



## **L’Institut d’Études Politiques Programme d’Échange Overview:**

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[The following information has been adapted from my experience on the undergraduate exchange program between SIS and Sciences Po, during the academic year 2009-2010. It is intended as a helpful reference for prospective students.]

## Sciences Po Academic System Overview

The French university system is much different from the United States model. That said, Sciences Po actually has its own academic model independent of the typical French “Grand École” system.

### The Grading System:

All classes at Sciences Po follow the typical French grading scale. Instead of receiving a letter grade or a grade point average, students in France receive a mark anywhere between 0-20 with a 10 being the most common. It is difficult to say what grades are good and what grades are bad because each professor has his or her own opinion of the 0-20 scale. Personally, I found that my foreign professors tended to grade higher than my French professors. Typically, grades tend to fall between 9-16, with 9 being below average, and 16 being exceptional. Because your grades do transfer back in this program, it is worth understanding the conversion scale, with 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 translating to a B-, B+, B, A-, A, and A+ respectively. Be sure to check with your advisor or the SIS office to make sure the scale has not changed. While in France, don't be surprised to receive a 10 for work that you thought deserved better. While a 10 may be a B-, it is considered a very fair grade in France.

### Class Types:

There are 3 class types at Sciences Po: “électif”, “conférence de méthode”, and “cours magistral”. The “électif” or elective courses, are courses that are not paired with another course. Electives can include subject courses or language courses and count for less credit than other types of courses. Elective courses are usually smaller in size and lighter in work than the other types of classes, and they do not include officially proctored midterm or final exams. A “conférence de méthode”, or “conf” as they are known, are classes of smaller size that accompany a “cours magistral”. The “conf” is generally characterized by student participation, student presentations, and short papers and is overall much more active than its partner course. A “cours magistral” is a lecture course that is generally quite large. Student do not typically participate in these lectures. The issues raised in the lecture course will be discussed in more detail during the “conférence de méthode”, with a different professor. This relatively strict class structure is likewise accompanied by strictly regulated homework assignments.

### Class Work:

There are only, officially, a very small number of possible homework assignments that you will receive. These include an “exposé”, “fiche de lecture”, “fiche technique” and a “dissertation”. These translate to a presentation, two types of short papers, and a long paper. In each of your “conférence de méthode” classes you can be sure to do at least one presentation and several short papers in addition to an officially proctored midterm and final exam. For the elective courses, the homework varies between each teacher, but is almost guaranteed to include a presentation. Finally, each of these assignments is subject

to the Sciences Po method. This means that they must be completed according to strict guidelines. Never underestimate the importance of these guidelines, for while the content of the work matters more than the form in the US, in France the reverse is often true. You may fail outright if you do not follow the guidelines, even if you feel that the content of your work is intellectually sound.

## **A Day in the Life; a Course Sampling**

Sample class schedule for the year:

### Fall Semester

Low Intermediate French  
 High Intermediate Chinese  
 The World of Wine in France  
 Philosophy of International Law  
 Painting Practices in Paris, 1630-1830  
 Scientific Revolutions and Political Revolutions  
 The State of Africa  
 Aikido (sport, non-credit)

This may seem like an excessive course load, but keep in mind that classes at SciencesPo only meet once a week.

### Spring Semester

Religion et sociétés (conf)  
 Religion et sociétés (magistral)  
 Food and Foodways  
 La pensée écologique  
 The New Arctic Game  
 Photojournalisme (club, non-credit)  
 Advanced Chinese  
 High Intermediate French  
 Yoga (sport, non-credit)

Academics at Sciences Po are formulated to provide the student with a broad range of topics and do not generally treat advanced subject matter. This is partly because courses exchange students take at Sciences Po are at the second year level, since third year student go abroad. While you might think this is like being a sophomore again, remember that the undergraduate program at Sciences Po is only three years long. Finally, each semester you are allowed to sign up for a sport and an art, though these courses do not count towards credit at American University and you will not receive a grade. These courses are especially important for an exchange student because they offer an opportunity to practice French without working towards a grade, as well as an opportunity to meet other French students in a casual setting.

