

HEC Paris, CEMS Spring Term 2018

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**1) BASIC INFORMATION HEC**

Different to what the name promises, the “École des hautes études commerciales de Paris” is not actually situated in Paris, but rather at the south-eastern border of the city, close to a village called Jouy-en-Josas. HEC is a very prestigious institution in France, as their university system is a bit different to ours: instead of a normal bachelor, French undergrads have two years of “prépas” after high school, after which they have to take placement tests where only the best 300-400 are able to join HEC, leading to circa 4000 students.

Campus: The campus is quite a vast piece of land. However, there are only two buildings in which the whole academic life happens: The T building, where you can find all class rooms, the library (very small, but open 24/7) with four study rooms to book, as well as part of the administration, and the S building, through which you enter the campus. S is mostly used by MBA students. It is quite modern and has about 15 additional study rooms that you as an exchange student can use if empty, but can’t reserve in advance via the normal system. Also, the reception, where you can get coins for the washing machine and the dryers can be found there. Aside from the dorms (more about them in chapter 3) only three other buildings are important for you: the RU (N), where you get food (see “food” below), the escargot (Y), where you will probably have some CEMS club events and the M building, where the gym, the sports hall, both campus bars and the party location for the POW are situated (see also chapter 6).

The rest of the campus is mostly covered by forest and two lakes. Furthermore, there are three football fields, one rugby field and an outdoor tennis court (Also see “sport” bellow).

Transportation: As said, the campus lies quite remotely in the countryside. Depending on date and time, it takes about 1 to 1.5 hours to get to the center of Paris by public transportation. To reach the next train station in Jouy, you have to walk 15-20 min. If you don't like walking, there is a bus stop in front of the reception that connects you to the station every hour or so. Furthermore, if you have the appropriate subscription, you can rent small electric cars in front of the campus (autolib). However, to reach the city, the most convenient means are the shuttle buses (Savac) that leave for either Massy-Palaiseau (access to RER) or Pont de Sèvres (access to Metro). From both stations, it takes you 30-40 more minutes of public transportation to get into the city. The shuttles can be booked via the “Karos” app and cost about 1.50 EUR per way. It has to be mentioned that the app is very unreliable and usually takes at least 5min of closing, refreshing, and changing the parameters to load tickets. To get back from Paris on weekends, there are two late night shuttles leaving from Denfert-Rochereau at 01:30 and 03:00 in addition to the daytime shuttles. If you miss the shuttles, the easiest and cheapest way to get back is to take a metro as far south-east as possible (e.g. Pont de Sèvres) and then book an Uber from there (between 15-20 EUR). The one thing, that HEC has plenty of is parking spaces. Thus, bringing your own car is not a problem.

Food: The food offering on campus is quite limited. The RU (restaurant universitaire) is the only restaurant on campus and offers lunch and dinner every day of the week. However, the quality of what is offered fluctuates heavily. Usually, lunch and dinner are quite decent from Monday to Friday, as you can choose between a “menu eco” (salad bar+ yoghurt + warm meal) for 3.70 EUR, a pasta menu, a grill menu (4 out of 5 times burger patty and fries), a vegan menu and an Asian menu. On weekends, the choice is limited to the menu eco (good luck if you are vegetarian / vegan). Additionally, there are two cafeterias, that offer sandwiches and some salads, but they are not open on weekends either. The next best place to get food is a supermarket called “Simply”, which offers everything you would also get in a midsized Coop or Migros. Depending on whether you want to get a fridge and/or a cooking plate, buying food in Simply and cooking at home can be the best option. However, cooking and storing food in the very small rooms, where you also sleep, can lead to a very smelly environment and to heavy arguments with your roommate and neighbors, depending on their preferences (see also chapter 3 for more details about housing). Finally, there are a few restaurants surrounding the campus. The closest one is the Pizzeria Napoletana next to the Simply. The food is a bit expensive, and they tend to turn on some disco-lights in the evening, which makes eating there not really a pleasant experience. It's better to take the food back to the dorms and eat there, or to visit the Napoletana in the village (same restaurant, different place), which offers a better atmosphere. There are some more restaurants in the village, however we never visited them. To summarize this: if possible, eat in Paris.

