



HEC Paris – X-HEC Entrepreneur 2018/2019

I had the chance to gain the Master in Management (MiM) Grand Ecole of HEC within the focus on Entrepreneurship. Because the master's program has been completely renewed in 2018/2019, my promotion was the first year which had the chance to get the X-HEC degree. X-HEC is a joint program, sort of a double diploma between Ecole Polytechnique and HEC Paris. I will focus mainly on this aspect due to its novelty.

The entrepreneurship master of HEC has always been a program different to the other classic programs on campus. Indeed, of all 115 students, none of us has been living on campus on Jouy-en-Josas. All of us lived in the city Paris itself. It is highly crucial to also live in the city and NOT on the campus to be somehow integrated because all group works, evenings, sport events etc. are held within the city. Only some classes (max. once a week) are held on campus. So if you are looking for a chance to get a real French experience in Paris, this program is your only choice at HEC.

This year, for the first time, the entrepreneurship master of HEC and Ecole Polytechnique (the best engineering school of France with a better reputation than HEC – similar to ETH Zürich and HSG) joined. That means that all students from both universities are taking the same classes. So you will have to join engineering classes from Ecole Polytechnique and the engineers are joining business classes at HEC. This has advantages but also disadvantages: The level of classes are fairly bad on the business side – you probably won't learn much if you have studied in St. Gallen before. But it is interesting to sneak into engineering classes and to get to know their mentality of work. Anyway,

this master's program is not about the classes you are taking. It is really about meeting interesting people and working with them independently.

- 1) Meeting people: Other than in similar programs at HEC, everybody knows everybody thanks to great social events. For example, in the first week all students went hiking for 5 days. This is perfectly organized with a daily rotation forcing almost every student to talk to every other student. We went skiing for one week in January. Every time anyone (literally anyone) goes into a bar in Paris, they inform all people on Slack, Facebook. Nobody is excluded, everybody is always welcome. At the end of the year, it is a huge and strong community of students helping out each other. I would assume one of the strongest communities at HEC.
- 2) Working: I will go deeper into the program itself below. However, work given by university is never the focus of the students, nor of the professors themselves. It should rather align and guide you on your way to your startup. So when students did not feel like working on university projects, they were not forced to. For example, one student had already a running startup and was growing successfully, he never had to attend anything. As long as you are an entrepreneur and you justify what you are doing, you are well off. In addition, your colleagues are mainly risk takers, really trying to build a startup (or have built companies already). It is in general a good idea to come with an idea or with a project right from the beginning.

Well, let's jump into the program. In the beginning of the year, we were asked to choose between three different tracks:

- 1) High Touch: This is more or less the classic HEC track. Mainly non-engineers are taking this one. It is less work than the other two programs, but also less challenging and less rewarding (a little boring in my opinion).
- 2) **Deep Tech**: This is the tech program. I guess around 70% engineers. The specialty about this program is, that you are going to UC Berkeley for 4 month between January and Mai. I have been taking this one.
- 3) Bio: This is tailored for bio-engineering. Mainly medicine students or pharmacists, but overall a fairly small group of people (has been around 8).

Because I joined the **Deep Tech** track, I will mainly explain you how this one looked like. We had two big missions till Christmas. Mission Creation in which we were put into a random team to find an idea for a startup and deliver a business plan within 6 weeks. Within the second mission you are joining a company for around 2 month within their scaling phase. I was able to join Slimpay, a fintech company which raised more than 40 million € where I even had a company's email address, reported to the CEO, had access to their full Salesforce account and much more. At the end of every phase, you need to pitch your results in form of an elevator pitch (between 4-7 minutes - graded). During those two missions, you always have some classes (around 4-8h a week), but most of them are more or less useless (attendance mandatory) and we never had an exam – only deliverables like business plans or presentations connected to the missions.

After the first phase in Paris, in January the entire Deep Tech track flew to California. We joined the UC Berkeley Learn2Launch program which is made ONLY for us French students – so we were NOT mixed with other students. Nevertheless, we had the possibility to audit classes without receiving ECTS). Normally, this program costs 15'000€. Every student got a scholarship of 5k-10k. I had to pay 5k on my own which is indeed expensive in terms of DACH fees, but nothing compared to US fees.

However, living expenses in Berkeley are high! I shared a room (around 8m²) and we paid 800€/each – we had one of the best deals by the way. But Berkeley has been a great time! Classes are good, the ecosystem is fantastic, nature breathtaking leading to an overall amazing experience. In Berkeley you have the mission to build your own venture. Classes support you, some coaching sessions give individual guidance, but overall you have a lot of free time to do what you think is important. So you can loose all your time at the beach or you can really work, go to conferences, use the accessible brainpower at San Francisco and learn a lot – but that is up to you (like in Paris).

Afterwards in Mai till June, we have had two possibilities. Either to continue with your project or you work as a “Entrepreneur en residence” at Station F. For me it was difficult to find a new apartment in Paris for only 6 weeks, so I continued to work on my venture but remotely from Switzerland, Germany and France. Classes were often compulsory which I just skipped.

A wrap-up with a positive mindset: Within France, HEC is well known and especially the Grand Ecole (MiM) is an amazing opportunity to gain a foothold within France. St. Gallen is offering a unique possibility by offering this diploma within two semesters and only paying the fees of St. Gallen. Other students who join HEC only within the second year of the master pay 22k€ and receive only the M2 and NOT the MiM. That is a huge difference regarding diploma and financial means. You also gain a lot of working experience. It is has nothing to do with studying, but it is a great entry into the entrepreneurial spirit.

A wrap-up with a negative mindset: The organization of the school is not comparable to HSG. Which classes and where they take place were often only communicated on the same day, changes occurred on a weekly basis limiting the possibility to plan life more than a week ahead. This program is about entrepreneurship and they also live this mentality. You need to be adaptive, planning is almost impossible and you need to take it as it comes. On the other hand, everything is negotiable. If you rather want to do something else instead doing a mission, then explain it – you have good chances that they support you. For example, we have some students who got first traction with their ventures. They work 130% on them since months and don’t show up at class nor do they hand in the deliverables – everything ok. They give you a structure, but what you do with it, is up to you.

I can highly recommend this program. For questions, don’t hesitate to call me.

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