

Intercambio a la universidad Pompeu Fabra Barcelona 2015

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General information

I have spent one trimester, from the second week of September until the last week of December, as an exchange student through the Erasmus Program at the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona, Spain.

Preparation

Due to being part of the Erasmus Programme, most of the necessary preparations is done for you. Your main concern in terms of preparation is applying as an exchange student at UPF. After being nominated by the EUR at UPF, you will receive an email containing instructions regarding your application. I received this mail at the end of March. In order to complete the application, you will need to send certain documents such as a copy of your passport/ID and a copy of your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). UPF requires their international students to have full coverage of eventual risks during their stay, so an accident and travel insurance must be contracted on top of the EHIC. UPF offers several insurance packages through an international insurance company. In contrast to some other universities a TOEFL test is not compulsory. In July I received an email from the UPF regarding the enrollment in courses. There will be an enrollment period opened for a whole week, but it is recommended to enroll as soon as this period is started. All the courses offered are divided into different time slots. To prevent overlapping lectures, only one course per time slot can be selected.

Another concern is accommodation. Barcelona attracts many international students, UPF alone received 1500 international students last year. Do not solely depend on UPF when it comes to finding accommodation. Their website provides you with several links to websites where people can rent or offer a room. I decided to book my room before arriving in Barcelona, because I did not want to be bothered with a room hunt whilst being in Barcelona. *Llogo Apartments* owns several apartments and they offer many different rooms. This company comes across as a very reliable one and I only have good experiences with renting my room at *Llogo Apartments*. Keep in mind that when you decide to book a room beforehand. It is recommended to start your room search a few months before the start of your exchange. If you prefer to find your room after arriving in the city, the Facebook groups *Housing Barcelona* and *Erasmus Exchange Students Barcelona* are very useful. The most central areas of Barcelona are the neighborhoods Barri Gotic and El Born, which are close to the beach, nightlife, shops and relatively close to UPF as well. Barcelona is a walkable city, so don't worry if you end up in another neighborhood.

Arrival

The first trimester starts somewhere in the third week of September. Check out the facebook page *Erasmus Barcelona 2015/2016* (replace with your college year) to find out about several

introduction events. A picnic in the Ciutadella Parc, a walking tour along Barri Gotic and many more activities to get to know other exchange students. There is also an introduction week planned in September by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) exclusively for UPF students so definitely attend this week. UPF will host a welcome day at the campus for all exchange students providing useful information about some procedures at the university. They will also provide you with instructions to apply for a NIE (Número de Identificación de Extranjero) which is an identification number. By law it is required to have one when you stay in Barcelona for longer than three months, but most exchange students (including myself) didn't apply for one. It is kind of a hassle to get one and I have not encountered any problems in consequence of not having one.

Courses

The requirement regarding the number of ECTS credits was a minimum of 24. All regular courses are equivalent to 5 ECTS credits. Language courses are worth 3 ECTS credits. My original selection of courses was worth 26 credits (two languages, four regular courses). Unfortunately, I quickly found out that combining a Spanish and Catalan course was not the best idea (Catalan is lot different from Spanish!). With high exception, the ESE let me be drop the Catalan course. When looking back to the regular courses, the general level at the UPF is lower than at the EUR. Most courses come with compulsory attendance at the seminars, however I noticed that this rule is not strictly followed. I completed the following courses:

Spanish course A2

I have completed a Spanish course A1 at the LTC at the EUR. There was a signifacant but not insuperable gap between both courses. Most of my fellow students in the A2 course followed the landing program (intensive Spanish A1 course) at the UPF. Looking back I would recommend the latter option. The pace in this course is quite high so try to attend all classes and try not to fall behind. Try to speak Spanish in your daily life as well, 5 hours per week of Spanish class is not enough to inprove your speaking skills.

Econometrics II

This course is a mix of the courses Econometrics 2 and Time Series from the EUR. If you have completed these courses, this course should not be a problem since most of the content should be familiar. If you study Econometrics at the EUR, I can recommend this course since you can brush up old knowledge and learn about a few new topics in Econometrics. You even learn to use a new statistical program called Stata, which is comparable to Eviews. Half the exam consists of multiple choice questions and and the other half is open questions. The exam I made consisted of quite a bit of questions which tested your knowledge of the slides rather than testing your comprehension of the theory, so keep this in mind when preparing for the exam.

Operation Reseach

This course covers several topics from the courses Linear Programming and Combinatorial Optimazation. Again, if you have completed these courses, you should not encounter any problems. What I liked about this course is that it provides you with some training in Excel. Some topics of the courses at the EUR mentioned above will be repeated, but this time using

Excel rather than by hand. Of all the Spanish professors I have met, the one teaching this course was the best. He provided the students with helpful lectures and a good preparation to pass the course. Even without having any experience with this topic, I believe this course is still manageable. The exam was definitely doable in the given time and it was no different than the exercises made in class.

Market and Derivatives

The main topic in this course were derivatives. This course will give you insight in several derivative instruments, their valuation and their application in financial markets. I found this course to be very interesting, since I wasn't familiar with derivatives. The lectures were given by a good professor providing us with sufficient material to pass this course. Mayor part of final grade consisted of a final exam and the remaining part were online tests. I can highly recommend this course since nowadays derivatives play a mayor role in financial markets.

Business Games

Without a doubt my favorite course of all. In this course, teams of 5 are created by the professor (a total of 10 teams in my year). Each team play a simulation game in which a startup company has to be managed. Every lecture/seminar, decisions have to be made regarding production, marketing, finances etc. Your main goal is to gain market share and compete with the other companies (the other teams in this course). A large part of the final grade consisted the performance of your company. A few written reports formed the remaining part of your grade. I can highly recommend you to enroll in this course since it was a lot of fun playing this game. It is also a great opportunity to directly interact with local students. Furthermore, the course will not occupy much of your time and it is very easy to pass this course (I think history would be written if you fail this course 😊).

Finances

Barcelona is a touristic city and the main touristic areas can be pricey. Overall, in my experience Barcelona is a bit cheaper than the main cities in the Netherlands. Groceries can be done for a fair price, restaurants charge fair prices (except for the ones at La Rambla) and nightlife was a lot cheaper than in the Netherlands. I made the following roughly estimated monthly expenses:

Rent: 535

Public transportation: 20

Daily life: 150

Gym membership: 30

Social activities: 200

Travelling: 200

Total expenses: 1105

Daily life

Most of my weekdays consisted of morning lectures and afternoon seminars. The total workload of my courses was manageable, so apart from the lectures and seminars I was barely occupied with studying. This meant a lot of free time in the evening and during the weekends.

During weekdays, in the evening I went to the gym or for a jog. I also went for dinner at restaurants with friends on a regular basis. Locals have dinner around 10 pm, but almost every restaurant is open earlier. Nightlife in Barcelona is amazing. There are several guestlists such as *Welovbcn* and *Shaz list* which can give you free entrance every night at the best clubs in Barcelona. My favorite clubs were Bling Bling (on thursdays), Otto Sutz and Opium (both on fridays). During the weekends I tried to travel as much as I can, exploring Barcelona or other cities in Spain. The organisations *Welovbcn* and *BarcelonaTrips* host several day and weekend trips to different cities in Spain and beyond for fair prices. These trips is also a great way to make new friends. I visited Gerona Valencia, Zaragoza, Andorra and many small villages along the Costa Brava.

In hindsight, my exchange in Barcelona was one of the best experiences of my life. I met many people from all over the world and made a lot of new friends. To sum up, I can't think of a reason not to spend a trimester studying at UPF.