Sports: In order to participate in the various sport offerings, you need to pay 30 EUR and present a medical certificate, where your doctor approves your ability to practice sport. The sport offering is not as good as at HSG, but you will likely find most of the common team sports as well as a climbing wall and a dojo. The gym is a story for itself: due to a law in France free weights are only accessible, when a coach is around. This happens three times a week for two hours, in which the gym is extremely crowded. There are no proper benches, so forget

any exercise that would involve one. For the rest of the week, you will have to focus on two (!) machines for upper body exercises and 3 for legs. There are quite a few cardio machines (rowing, exercise bikes, treadmills), but usually at least one of the treadmills is broken. In general, it is best to focus on body weight exercises. On the other side, the campus is very nice to go running if it doesn't rain (which it does regularly). There are various different routes that lead you around the lake, and if you go further, the countryside surrounding the campus is also pretty.

CEMS Office: The CEMS office is situated in building L, where you can also find the infirmary. However, the academic director is rarely there, as he lives in the Netherlands, and the person that took care of all our problems was situated in T. However, this might change, as this person is leaving HEC.

2) BASIC INFORMATION ACADEMICS

The academic part of the spring term was disappointing to say the least. Aside from the business project (15 ETCS) and the GMP class (9 ETCS) one could choose from four CEMS-only electives (6 ETCS each). As a result, the exposure to local students and non-CEMS exchanges in classes was limited to the language courses. In the following, the classes we took will be introduced.

GMP, Prof Dr. Jeremy Ghez and various guest speakers

Key CEMS class, that can be split up into three different parts that should be summarized separately. The first part was an introduction into how to conduct a country risk analysis, as this was a grade component. The 1.5 days were quite technical but also interesting. However, they had almost nothing to do with the rest of the class. In the second part, different guest speakers gave presentations about various parts of the world. The quality of this sessions fluctuated heavily, but in general, they were quite interesting. And then there was the third part, held by the HEC professor that is responsible for the overall class. In hindsight, this class was a disappointment as it was very generic and lacked a sense of purpose, which was reflected in the very low class participation. In general, the class was missing a red line and a meaningful way of how the statements of the different speaker could be put in perspective.

Professor: Jeremy Ghez and various guest speakers

Grade Components: 1 page reflection (individual), 4 - 6 page country risk analysis (group), "group- challenge" - generic management task, that has to be done in 4 hrs as a take-home exam.

Effort: Low

Grading: tba

Insights: Interesting insights from guest speakers about different regions of the world, however overshadowed by organization and lecturers from Prof Ghez.

Management Of Innovation And Technology In A Global World, Dr. Denisa Mindruta

Rather generic innovation management class. Depending on your previous knowledge, this class offers little to nothing new in terms of concepts or understanding. However, the professor is quite engaging and the discussions about the case studies (one for every class) are actually interesting.

Grade Components: Very fragmented - Class participation (20%), Individual Case Assessment (pre-class, on-line short assignments, 3 @ 10% each), Simulation Score (10%), Group Report (25%), Group Presentation (15%).

Effort: Low, as it is quite stretched out over the term

Grading: tba (but should be good)

Insights: Topics such as disruptive innovation and management of multisided platforms. Many interesting cases.

Luxury Management, Dr. Anne Michaut

General Description: this class is interesting if you want to learn the fundamental concepts of luxury management and marketing. Prof Michaut is a very good story-teller and manages to keep everyone's attention during class. As director of the LVMH academic chair (and having started out as an agro-engineer), she is a pretty cool person and very knowledgeable, both in marketing and retail goods. She has a very laid-back teaching style and does not expect deliverables to have a strictly academic form but rather asks for it to reflect curiosity and interest. Class is very interactive. I would recommend this class to people who are willing to discover luxury.

Grade components: participation, two group presentations, one 3-4page individual paper

Effort: low, very light readings

Grading: tba

Insights: basics of luxury management and many stories about the *maisons* and their know-how.