## The Visa

The visa you will need is a long stay visa. The appropriate information can be found at the following website:

<http://www.consulfrance-washington.org/spip.php?article385#II-Studies-in-France-for-more-than>

Depending on where your official residence is in the United States, you may not be able to apply for the visa at the French Embassy in DC. The visa process makes use of a tangential organization called “Campus France”. You will need your official acceptance letter from Sciences Po, which is available online and also comes in the mail, to complete the Campus France process. The entire procedure from start to finish is as follows:

In the US:

- Do your research and prepare all of your documents
- Fill out your Campus France profile
- Send you official acceptance letter to Campus France
- Make an appointment online with your embassy
- Go to the appointment and hand in your paperwork
- You will receive your visa in the mail, along with one OFII form

In France:

- Fill out and mail in your OFII form
- You will receive another form in the mail
- Fill it out and go to the OFII office to make a doctor’s appointment
- Buy the appropriate stamp for 55euros
- Go to your doctor’s appointment and bring all of your documents
- After your exam is complete you will receive a large sticker from the OFII in your passport signifying temporary residency.

As you can see, the process is complicated. Begin the application 3-4 months before your planned departure date. Once you have your visa and are in France, don’t be surprised to wait 2 months for your doctor’s appointment. Not having the temporary residency card in your passport for most of the first semester is not going to cause you trouble, so don’t worry. Americans are allowed to be in France for 90 days without a visa. The purpose of the entire process is to make sure that you are not a health threat and that you pay your tax of 55euro.

Save your plane tickets and make sure the stamp on your passport is legible in case you lose the OFII form. If you lose this form you can still get you residency permit, but it is much more difficult.

## **Cultural Issues**

Culture shock is different for everyone. Some Americans fall in love with France and feel at home, and others hate it. There is no way to predict which cultural issues you will come up against, or which ones will cause problems for you. France is a highly civilized and industrialized countries that will guarantee you a level of comfort equal to or above life in the US.

To speak more specifically about Paris, there are some things that may or may not be obviously different. These same things may or may not pose a problem for you. In general, the clothes people wear, the food that they eat, and their general attitude may or may not offend you. As you will be living in a foreign country, you will never be able to escape the fact that you are the foreigner. This element will characterize every single one of your relationships. Except people to treat you differently once they detect that you are not a native. Depending on the person, the knowledge that you are not French might offend or intrigue them. For example, once the average student at Sciences Po finds out you are on exchange, he or she will most likely be intrigued and ask you all sorts of questions. Conversely, expect beggars to treat you more aggressively, and expect some salespeople or administration officials to ignore you. As long as you make an effort to learn about French culture, act confident, talk to a native, and keep an open mind, you are guaranteed an enjoyable experience abroad.

## Administrative Issues

For some reason that I will never understand, the French love paperwork. They love it to death. Ask any French person and they will undoubtedly go on and on about all the useless documents they have had to fill out. In fact, they love to complain about it, and sooner than later, so will you.

Here are all of the documents you are likely to need.

- Certificate medicale
- Certificate de domicile
- Certificate d'inscriptions pedagogiques
- Certificate de residence
- Certificate de naissance
- Les photos d'identités
- Une carte d'identité
- Une carte d'étudiant (e)
- Une Rèleve d'identifié bancaire (RIB)

The absolute best piece of advice is to get a folder, keep track of everything, and make lots of copies. Before leaving the States get 6-8 copies of your passport picture, translate and make copies of your birth certificate, make copies of your passport, make copies of your credit cards, and make copies of your medical insurance. Get another folder once you get to France and keep track of everything, including apartment insurance, apartment contract, phone contract, bank statements, internet bill, utilities, medical insurance, copies of your student card, copies of your passport, copies of your credit cards, etc. Do your best, however, not to get depressed by all of this busy work.

