

Saint-Petersburg State University
International Relations Office

EXCHANGE STUDENTS' REPORT

Please complete this form and send it to Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept.
nechaeva@ir.pu.ru, fax +7 /812/ 3240788. Thank you.

TO BE FILLED OUT ELECTRONICALLY

The international experience you have gained while the exchange period at St.Petersburg University is the unique practice you will remember all your life. It can also help other students when they are planning for their exchange. To make sure that prospective students have a chance to learn from your experience you are required to submit the **Exchange Students' Report**.

Please complete the form and **return by email to nechaeva@ir.pu.ru**.

When filling in the returned student report try to remember the sort of things that you wanted to know before you went on exchange, be honest in your responses and try to avoid simply giving yes/no answers.

Please do not hesitate to contact Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept. staff if there are any issues you would like to discuss regarding your exchange experience.

Name:	Anna Isakova
Home faculty at SPSU	faculty of sociology
Exchange Study Period	2/09/09 – 31/07/10
Host Institution	Katholieke Universitet Leuven, Belgium

Do you give permission for prospective exchange students to contact you if they have questions? **yes**

If yes, please give your preferred email address: anytkaisakova@gmail.com

The Host Institution

What influenced your decision to select the host institution that you went to?

I went for my exchange program within the framework of Erasmus Mundus TRIPLE I, that's why we had already a list of universities where we could go and study. Katholieke Universitet Leuven was on the list and the fact that it had lots of studying programs in English made my choice.

Besides, the programs themselves sounded really challenging and interesting, giving you a chance to study some subjects you can never find at Home University. And, of course, the country itself... It was like if not now come to Belgium, then when? So, all of this made me decide about going to Leuven.

Please describe the location of the host institution.

My host institution is Katholieke Universitet Leuven. It is situated in Belgium, in a quite small city of Leuven. The most peculiar feature of it is that it is absolutely student city, where two thirds of population are students. That exactly makes it a unique place – you will never get bored, seeing people like you around and discovering something new for yourself every single day.

Besides, Belgium itself has a very good location. I mean that it is literally situated in the “heart” of Europe which means that within 3 or 4 hours one could appear at least in three foreign countries.

Please describe the courses that you took while on exchange. What were their pros and cons?

My exchange program was quite different from that one I have in St. Petersburg State University. It wasn't exactly my specialization, but as it turned out that wasn't the crucial thing. The program was called “Studying European Society and Culture” and it enabled me to choose the subjects practically from all the faculties which were available in English of course. So, that's why my schedule was absolutely diverse: I had marketing, European studies, culture and arts, peace research and conflict management, anthropology, politics, business, globalization theories and etc.

The main pros of this I see in the following: you are offered a great variety of courses and within two first weeks of the semester you are free to go to whatever classes you want and only then you make your final decision. So, you can try out the courses, look at the professor, learn about the way exam is going to look like.

The cons of this system is probably the following one: sometimes it in a way distracts you, I mean, that you are becoming too far from your main specialization. You take a lot of diversified courses, get a lot of knowledge in different fields and then lose a bit the knowledge needed for your major.

How did course content, class size, marking, etc compare with St. Petersburg State University?

The courses are more oriented on self-studying. It doesn't mean that during the lectures professors don't give any material or don't explain something. No, it just means that everything is based on self-discipline: there are no mid-term exams, practically you don't have any checks of your knowing the content of the subject during the semester.

Besides, there is plenty of group working projects and group assignments.

the number if people in the class really depends on the course you are taking: there can be from 20 students to one hundred.

In K.U.Leuven they have this system of credit points and the student should take certain amount of credits each semester and that effects the choice of the courses sometimes – the students look at the courses where they can get this or that amount of credit points.

Marking is quite different as well in a sense that in K.U.Leuven they have a system of 20 grades. If you get 10, you pass the exam, if less- you fail. It's most common to have like 14-15.

Did you find the academic and international office staff helpful?

Yes, both sides (the International Office in St. Petersburg and in Leuven) helped me a lot with everything I addressed to them with. If needed, they provided me with up-to-date information, if something was unclear, I always got the answer. I'm very grateful to all the staff especially because in spite of all the difficulties for themselves they never turn their back to me personally, so I should say for sure that they did great job.