Business Project: On the first two days on the campus, all partners presented their projects. We could then list our top five choices and the CEMS bureau would allocate us. The system used for this allocation is not really transparent. The experiences made during the projects depended heavily on the specific task and the company. We were both lucky with the assigned projects and could work on interesting topics. However, quite a few fellow-Cemsies mostly complained about their tasks. It should also be mentioned, that out of the 18 projects, 9 came from non-French companies and there were only 11 different companies, as many offered more than one project. If you plan on taking a business project with Henkel, feel free to contact Julian, if you plan on taking a business project with Ashoka, feel free to contact Stephanie for details.

Responsible Global Leadership Seminar: The mandatory RGLS took place on a weekend: All CEMS students were forced to take part in the HEC Model United Nations. While MUNs are in general very interesting and engaging, this was not exactly true for said weekend. Most of the other students (MBA) dropped out of the event by Saturday evening while our attendance was checked consequently. The lack of motivation of most Cemsies, together with the lack of experience of the chairs made the event a tiring and unsatisfying experience for most participants. We had the feeling, that CEMS students were mostly used to fill up the ranks, as otherwise, not enough students would have enrolled. Also, one could get the idea that using an already organized event for our RGLS was mainly done to save the local CEMS bureau some work.

Skill Seminars: Aside from the mandatory RGL, only three additional skill seminars were offered. Personality Profile (0.25 ETCS) and Beyond Bias (0.25 ETCS) took place in the same

week and were held by the same guy of guy of Hilti. The best to be said about it, is that we could check another 0.5 ETCS for my degree.

French Language: Only class with exposure to non-CEMS students. How the class is organized depends heavily on your level and the teacher you get. In general, the teachers are not really aware of CEMS and the course itself goes on for four more weeks after your term ends. The evaluation was thus limited to a homework. Quite an easy way to pass the language requirement.

3) INFORMATION PRIOR TO GOING ABROAD

The administrative stuff

Good news: France not being on the other side of the world, there are no significant preparations to make (such as a visa). Registrations for class and the various online platforms run pretty seamlessly. If you have a problem, you can contact the program manager (Loli Bretton for us).

However as soon as you are at HEC, you should do the following in order to get the SEMP learning agreement money & CAF money ("aide au logement", which is money the French government gives to all students studying in France and that will be in between 80-150€ per month according to your living situation BUT it takes ages to set up and WILL drive you crazy):

- a) Get the SEMP learning agreement form sorted out (then it's done)
- b) Open a bank account (if you want the CAF): we would suggest getting it with BNP Paribas as they also give you a free premium account visa card, housing insurance for your room if needed and 20€. They are present on campus during the first week and there is a bank near the Jouy-en-Josas train station. You just need your ID and matriculation confirmation to open an account
- c) If you would like the CAF, you will also need to order a birth certificate
- d) Get a SIM card: If you would like to have data etc. you can order a phone card on the website of Free (mobile provider) and they will send it to you by mail. You will get unlimited everything for 20€ and can stop the contract online whenever you like (online)
- e) Join the various HEC groups such as the IS (international students society) one
- f) If you want a boiler/coffee machine, bring it with you and don't forget your adapters or buy them on the HEC facebook groups
- g) Look up the spring strikes. They are no fun, especially if you are planning to travel for fun or interviews

Getting to campus

You have various ways to get to campus. From Switzerland, the cheapest way of getting to Paris is the TGV if you book early, the plane if you book late. You can get the "carte jeune" for 50€ which gives you a 25-60% discount on TGVs. We highly recommend it if you count on taking the TGV a few times.

If you want to go to campus from Paris with the train, the easiest way is to take the RER C to Versailles Chantiers, and then to take the other RER C to Jouy-en-Josas. It will cost around 4€50. You can also take the RER B through Massy. The walking distance from the train station

to uni (when taking the shortcut in the forest) is comparable to the one in St. Gallen, both in length and in steps.

