

Study Abroad Summary Paris II – LL.M. European Law

My study abroad experience during my third year of law school was both exciting and challenging. Upon my arrival in France, I had the daunting task of finding an apartment in Paris. Although student housing was available to me at the “Cité Universitaire” a large student-housing complex in the southern end of the city, I chose to search for a room in a shared living situation with a French person to ensure that I would have ample opportunity to improve my French. After sending nearly one hundred messages in that first week, I finally found a great room in a two-bedroom apartment in Paris’ Latin Quarter. My apartment was walking distance to the Paris II Rue Saint-Guillaume campus where most of our classes were held. Looking back on it now, my experience living in the Latin Quarter could not have been better, therefore the risk I took rejecting the student-housing offer in order to find an apartment independently definitely paid off.

I should admit right of the bat that the intensity of the Paris II program came as a bit of surprise to me. It is no secret that the third year of law school is often referred to as a breeze. Additionally, study abroad programs are also often seen as less challenging than studying at your home institution. But, very early on in Paris, I realized that my year there would not be a breeze to say the least. The program was composed of 12 courses taught by professors from different universities throughout Europe as well as from Paris II itself. And the director of the program, Professor Catherine Kessedjian, a brilliant yet strict instructor, ensured that we do not treat our two semesters there as a form of academic tourism. For this I am very grateful. I say that with the benefit of hindsight because I am very happy for the deep knowledge of European Union law

that I acquired during my two semesters at Paris II, and perhaps I would not be the European law expert that I am today without Professor Kessedjian's stern direction.

Although the program did have its strengths, it also had several less appealing aspects. For example, the workload of the two semesters was not divided equally. The first semester workload was already challenging, however the intensity increased heavily in the second semester. It seemed like there was not a single class session in the second semester where we did not have a presentation, an essay, a role-playing game, or an exam. Also, the exams were held at random during various times during the semester, which made it difficult to study for them because of the many other obligations we had in a given week or even day. Therefore, in my opinion, the program would benefit from dividing the workload of the two semesters equally as well as having specific exam periods at the end of each semester.

To repeat myself, my study abroad experience at Paris II was both challenging and rewarding. The program was not an easy one. In fact, I would say that at times the workload and the atmosphere of the courses were reminiscent of the first year of law school. However, just like the heavy first year of law school, it is an experience that makes you better in the end. In addition, Paris is an amazing city, especially for students. The city is bustling with intellectual life. I will never forget the many hours I spent studying in the beautiful nineteenth century libraries of the Place du Panthéon, or the many interesting academic debates and discussions I had with my international classmates. My study abroad experience at Paris II was an amazing one, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in learning about European law or the European experiment in general.

Studying Abroad in Paris: My Experience at Pantheon-Assas

During the 2011-2012 academic year, I lived in Paris and completed an LL.M. in European Law at the University of Paris, Pantheon-Assas (Paris II). In a period of seven months, my fellow classmates and I studied 12 different subjects in European Union law. These courses comprised a survey of law within the European Union more generally, including consumer law, private international law, labor law, external relations of the European Union, and financial market law.

During one academic year, I received an introductory review of a variety of subjects that I would not have been able to study at home in San Francisco. While it was interesting to study so many new subjects, it was also difficult to get more than a cursory or shallow review of any particular subject. The time constraints simply did not allow for a deeper look into any of the subjects. Moreover, in some of the courses, the lectures were very general, and the final grade was based on a single research paper. Although making the satisfaction of the requirements for those classes much simpler than any American law school course, there was no motivation to really learn anything other than the subject of my particular research topic.

For any student who may apply for this program in the future, it is important to note that knowledge of the French language is not required for eligibility, but having that knowledge will prove invaluable for the experience. Personally, I studied French for many years before I went to law school, so I was able to cope with the fact that most people do not speak English. For example, the program director had one secretary who was charged with handling all administrative matters, most communications between the professors and the students, and

distribution of the reading materials. This secretary, albeit a very nice and accommodating woman, did not speak English. Obviously, for those students who did not already speak French, it made it more difficult for them to communicate their needs or understand the communications transmitted through the secretary.

Knowledge of French is also important for completion of the required assignments. Although all instruction was in English, and the assignments were simple academic papers that any American law student could complete, all of the libraries and almost everyone that works in them only speaks French. Without a working knowledge of at least conversational French, it proved very difficult to do research at any of the libraries or through their websites. For the assignments that I completed, I relied mostly on my access to the Hastings library via the proxy server and through regular Google and Internet searches. After a preliminary attempt to conduct research at a French library, I found that I could do work much more efficiently and successfully if I just used my own methods.