Once at Sciences Po, there is a lot more paperwork that you will need to take care of. You will have to register as a student and get an ID card, get a metro card, a bank account, a phone, internet if you do not have it, register for the CAF, send your form to the OFII office, as well as register for medical insurance unless you are an EU citizen. And finally you will have to register for classes.

The process for class registration is similar to the once at AU. It is done online, but there are two key differences. The first is that every exchange student registers at the same time, which is a cause for panic, and the second is that once registration is over, there is NO add/drop period. You can look through the course offerings online before registering, so make sure to prepare several lists of acceptable courses and clear them with your adviser by sending him/her a short summary. Actual registration is done through your student portal. Be sure to check the boxes regarding the Sciences Po certificate before moving on.

## Getting Set Up

### Welcome Program

Sciences Po offers exchange students the option to participate in the Welcome Program for a small fee. This orientation program is highly recommended. During the Welcome Program, you take two classes during a two-week period. The first class is an introduction to Sciences Po's academic method taught by an alumnus. This class is very useful because it takes time to adjust to Sciences Po's method. The second class is a French language crash course. You will be placed according to your language exam anywhere from total beginner to fluent (although if you pass as fluent you don't have to take a language class). You take both of these classes with the same group of people, so it is a good chance to make friends before the start of the school year.

The Welcome Program also helps students get set up for life in Paris. There are French student leaders that can answer your questions, and an introductory seminar your first day. The Program also provides you with a packet of information with an introduction to Sciences Po and instructions for getting a metro card and registering for classes. During this two week period there is a day when local banks come to advertise their student packages and help you open an account.

Finally, the Welcome Program arranges many fun activities around the city led by the student volunteers. You can sign up independently for these events or with a group. They are a good way to get to know other exchange students, get to know the city, and see some of the sights.

### Bank

Life in Paris would be made very difficult without a French bank account. To help you get an account, there are several banks that set up stands in Sciences Po much like Chevy Chase does every year at AU. They usually offer some perk for banking with them as a student, as long as you provide proof of enrollment from Sciences Po (which you can print off from your student page). Setting up a bank account should be one of the very first things that you do because a French bank account and address are both necessary for the next two steps.

### Phone

You will have to get a phone. There are two options for getting a phone that you might consider: getting a phone plan, or getting a pay-as-you-go phone. For those students studying for the entire year, it might make sense to get a phone plan to make payments easier. Beware, however, that if you do not plan on staying the full 12 months of the contract, you will have to cancel the contract by providing a "certificate de domicile". Since this document does not exist in the States, you can provide them with a utilities bill instead. You may have difficulty coming up with a bill, however, since you will still be living in Paris... In order to cancel a phone contract you will have to send a written statement along with proof of your new residence to the company and they will cancel it without a fee, since the contract includes a clause saying that moving abroad is a valid

excuse for cancellation. Because you will have to leave time to also close your bank account I suggest sending in your cancellation request at least a month before your departure date.

If you are only going for a semester or don't want to deal with canceling your contract, you can get a pay-as-you-go phone. These can be expensive, but they will most certainly be a more efficient use of money, as usage inevitably varies per month.

### **Internet**

As a student you will need Internet. If your apartment does not have Internet and you would like to get it, you can go to any phone service provider and they can install it for you. It costs around 30 euro a month. If you don't feel like paying for Internet service, all of the buildings at Sciences Po offer wireless, as do many cafés and public parks. Do not count on using a communal computer at Sciences Po for all of your technological needs, however, because they are few in number and high in demand.

### **Metro**

There is a student metro card that you can get only if you are in Paris for two semesters. The application requires you to provide a French bank account, proof of enrollment, a French address, and a passport picture. The card is called the Imagine-R and the website is listed in the references. The Parisian Metro is a fabulously confusing yet useful network of underground trains. There are around 300 metro stops within the city limits. You can also use the RER, or regional train, with a metro card. The RER is an "express" metro that also serves the suburbs.