As stated before, you can also book shuttles for 1.50€ from an app called “Karos” which will take you to and from Massy (where you can get the RER B to the eastern part of Paris) or to Pont-de-Sèvres (west of Paris, where you can get the metro). On weekends you have quite a few free shuttles to and from the metro stop “Denfert-Rochereau” which is super nice. However, in order to use Karos, you need all of your HEC credentials so we would recommend just taking the train/regular bus the first time, but to then ask regular students about the shuttles (“navettes”) asap. The CEMS Club should send you a time table and you can also get them at the entrance of campus.

Downloading UBER for emergencies is also highly recommended as taxis are super expensive and trains don’t run late. Also, they are sometimes on strike.



Living arrangements

We both opted to stay on campus as we were told that it was good for the “CEMS spirit” and it is a nightmare to get a short-term lease in Paris (as they want to make sure you can pay and ask for a lot of documents including salary checks). We decided it wasn’t worth the hassle. If you do want to live in Paris however, we would recommend joining Facebook groups and having a look on websites (such as studapart.fr, omni.fr, cité universitaire). Living in Paris is an amazing experience but you will be isolated from the rest of the CEMS group as Jouy is far away from the city and going there for any other reason than class doesn’t really make sense.

As student accommodations were being renovated, we were both assigned a shared room. This room will typically be in buildings M1 or L1 (where all the international student parties take place, and CEMSies often meet up for a drink). You will also be able to rediscover the joys of teenage summer camps and sleep in little rooms with bunk-beds. Your experience in those rooms will highly depend on who you share

it with and if you escape to Paris on the weekends. We had both a positive and negative experience with our roomies and so would recommend contacting other CEMS people on facebook and teaming-up beforehand if you want to know who you’ll be living with. Opinions about the other kinds of rooms are in other reports. Also, make sure to inform the housing office well in advance if you plan to arrive on campus earlier. They are not necessarily flexible when it comes to this (one of us was allowed to come early, the other not).

Many students buy a fridge and hot plates for the room. The proximity of Simply (now Auchan) supermarket makes it easy to cook. However, given the very small size of the shared

room, neither of us did this and we mostly ate at the RU (restaurant universitaire). We still recommend to buy a few cups, mugs and cutlery for “simply picnics” for when you are fed up with the RU. You can buy coins to use the laundry machines from the entrance desk (and stamps as well). Buy a drying rack as well, the dryers are expensive and work only every second time (in L1).

4) MONEY

Expenditures on Campus

This will highly depend on how much you like to spend. A room on campus will cost in between 290-600€ and food at the RU is only around 3€ per meal (a little less if you're vegetarian, a little more for extra meat). Last important thing: coffee is 0.80€ (and much nicer than our migros coffee). You can also get the cleaning done in your room for 10€. The permission to use the gym will cost 30€ and a medical certificate, plus a little more if you want to do classes such as yoga.

Expenditures off Campus

These can again be more or less high according to what you like doing and are willing to spend. We would recommend getting an Airbnb in Paris *at least* once for a full-on Parisian weekend but you can also go out and take the shuttle back to campus at 1.30 & 3AM. We also recommend spending time in Paris and going out for food, coffee, drinks, shows, clubs etc. If you speak French, go to the Comédie Française (free tickets on Mondays). If you don't, there are lots of English shows as well. A lifetime wouldn't be enough to explore Paris. Also, try to see different parts of France, with flibus, blablacar and the TGV carte jeune, it isn't very expensive!

There are loads of free stuff to see in Paris as well. Walk around in different arrondissements. Take free walking city tours. If you are a European citizen under 26 or have your HEC ID, museums are free and you don't need to stand in line to get a ticket.

In short, thanks to the price off on-campus rooms, the RU, the Simply prices, the CAF, the SEMP agreement, and student prices, your semester shouldn't be too expensive. Other reports' recommendation of planning around 1'000€ a month for everything including travelling seems reasonable to us.

However, if you live in the 16ème arrondissement, go shopping at place Vendôme every weekend and eat at the George V or at the top of the Eiffel tower every evening, well that's another story...

