

**2013-2014**

**University Attended: St. Gallen**

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### **INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME**

What did this involve, how long did it last, was it useful?

The induction programme consists of two weeks. Those who want to can take a crash course of German these first two weeks. Whether this is totally essential is tough to say. Many of the Swiss are bilingual and with English it would be possible to get by as many of my friends have done. It's difficult to comment on this as I speak German already.

What is essential, however, is the enrolment into the buddy system. These will be the people you will hang out with and get to know well throughout the semesters. The local students don't seem to want to go out as much and you may struggle to really engage with them as they are so study-focussed. The buddy system will show you round and help you find your way and is a great organisation to meet people through their events.

### **ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE**

Style of teaching, courses, ease of access to courses, methods of assessment, teaching support

The quality of teaching is good. The English of the teachers can be a little difficult to understand because of the accent however I don't feel it particularly hindered anybody. However be aware that even though a class says it will be taught in English, if they are no non-German speaking students, teachers will gladly switch to German anyway.

The style is the same as in Manchester. Teacher lectures and ask questions. Interaction can vary heavily from class to class. Sometimes it can be very enthusiastic whilst on other occasions there is dead silence.

The ease of access to a course however is a completely different ball game. It is all because of the bidding system. The school is great, teaching is good too but this. Oh my gosh! As you can infer I have a personal vendetta against this system. So what is this system you might ask? Well here you go:

I can be likened to a silent auction. At the start you have given 1000 points. The way it works is, the more number of points you put into a course selection the more likely you are going to get it. For example a course has 30 spaces. The top 30 people who put the most points in will get the places. So you have no idea what the bare minimum is to get a course. I missed out on a course once by 1 point! It is the most frustrating thing. Especially if you have to pick 6 courses. So if you split it evenly,  $1000/6 = \sim 166$  points, it is likely you will not get any of the courses, unless they are really not in demand. So what to do best is to prioritise 2 or 3 courses you really want and put all your points in them. Even this however is not a guarantee for success. I put in 370 points into a course and still didn't get it. So be warned! There are multiple rounds and you receive points back if the course you bid on is given to you. I think the problem is that we are very unfamiliar with the way courses are assigned here. The local students are well practiced in terms of getting the courses they require. I could write a list of tips but the problem is there is no guarantee of success even with tips. It is really luck that gets you your courses in the end. Perhaps a guide would be to just focus all your points in 2 to 3 courses in the first round of bidding rather than spreading them evenly. However one positive thing about access to courses is that you can literally pick anything.

The methods of assessment vary. These can be group presentations, papers, oral or examination. When doing examinations always decentralise them. Both in the first and second semester. Otherwise you can say goodbye to your Christmas and summer holidays. They may say you can't in your first semester but you can. Many of my fellow exchange students who were here for a full year did so. Keep it in mind! The teachers are very accommodating to exchange students so don't be afraid to ask them for the de-central paper.

### **MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM**

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

Tough to say having lived here before so I was quite familiar with everything, hence never found the need to ask.

### **MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS**

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

Yes, don't rely on your grant to come. Best financial advice is to plan way ahead and see it as a bonus. Luckily I am fortunate enough with well off parents, but I can imagine other students who aren't may really be struggle.

### **HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE**

Level of support, additional information that could be useful for future students

They are good. Very friendly and helpful!

### **INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER**

Please include any information relating to the purchase of compulsory health insurance ie costs etc. or whether this was waived by having the University of Manchester Insurance Policy

I cannot comment on this as I have my own personal insurance with CIGNA registered in Switzerland. I never had to rely on the University of Manchester one. You do need to register it with the local government as it is required by law in Switzerland

### **INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS**

This should be information on any extra fees that the University charged but should not include accommodation, books, transport, visa etc.

See destination information where I will cover all the costs.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

As much information as possible on what accommodation is recommended or not recommended.

First of all prepare to pay a lot. 500 CHF is minimum really. However it can go up to 1000 CHF. It is best to be within the valley. St Gallen lies between two hills and you don't want to be walking back and forth. Try to be close to the train station as that puts you in an ideal location. Places like Rosenbergstrasse, Blumenbergstrasse are very good places to live. For the real partygoers try to get into Blumenastrasse 32. That's where the parties will happen, however cleaning up the next morning might not be as pleasant.

### **DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE**

Transport, travel, social life, integration with local students, student activity groups

First things first: Switzerland is expensive. Because of the high minimum wage everything you pay for isn't going to be cheap. For 200g of chicken easily expect to be paying 8-10 CHF. Living costs here are very high. Rent as mentioned before can range from 500-1000 CHF a month. Then of course depending on the lifestyle you live and what you eat you can easily add another 500 CHF on top of that for going out and food. Never expect to go to a restaurant. They are darn expensive. The only two I would recommend going to is Dieci, which is a pizza place which has a special student deal, and US Mex for the fajitas etc. Anywhere else isn't really worth it. You are better off cooking yourself.

In terms of travel buy a half-tax card and/or a Gleis 7. A half-tax card pretty much cuts the price of every transport cost in half. The Gleis 7 card means you can travel for free on trains between 7pm-7am so it's great if you want to go to Geneva or far away. These cards really pay for themselves so get them as soon as you arrive.

St Gallen is really a small town which 70,000 people. You will want to go travelling. St Gallen will make you run out of things to do within the month. But Switzerland is perfectly located in the centre of Europe. I highly suggest you take the overnight bus to Prague for example (look up studentagency for prices) or go to the Oktoberfest in Bavaria. Italy and many other places are all options. It is definitely something worth looking into. I had an American friend who went somewhere different every weekend for the whole semester. It is possible. The opportunities are endless.

The social life is good especially with the interaction with the buddy system group. However you may find yourself heading into a routine. Elephant on Wednesdays, Caliente on Thursdays and watching Champions League in Ofive, Meeting Point or Ad Hoc. Plus they organise special trips to go skiing or to Luzern, the lakes you name it.

Getting in to student activity groups isn't too easy from what I can gather. Many of the sports team just do their own thing. This is possibly because the interaction with local students is minimal outside the classroom as they are so focussed on their work. Some will connect with the exchange students and you will see these people frequently at the events the buddy system holds. I think it is highlighted by a sign that is inside the university. It's lights that spell out "happiness is expensive". So many people are just focussing on their studies so they will earn money rather than enjoy university and the moment.

#### **DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD**

A great experience with a costly price but something I have no regrets about.

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