### **Trains**

SNCF long distance trains allow you to travel around France and Europe without the hassle of airport security. For students under 25, there is a discount card that you can, and should, buy for 50 euro. This card, called "la carte 12-25" will save you a lot of money even if you only travel a few times. Trains are expensive but a fun and convenient way to travel.

### **Housing**

Finding a place to live will undoubtedly give you some trouble. There are three websites listed in the references that may prove useful. The first is a roommate finder that can potentially be of use. All you have to do is make a profile and either search for people who want a roommate or post that you are looking for one. The second website is the agency that I personally used to find an apartment. I booked my place the summer before I went to France, which was a potentially risky move. Most students prefer not to use agencies because they charge a fee, however they control the vast majority of available housing. The third link is for student housing in the 14<sup>th</sup> district at a place called "Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris". They offer student housing on a large campus. The center and the campus offer different houses for different nationalities, and it provides a very familiar environment to Americans used to "on campus" life.

If all else fails, there are sometime housing availabilities posted on the bulletin boards at Sciences Po or La Sorbonne, on craigslist, or on various other websites.

To be safe arrive in Paris at least two weeks before the welcome program to begin your search if you have not reserved housing ahead of time. Be wary of private listings, however, as people do try to scam foreigners. If the landlord asks for more than two months rent in a security deposit and one or two months rent up front, you might be getting scammed. Studios and student sized/priced apartments are especially difficult to find towards the end of august and the beginning of September, so start your search early.

### **US Embassy**

Check the French US embassy's website for useful information. It is also a good idea to register with them as an American living abroad. They will send you alerts if there is a cause for panic, and can help you in the case of an emergency.

### **La Caisse d'Allocations Familiale (CAF)**

The CAF is a department of the French government that provides money for low-income families as well as students. As a student at Sciences Po you qualify for housing subsidies that will help you pay your rent. You will, however, need to fill out an application and provide the necessary documents.

You will need the following documents, as of 2009

Copy of your passport and your visa

Copy of your student card OR proof of enrollment

One "Relève d'identité bancaire" (RIB) which you get from your French bank

One copy of your birth certificate officially translated into French

The CAF will deposit generally around 200 euro into your account monthly once you are approved. They will also pay you retroactively for the months you have already been in France but have not received benefits. Be sure to ask if there are other documents they might require.

### **Museums**

All of the publicly owned museums are free for students between 18 and 25 from the EU. This also applies for students with temporary residency, and as such, you can get free tickets to most museums by showing your Sciences Po ID. Take advantage of this to visit the wonderful museums including the Louvre, Musée D'Orsay, and Versailles for free and as often as you would like.

## **Student Life in Paris**

As a student at Sciences Po in Paris you will gain a certain level of prestige. Don't be surprised to see people gasp when you tell them what school you go to, or find their attitude and opinion of you remarkably improved. Enjoy it for what its worth.

One of the greatest features of Sciences Po is the wide range of professors. Many professors come from abroad to teach on sabbatical, others teach while doing research in Paris, and many come from various professional fields in which they are experts. Having professors from all over the world and from all walks of life was is one of the most enriching parts of the exchange program. If you are lucky you may end up with some great contacts in various professional fields both abroad and in the US by the time you return home.

Sciences Po is trying to become more international in focus. This is one reason why they are accepting an increasing number of exchange students each year, and offering more courses in English. Exchange students now make up around a third of the entire student body. There may be more exchange students than French students in some of your classes. This kind of environment can be a great benefit.

You might also consider signing up for the Tandem program. This is the language buddy program where you can partner up with a student of another nationality and practice foreign languages. Many French students sign up to practice English, and thus it can be a great opportunity to practice French for an exchange student. If you find a French student language partner, he or she can also answer any of your remaining questions about the country, city, school, or teaching method. This is also a great opportunity have a native proofread your coursework for grammar and style.

