

Double Degree Programme (DDP): Bocconi International Management (IM)

As a MBF student I got accepted into the DDP programme in IM with Bocconi. The courses started in the beginning of September 2019 and ended in June 2020.

Bocconi is a well-ranked private university with global, or at least continental reputation. The campus is located between the buzzing area of Navigli to the west, Porta Romana to the east, and the Duomo area to the north. Hence, it is surrounded on all ends by restaurants, bars, and clubs within walking distance. The university counts around 14'000 students, divided between bachelor, master and executive education. In the first semester there were roundabout 1'000 incoming exchange students, aside from that the students are predominantly Italian and there is a lack of international diversity in my view. The exchange and double degree students get a different treatment. Exchanges receive a welcome pack, where they get all the information needed and come into contact with the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). ESN organizes a very booze-heavy beginning of the semester where students can join in some parties, Aperitivos and day trips. There are still some events throughout the semester but they get scarcer. As my flatmate was an exchange I joined in some parties in the beginning of the fall semester, but refrained from doing so after that, as they became quite dull. Double degree students do not get contacted by ESN, hence, if the above description sounds fun for you then you have to contact them by yourself via facebook, e-mail or some acquaintances. Double degree students get a more formal 2-hour introduction into their program, where you will receive all the information that matters academically. You also get introduced to the double degree office, which you can contact anytime throughout the year if required. In general as a double degree student you are treated as a local Bocconi student, whereas the exchange remains somehow external to the university.

Now to the academic bit. The first semester consisted of the following courses:

20172 – Seminar of Collaborative Competencies – 2 credits

Course at the beginning of the semester where you get to meet your colleagues in an interactive way. Take the opportunity to talk to as many of them as you will be in a classroom with the very same people for the rest of the year. There are two classes in IM, a CEMS-class and a non-CEMS class. As a double degree student you should be in the non-CEMS class. The people I met in the first hour of this class remain some of my dearest friends to this day. Course is ungraded and takes 2 days. Hence, enjoy, meet people and make plans with them. Many people don't know anyone in the university, just like you.

20637 – Professional English Seminar – 2 Credits

If you have a certificate above a certain passing grade you do not have to attend the course. I had a valid TOEFL above a certain threshold (cannot recall the exact threshold), and hence did not do the course.

20375 – Italian Language – 4 Credits

Italian course starting from the very basics and progressing slowly. 4 hours a week, with some homework. Attendance is required if you want to have an easier exam. Group presentation in Italian towards the end of the semester, and some essay hand-ins. There are 2 classes for double degree students, with different teaching styles and hand-ins. You can choose the one better fitting for you. Final exam consists of an easy written exam and a short oral exam. In conclusion: easy light course, nothing to worry about. If you want to learn Italian I propose you do some extra work aside from this course as it remains basic throughout.

20665 – Programming with Python – 2 Credits

You need to do 2 extracurricular credits where you can choose from a catalogue of courses. I went for this programming course. I think it is the worst and most useless course I ever had in my life. Recommendation: If you want easy kindergarten level credits then take it, else refrain from it.

20119 – Internship or similar activities – 8 Credits

Minimum of 5 weeks 100% working experience. I sent in a letter of reference from my last job and the credits were accredited.

20624 – Global Scenarios – Module 1 (Macroeconomics) – 6 Credits

This is the first core course I am mentioning. Lectures are held biweekly, and the semester is split up between two professors. First, professor is one of the “star”-professors of the uni and is also a senior advisor to the government and the WEF as far as my Italian friends told me. Second professor is knowledgeable and fun. Overall interesting course, which is repeating some of the macro topics from the HSG bachelor, and extending beyond it by looking into some EU and Italian topics such as Brexit and Italian Budget Deficit. Enjoyed the course. The exam was a bit arbitrary, as everyone could answer the essay questions, hence, minor deviations in an answer could change the grades substantially up- or downwards. In general the IM, in particular the CEMS class, is extremely competitive. The grades are curved, thus, you have to put in some hours to get a very good grade. Good grades (i.e. around 25) can be achieved with modest workload. 30 and 31 usually are difficult to achieve and depend heavily on the arbitrary grading of the professors.

20625 – Global Scenarios – Module 2 (Geopolitics and Business) – 6 Credits

Interesting topics such as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and different cultures. But course is extremely unstructured. Grade consists of a group presentation about one country and an exam. Exam is vague and specific at the same time. Some questions are about one word on a certain page of a non-mandatory 50-page paper, and some about Russian weapon exports to Africa. Overall interesting topic, but non-optimal execution.

20161 – Performance Measurement – 6 Credits

Cool professor who is explaining the topics with some Harvard Business Cases. She also engages everyone in the classroom, sometimes cold-calling students, which results in a very collaborative discourse. Topic was particularly interesting to me due to my non-existent background in business administration. Exam is fair, but quite heavy in workload. Still, one of the best courses of the year in my opinion.