Please describe the resources available to exchange students (i.e. computers, the library).

The sources K.U.Leuven has are extremely valuable: the library possesses great number of books, journals and newspapers in different languages.
The computer system is extremely well-developed: there are enough computers for everybody who needs them in all the university buildings with Wi-Fi access.

Did you experience any language or cultural difficulties at the host institution?

I can't say so, well, I experienced cultural and language differences when meeting with other international students, but it was difficult, because from the very beginning the university itself prepared a lot of activities to bring us together. What's more, even though Belgium is the country where English is not official language, everybody everywhere can speak it and that's why can help you with everything.

Do you think that going on exchange contributed to your academic and personal development? If so, how?

Yes, I'm sure it did. In many ways: speaking about academic development, it gave me a chance to enrich to great extent my general knowledge about different fields of studies. And as for personal development, this exchange and Erasmus Mundus experience was also very valuable. I won't mention how many friends I made here and how many wonderful and cool people I met, I will just say that it definitely changed me, made me more open to everything new, to progressive thinking, I suppose.

Practical

Accommodation

Please describe the accommodation options available to exchange students.

Exchange students can choose from different options: a special body of the university (Housing Service) provides you with the list of available accommodation: dormitories, private housing (room or studio – a small apartment for one person). You are to decide based on your preferences and money you have.

How expensive were the accommodation options?

Room in the Dormitories – around 230 euros per month. Studio in the dormitory – 280 euros per month. Room in the private housing sector – 220-300 euro, and a studio in the private housing sector – around 350 euros.

What type of accommodation would you recommend?

At my time, when I arrived, there were no places available in the university dormitories, so I don't know very well about this option, though people say that it is quite good. I would recommend a room in the private housing sector, because you are more free to choose whatever room you like, then, you have your own room usually with your own sink, fridge and stuff like that.

Food

Did you have self-catering facilities or were meals provided with your accommodation?

No, the accommodation doesn't include food, you should either prepare something in the kitchen by yourself or there is plenty of places in Leuven where you can have a meal. University has its own net of student restaurants that are quite democratic with their prices.

Was food expensive?

Not really, I think in average you spent like 100-150 euro per month on food (alone for one person).

Where is the best place to shop?

The nearby supermarkets.

How much does it cost to eat out at a local restaurant/café?

In the real restaurant -around 30 euro. In student restaurants, around 7-8 euros.

Transport

Please describe the local transport options.

Students are provided in the beginning of the academic year with a free bus-pass, so you can use the bus for free. There are also very good train connections with other Belgian cities and some cities in other countries in Europe.

In Brussels there are two airports and also a lot of opportunities to choose the means of transport to travel across Europe, be it a bus or train or plane.

Was it expensive to use local transport? Please give an example of the costs.

Using the bus within Leuven was free for students.

Personal Safety

Did you find the city in which you stayed safe?

Yes, I never experienced any problems with this issue.

Do you have any safety advice for other exchange students?

Well, as everywhere be careful with your own belongings, just watch out our bags and wallets at some parties or clubs or pubs.

Highlights

Briefly describe the highlights of your exchange experience.

- interesting and useful studies
- really nice place in terms of living
- lots of new great friends
- multicultural experience
- advancing your knowing of English
- traveling
- being able to live in a foreign country
- self realization in different fields

Problems

Briefly describe any problems you experienced and any suggestions you may have to help others avoid them.

- some problems with papers and documents needed for both sides (Home and Host University)
- quite difficult and long procedure of getting Belgian residence permit to be able to stay in country for more than 3 months. But it was inevitable so actually there is nothing to complain about

Other Comments

Do you have any further comments?

I would like to say how grateful I am to my Home University and International Office who gave me the chance to go to K.U.Leuven and who helped me so much during my stay here.

The information given in this Report CAN BE PUBLISHED on the Internet __ Yes _____

Thank you for taking the time to share your exchange experiences in this report.

Please save your report as a **Word document** and email a copy to nechaeva@ir.pu.ru

Date: 14/02/10

Name: Anna Isakova

The idea and the model of this form is taken from the University of South Australia web pages.