Despite the troubles that I encountered with school and living in Paris, I enjoyed my time in France a lot. I had all of my classes with the same group of 16 students. Like the camaraderie that develops between section-mates during the first year of law school, I made amazing friendships with my classmates from Paris. In my class, there were people from all over Europe, including Croatia, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, and Germany. In addition, there were students from schools in the US, Canada, and Colombia. As such, I learned so much about the European system from both the top-down (European Union-Member States) approach as well as from the bottom-up (systems within the individual Member States) approach.

Living in Paris, I was able to travel to neighboring countries at little (relatively) expense. I traveled to Spain and Portugal to visit friends while I was there. As part of the curriculum of the program, we traveled to Belgium and Luxembourg. Other students did much more traveling than that. Transportation is relatively cheap for those who want to travel within France and outside of France, but within Europe.

Overall, I had a great experience in Paris. I met new people, I discovered a new city, and I studied an interesting and dynamic legal system different than any other system I had encountered before. I dealt with very friendly people, and very uncooperative people. As with any extended international experience, my perspective on the US and the system that exists here (both legal and economic) changed. I would recommend the Paris program to any person who is up for a challenge but with great rewards.

2011 LL.M. at Paris II

My experience in Paris during my LL.M. in European Law, as a whole, was amazing. I undoubtedly learned an extensive amount about the E.U. legal system, and would consider myself one of a lucky few law students who had the opportunity to experience and absorb a very rich comparative law culture.

The LL.M. program at Paris II was, as promised, very intense. However, a number of factors made the experience as a whole more difficult than it probably needed to be. Hopefully my observations and suggestions will be taken as they are intended – to help the program better serve the students that are wholly immersed within it.

I have subdivided my comments into following three distinct headings in order to give a coherent organization to my review.

Curriculum

The LL.M. curriculum was very rich, although it was hard to follow at times. We began by learning about the E.U. institutions. This class is fundamental, and in order to gain a sophisticated understanding of the European law by building upon it throughout the program, it would be necessary to teach it in a modern, understandable and comprehensive way. Rather, it was taught to us by describing, in a non-consecutive order, treaty provisions in over 50 years of European treaties. In order to understand the treaties, you must understand how the E.U. functions today and then trace the legal provisions that have resulting in its modern composition. As such, this was a rough start to the program, and I ended up learning as much as I could of the fundamentals through the internet as opposed to relying on my class notes.

Other classes we took early on were more cognizable and provided an effective overview of the subject matter. For example, Private International Law and Dispute Resolution provided an in-depth look and discussion into the means of dispute resolutions between and outside the E.U. Member States (MS). We also took a class entitled the Four Freedoms of E.U., similar to U.S. Constitutional law, but more critical to an understanding of the E.U. legal order; as substantive legal topics like contracts or torts are not within the competence of the E.U. This class was well taught, and through it, I learned to critically read and interpret European Court of Justice (ECJ) cases, and admire the extent and impact of E.U. legal and social harmonization. Interestingly, we did not finish this class until February because of scheduling issues. As such, we were learning complex and non-fundamental subjects like European Competition law (akin to U.S. anti-trust law) before we had even progressed half-way in necessary classes like Four Freedoms. The result of this was extreme difficulty comprehending the sophisticated subjects, especially since we had no previous exposure to the building blocks of European law.

The second semester was rough, as I further discuss in the scheduling and organization headings. I took eight classes in a span of three months. Some of these may have been beneficial to learn up front. For example, Labor and Social law or Consumer law well-complemented Four Freedoms, and could have been beneficial to learn at similar times.

Further, because Social law and Consumer law overlapped in some parts with other classes, I felt like it would have been interesting to offer a class such Evidence law in Europe, which while not a topic of E.U. harmonization, would have nevertheless been helpful in providing insight into the different trial systems in European MS.

Overall, however, the curriculum was diverse and interesting. The professors came from different European countries, and most spoke English fairly well. Further, the curriculum may not be something that you can really change, but I thought I would give you my honest feedback on some oversights and structural issues that affected my learning.

Communication

Communication between students, teachers, and administrators was seriously lacking. As far as the administration went, we had the headmaster of the program, her assistant, and an administrative assistant, who dealt with scheduling of our classes and securing us our reading materials.

Often we did not get the materials we needed to prepare for class until immediately before or when the class was scheduled. If they could, our professors provided us with materials ahead of time, but sometimes they tried to do this through an intermediary, and we wouldn't end up receiving them until late. For example, we were supposed to receive a copy of a book our Environmental law professor wanted to use. Because of some oversight, we did not get these copies. The book was not available in any library or book store, so we as a class had to figure out how to get it from the publisher. By the time the book arrived 6 weeks later, we were already half-way into the course.