5) HOST COUNTRY

If you're Swiss, you will of course experience cultural differences but nothing radical. Although the administration can be slow and very annoying, that no one will care if you hand in your essays a little late, that transportations systems cannot deal with snow or unhappy workers (strikes all the time) and that the RERs will be a little more dirty and late than typical SBB trains, Paris is safe and a beautiful city. We both speak French and so did not encounter communication issues. Communicating in English can be laborious as the French do rather speak French than English but it's mostly fine, especially on campus. France is an amazingly rich country in terms of culture and landscapes and well worth visiting.

6) SOCIAL LIFE

Your social life will of course depend on you and your preferences. Either way, your fellow Cemsies will most likely be the people you end up spending the most time with. However, a local specialty is, that CEMS students that do not live on campus (=80% of the local students) rarely take part in any activity of the CEMS club. Many of the local Cemsies will be preoccupied with job interviews and their master thesis in the spring term. In our cohort, we were mostly about 20 to 30 people that met regularly, out of the 80 CEMS students.

HEC has some associations and sport clubs that you can join for the term. This is probably the only way how you can really get into contact with local non-CEMS students. Speaking French will most likely be necessary, as the cliché that French people do not like to speak English is sadly true (with exceptions, thankfully). Take this as an opportunity to practice your French. In general, there are three places, where students gather on campus to socialize: at the party of the week (POW) which takes place every Thursday. The participation rate fluctuates quite heavily, but the more people there are, the rougher it gets. Most people have special clothes and shoes for the POW, as everything you wear for the evening will most likely be ruined due to the beers that are thrown around. It's worth a consideration to bring shoes that you can throw away after the term and to leave your jacket / hoodie in your room, as chances for it getting lost are high. For 15 EUR, you get free beer (hard liquor was banned a while ago) until 01:00 am and the party normally ends at 02:00. While the POW can be very funny, heavily drunk and sometimes aggressive first year students (plus-minus 19 years old) are quite annoying.

Aside from the POW, there are two bars on Campus: The Wunder, which is open unregularly until ca. 11pm and the Zinc, which is actually more like a club and opens after the Wunder closes. The Zinc is run by the rugby team of HEC, and the guys generally appear like a mafia. Depending on the situation they behave either rude, aggressive, provocative or all three of the afore mentioned. We didn't frequent the location too much after the first few weeks. Finally, many students meet in the shared spaces of the dorms, either for drinks, cooking, games or working. We had the best times on campus at some of the many gatherings there with Cemsies and other exchange-students. For such events, Simply has quite an extensive offering of wine, liquor and beer, so you are not depended on the bars for drinks. In general, you should leave the campus whenever possible to explore Paris. Try to find a good Airbnb that you can rent every other weekend with fellow Cemsies.

7) OVERALL EVALUATION OF OUR EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

Stéphanie: As explained in the beginning, the system is different to the one we are used to and campus life means you will meet local students which are on average much younger (and therefore sometimes a little immature). HEC during the CEMS spring semester is not the first place to go if you expect to be very challenged academically, if you can't stand disorganization and if you expect to live in Paris. However, this also means you will have time for exploring or job-hunting. It is also good to have been to HEC if you plan to stay to work in France, if you like Paris and if you like wine and cheese. You'll get to meet a lot of very nice people (including a lot of French people) and have a lot of fun. The enjoyability of campus itself will highly depend on your attitude, the weather and on the people you meet and friends you make.

Julian: In general, the CEMS exchange term at HEC leaves kind of a bitter taste. While I met many great people, and could work on an interesting and rewarding business project, there are certain aspects that would lead me to not chose HEC as one of my top five priorities again: First and foremost, I'm disappointed by the academic offering, and the way the local CEMS administration set up the term. I genuinely do not understand, how this university got its reputation. Second, I was bewildered by how local students treated one another and by how they apparently were not concerned at all about the support staff, that is cleaning a way their mess day after day. Third, I am disenchanted by how little a big part of the local CEMS student body cared about being part of the CEMS community.

In various talks I had with fellow exchange students, it became obvious, that I'm not the only one that perceived the term negative. I hope that our feedbacks also find their way to the people in charge, so that necessary adjustments can be made.