You can safely expect every student at Sciences Po, French or exchange, to understand and be able to communicate in English. The study of English is one of the main requirements for French students at Sciences Po. This may or may not be good news. If you are hoping for a true immersion experience where you never have to hear or speak English, this is not the program for you. However it is an intensely rewarding foray into the European academic system and a truly authentic abroad experience. All in all, the opportunity to be an exchange student at Sciences Po in Paris defined my undergraduate career, and I cannot recommend it enough.

## References:

### Caf

[www.caf.fr](http://www.caf.fr)

### OFII

<http://www.ofii.fr/>

### Sncf

<http://www.sncf.com/>

<http://www.12-25-sncf.com/accueil/>

<http://www.voyages-sncf.com/>

<http://itunes.apple.com/fr/app/voyages-sncf-com-horaires/id343889987?mt=8>

### Metro

<http://www.imagine-r.com/>

<http://www.ratp.fr/>

### Prefecture

<http://www.paris.pref.gouv.fr/>

### Embassy

<http://france.usembassy.gov/>

<http://ambafrance-us.org/spip.php?rubrique=2>

<https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/index.aspx>

[http://france.usembassy.gov/living\\_in\\_france.html](http://france.usembassy.gov/living_in_france.html)

### Courses in France

<http://www.cours-municipal-d-adultes-cma.cma-paris.org/>

<http://www.alliancefr.org/>

You might find the need to take additional French language courses to prepare yourself for academics at Science Po. The courses at the top link are cheap or free. The bottom link charges but has great instructors and facilities.

### Housing

[www.collocation.fr](http://www.collocation.fr)

<http://www.parisattitude.com/>

<http://www.ciup.fr/>

Housing causes many people a lot of trouble. Play it safe, and things will work out.

### Sciences Po

<http://www.sciences-po.fr/portail/>

<http://entg.sciences-po.fr/customers/sciences-po/index.jsp>

<http://asscpo-paris.fr/>

<http://bdarts.org/>

<http://welcomeprog.blogspot.com/>

<http://formation.sciences-po.fr/>

<https://asp.zone-secure.net/v2/index.jsp?id=1737/2223/7170&lng=fr> (course catalog)

### **Planes**

[http://www.cluballiancevoyages.com/club\\_alliance\\_voyages/Accueil.html](http://www.cluballiancevoyages.com/club_alliance_voyages/Accueil.html)

<http://www.kayak.com/>

<http://www.skyscanner.com/>

<http://www.ryanair.com/en>

<http://www.ryanair.com/en>

<http://www.iberia.com/fr/>

<http://www.airfrance.fr/cgi-bin/AF/FR/fr/common/home/home/HomePageAction.do>

<http://www.aerlingus.com/cgi-bin/obel01im1/bookonline/index.jsp>

<http://www.eurail.com/>

These websites can help you find competitive airfare. Be aware that companies like Ryanair often make money on hidden fees. Pack your bags according to the specified limit and print your boarding pass ahead of time. Also know that from Paris, Ryanair flies out of Beauvais airport, which is a 14 euro, two hour bus ride outside the city. Factor in an additional 28 euro to any Ryanair airfare. Also be on the lookout for holiday specials.

### **Buses**

<http://www.eurolines.com/>

This is an international bus line that does not go to other cities in France from Paris. You can take them to other countries, like Belgium or England, for a reasonably timed trip and a competitive price.

### **Hostels**

<http://www.fuaj.org/>

If you like to stay at hostels and want to travel around France and Europe, think of getting a membership card with this hostel group. They have very reliable hostels in many French and European cities for very good prices.

### **Banks**

<https://particuliers.societegenerale.fr/index.html>

There are other banks that give student rates too.

### **Phone/internet**

<http://www.orange.fr/>

There are also other phone companies. They are all around the same price, however.

### **Welcome Program**

<http://welcomeprog.blogspot.com/>