Before I delve into the second semester there are three additional things to be mentioned. First, courses can be passed in an attending or non-attending mode. All my first semester courses I chose to attend to get to know my colleagues. However, there is the option of choosing to not attend courses and only do a final exam, which I chose for one course in the second semester. Second, there usually are three exam dates which means you can spread out your exams over 2 months. I chose to do the exams in the first date, as I did not care about the grades too much. Italians generally only are happy with the top grade. Hence, they usually choose the first date, go to the exam, check the questions, and if they don't know one of the questions they choose to waive the exam and go the next one. Foreigners, tend to take a more relaxed stance and just take the exam once, but spread out the dates over 1-2 months. Thirdly, Covid-19 hit Milano in February, resulting in a suspension of the on-campus teaching activities for the rest of the semester. I chose to go back to Switzerland. The courses were finished online. In general, Bocconi did an extremely good job during this transition. However, the courses had to be changed substantially, therefore I would take my subsequent comments on the courses with a grain of salt.

20215 – International Comparative Business Law – 8 Credits

I am no fan of law course, thus, my expectations were low. The first professor was as boring as might be expected, however, the second professor was able to deliver the content in an interesting and fun fashion over the online lectures. In general the topic was surprisingly interesting. It was dealing with some main corporate law principles and a comparison between American and European law as well as some other jurisdictions. 3 points were given for a group essay about a specific case, the rest of the grade was decided in an exam which was quite heavy in workload, but nothing out of the ordinary.

20158 – Organization – 6 Credits

Course about how organizations should be set-up theoretically, which is then applied to numerous Harvard case studies. Interesting course for me, due to my lacking business administration background, but might be boring for those who heard this times and times before.

20575 – Global Operations and Supply Chain Management – 6 Credits

Did this course in non-attending, was the right decision, as the workload can be reduced drastically. Learnt for the exam for a few days and already forgot everything about it again. Classic bulimic learning course, like basically most of the IM courses.

20506 – Marketing Decision – 6 Credits

This professor didn't know how to deal with the Covid related transition, so course became quite chaotic. Core of the course was a Markstrat simulation over a few weeks with a paper and a final presentation about it. Additionally there were some short exams, which were a joke. He gave 20 minutes to answer 20 questions, which he felt to be necessary, as he argued we cannot cheat if we don't have time to do so. As an unsurprising result everyone tanked the exams and the grades became random at best.

20160 – Corporate Strategy – 8 Credits

Best course in the entire master. Two extremely sympathetic and knowledgeable professors. You go through some principles of corporate strategy on the basis of case studies. Two of the case studies you have to hand-in and are graded. Moreover, there is an oral participation grade. Lastly, there is an interactive group strategy simulation over one weekend. All of which was really interesting and it was the only course in the entire master, aside from Marketing, not focused on bulimic learning.

Last thing to mention is the thesis. If you choose to write about the same topic in the MBF and the IM you might run into some hurdles. My main hurdle was that Bocconi generally requires the thesis to be a minimum of 50 pages long, HSG professors often require research theses to be as short as possible. Therefore, even if you have the same topic you might be required to write two versions, like I have to at this moment.

Aside from the courses I chose to engage in two university clubs. The Bocconi Students Consulting Club (BSCC) and the Build sustainable innovation (BSI) club. Both of them have a rather rigorous interviewing process to even get in, with BSCC actually having 2 rounds of interview with a case study. BSCC was more of a networking club, whereas in BSI I was a project leader of a few Data Science students for a consulting project where we implemented some machine learning and data analytics tools for a Italian multinational. This was rather time intense but very interesting. In general the club landscape is diverse and if you are a double degree student you should get in to most of them. I would recommend joining one organization as you get exposure to new people and more Italians.

So much about Bocconi, now some other pieces of information. I found my apartment via a Facebook group and paid about 550 Euros per month, which is at the lower end of the rent scale (average probably around 750 euros). Location was next to Viale San Gottardo, and it was owned by the church. The church doesn't pay taxes, that's why it was so cheap for such a cool place. In a post-covid world, I recommend to start looking for a room early via facebook. Regarding sports, I chose to join a local gym, which was quite affordable at 30 euros a month. The uni gym has a bad rep, and people tend to avoid it. Food-wise you will be happy in Milano. During the week I found myself in a different Aperitivo place every other day. With Aperitivo you get a drink plus unlimited food for 9-13 euros, therefore, at some point I didn't cook much anymore. Restaurants are great, I particularly enjoyed the more hip and less touristy area of Porta Romana. Navigli is a bit too touristy for my taste. For bars you anyways often end up in Navigli. Regarding the names of the restaurants and bars, just try them out and ask your friends, you will find the good spots. Clubs are plentiful,

the most common ones are mainstream clubs such as Just Cavalli, Armani and Gattopardo. For the techno/electronic people I would recommend Rocket Club, Apollo Milano, and Volt. My absolute favourite is Tempio del Futuro Perduto, a school turned club in the north of the city where the entrance is often paid by book or clothes donations.

Overall my double degree was an interesting experience. On the one hand, Milano as a city was full of positive surprises and I would therefore definitely go back again. On the other hand, Bocconi surprised me negatively. Due to the rankings I was under the assumption that it is on a similar level as HSG. But, after studying there I would put the level of studies of HSG substantially above that of Bocconi. However, the people at the university are as good as it gets. As such my overall experience was very positive and I can recommend this programme to everyone.