

Report

University of Helsinki (Helsingin yliopisto)

Winter Semester 2016/17 – Study Program: MA Media and Political Communication

Preparation

I was determined to apply for an exchange study program already in the beginning of October, 2015, when I finished matriculation in the Master program. For a four-semester structured MA the possible exchange takes place in the 3rd semester; you need to make early decisions about your study plan and leave enough time for information gathering.

My original options were Chinese University of Hong Kong (from Direktaustausch) and University of Helsinki (from Erasmus). For me, the University of Helsinki (UH) (fall entry, 09.2016-12.2016) was attractive because 1) it offers intensive training in theoretically informed critiques towards global communication studies which supplement my largely empiricist orientation in FU; 2) it is located in the capital of the *Nordic welfare model* that enjoys 1st ranked media freedom, of which I was eager to obtain first-hand observations; and 3) as I've been living in the tropical region for most of my life I expected to experience full-scale snow and polar nights in the faraway Scandinavian land.

After I had been nominated a lot of information flooded in and three tasks came chronologically:

1. formal application to the University of Helsinki (deadline for non-European citizen: 15 April)
2. visa application (for non-European citizens, starts after obtaining official acceptance letter from the UH)
3. apartment search

Accommodation

The UH organizes accommodation for exchange student. In the middle of June, I received a one-time, non-negotiable offer from "Unihome" of a studio flat in Domus Academica located 2 subway stations away from campus. Although a monthly rent of 550 Euro is relatively high, I got to enjoy 1) room cleaning service every two weeks, 2) built-in sauna and laundry in the dorm basement, and 3) a great neighborhood in the center of Helsinki. In the offer email, Unihome required a deposit (500 Euro). So for those not sure about the UH accommodation offer, there is still enough time to search private rooms before making up your mind.

Financial considerations

In this aspect, an exchange semester in Helsinki has pros and cons. I had to temporarily stop my FU student assistant job because of the stay in Finland and the apartment rent was almost doubled. After coming to Finland, I got to appreciate the fact that a student status could exempt you from some

economic burdens living in the Nordic country. I received a standard grant package of 810 Euros from Erasmus Higher Education Coordinator in September. University of Helsinki offers several in-campus canteens where you only need 2,60 Euros to have a full-set meal (main course, side dish, drink, bread, salad).

Studying at the host university

Having a two-period system, the UH offers lectures and seminars from September to middle October and from November to middle December. I went to Helsinki with no prior knowledge of Finnish/Swedish but this has not disadvantaged me in any sense; as an international University, the UH publishes a very convenient summary of its English-instructed courses every term. I chose 6 from the Weboodi lecture pool (<https://weboodi.helsinki.fi/hy/>).

Course Name	Period	Evaluation
Finnish Media and Communication System	07.09.2016 -26.09.2016	7 Learning diaries
Critical Social Theory	09.09.2016 -21.10.2016	1 exam
Introduction to Media and Global Communication	12.09.2016 -14.10.2016	2 reading reports, 1 final essay
Methodologies in Discourse and Identity	29.09.2016 -10.11.2016	4 reading reports, 1 presentation, 1 empirical paper
Racism, Multiculturalism and Public Discourse	01.11.2016 -18.12.2016	1 final essay
Civilizations, Technology and Literacies	01.11.2016 -01.12.2016	1 final essay

Conclusion

All of these factors led me to the conclusion that my four months spent in Helsinki as an Erasmus student were a unique and worthwhile experience.