Another example is that second semester, after the headmaster left to teach in NY, her assistant was to communicate all information to students and professors regarding the curriculum. Instead, she usually failed to respond to our emails and sometimes, we were told, did not even get back to the professors. As such, we were always finding out about key information at the last minute. This included changes to our class or exam schedule, and information regarding two out-of-country trips we took as a class. Because our schedule was so tightly packed, this made it unnecessarily difficult to plan out study schedules or to allot the appropriate time to different tasks we had.

Moreover, we were often not provided with our professors emails, and were refused by the administrator when we asked for them. Given that many of the professors don't have offices in Paris, or even live there, it became difficult to communicate with them and get the necessary information we needed directly.

We also had little guidance on where we were required to go at the beginning of the year. As international students in France, we were required to comply with several formalities, including document production and even a medical exam. The school could have provided us with some guidance on what we needed and where to go because unlike in the U.S., this information is very unclear and often incorrect when you look it up online yourself. Further, we were also required to attend separate "orientation" activities through the program, but often we had little clue as to where to go because we were separated from the main campus. While I expected that I would need to be extra-resourceful living and studying in a foreign country, I also expected that I might get the right information the first time I seek it, instead of the fifth time or at the fifth office in the fifth part of the city I've traveled to. Thus, a little more front-end communication would have gone a long way in curing this.

As for overall, the program would highly benefit from an improved communication system. Student's would be able to spend more time focusing on the law, instead of worrying about if they got the professors assignment or schedule updates.

Scheduling

Scheduling was a major issue during the program. During our orientation week, we were handing a 3 foot x 2 foot paper "schedule" that took hours and hours to organize in a cognizable "calendar" format on a week by week basis. The schedule was more like what you see in the newspaper for movie listings at all the different theaters in the area multiplied by about 8 for the 8 months of classes covered.

Further, our classes were not held consistently at all. Other than a few courses we had at roughly the same time weekly, the rest of them occurred in giant bundles with big gaps in between. For example, we would have 14 hours of the same class in two days. This made it rather difficult to prepare for class because you might only learn what your assignment(s) were a few days prior, and then have to prepare for sometimes 3 or 4 presentations or short papers to be delivered in that 14 hour block. These sessions would fall back to back with "regular" classes and you would end up needing a week to prepare for a week of class. I understand that part of the reason for doing this was to accommodate professors who came from outside of Paris, but for a student it bordered on unfeasible at times.

The problems that arose from this method of block scheduling were significantly compounded by the fact that we had so very many class cancelations and re-scheduling. Several times we didn't find out about a class being canceled until we had already prepared for the class. If it was a block class, that resulted in having to re-prepare the materials at a fresher time because the rescheduled class was often scheduled months later. Another "side-effect" of this rescheduling was that we had dozens of hours of classes rescheduled from first to second semester. We then ended up with eight classes, which were held substantively in the second semester, versus four completed courses first semester. Out of those four, two research papers also had to be submitted second semester. Thus, from January to early April, we were

completing final research papers and exams for ten out of our twelve courses. This resulted in an immense, often unfeasible, work load. We were constantly writing papers and taking final exams that second semester. Again, this was only compounded by the fact that we were also in class for 30 or more hours some weeks to fulfill all the necessary class hours from the scheduled and re-scheduled courses. Out of the twelve weeks, we were also in attendance on at least 5 Saturday courses. As you might know, six days of class and two-semesters worth of work in one does not make for the most conducive learning atmosphere, let alone a semblance of work-life balance.

As mentioned above, we also took two class trips. We went to the ECJ in December and the European Parliament and Commission in February. Both of these trips turned out to be very good educational experiences, but the process of learning about how they were scheduled, when our train departed, what hotel we were staying at, etc. was hard to come by because the assistant in charge of providing us this information neglected to do so until the last minute. Because both trips were three-four days long, and given that they were out-of-country, this information was essential for us to make our own plans as necessary. Thus, it would all have just been much more straightforward if we had the information when we needed it.

Conclusion

To summarize, I must again comment on how lucky I feel to have learned European law and to have lived in Paris. I truly feel that I'm amongst a privileged few, who has a fairly coherent understanding of this emerging and continuously evolving legal system. This experience has given me insight into regional, international, and comparative law, which is certainly of great value in the global market. However, I would be remiss if I didn't take the time to point out some critical oversights and flaws that made the program very difficult in ways that were unnecessary and wholly unrelated to the substance of European law.