

# SEP Report

## 1. Student Information

<b>Faculty/Major</b>	School of Computing/DDP Computer Sci & Applied Maths
<b>Host University</b>	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology of Lausanne (Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, EPFL)
<b>NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)</b>	AY14/15 Semester 2

## 2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**
- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**
- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

The lessons are conducted in lecture-exercise(tutorial) style which is the same as NUS. However, in exercises, unlike in NUS where the TA/lecturer goes through some tutorial questions, you are expected to do the worksheet on your own during the session and approach the TAs if you have any question. (That said, in one of my classes here, the lecturers do facilitate the exercise session.) I find the NUS style better, although it requires more time outside of class as we need to prepare for tutorials before hand. That is because the TA/lecturer is invaluable in highlighting potential errors and pitfalls.

When I started classes in EPFL, I was reminded about our 'teach less, learn more' movement. The lecturers were able to engage effectively with the class - they regularly pose questions and give time for students to think or discuss. Many students were active in answering and asking questions during the lectures as well. In one of my classes, Chemistry, we even had experiments during the lectures, which made the lectures interesting and the content easier to remember. Also, instead of having twice-a-week, 2-hour (Maths) lectures like in NUS, I only had a once-a-week, 2-hour lecture scheduled in EPFL. I found myself with more time to read up on references provided by the lecturers and that helped to better my understanding of the course material and to learn material outside the scope of the course.

I was able to easily find textbooks (whether suggested, or not) in the library, so I did not have to buy them. Also, the loan period was much longer and I found that I could easily hold on to a book for the entire semester. The books were in excellent condition too.

Students are not graded on a curve, but on absolute scores. I think it makes the environment less competitive and the students seemed really interested in learning and were open to sharing. Personally, I found learning more enjoyable.

I was unable to map all the modules that I'd wanted to because many modules are only offered in one semester (either semester 1 or semester 2) and I had taken a lot of the modules that they were offering in English back in NUS. They do have a good number of modules in English though and unless you have already taken them back in NUS, you should have sufficient modules to map. Many of my friends on exchange to EPFL had difficulty meeting the minimum of 20 ECTS required by EPFL because

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many modules are 3-4 ECTS. This means you need to take more than 5 modules. Many of them ended up taking modules that they do not need.

Another thing is that some courses have pre-requisites that NUS may not offer. Take for example in my case, Operating Systems had the pre-requisite of Concurrency but in NUS, Operating Systems is the pre-requisite for Concurrency. It is still possible to take those courses which you do not have the pre-requisites for, but be prepared to read up on your own.

**Please list the courses that you took during SEP.** (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
CH 161	General Chemistry (English)	3	CM1502	General Physical and Chemistry for Engineers	4
MATH 351	Advanced Numerical Analysis	5	MA5265	Advanced Numerical Analysis	4
MATH 360	Graph Theory	5	MA4235	Graph Theory	4
CS 323	Operating Systems	4	CS2106	Introduction to Operating Systems	4
CS 431	Introduction to Natural Language Processing	4	CS4248	Natural Language Processing	4

## 2. Accommodation

**What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?**

**Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?**

**Do you have any other suggestions?**

I stayed in one of the residences of Foundation Maisons pour Etudiants Lausanne (FMEL), Marcolet. It is a flat-share of 3, 4, or 5 rooms. The flat I stayed in had 5 rooms, 2 bathrooms, a kitchen with dining area and a balcony. The floors of the rooms and hallway are carpeted and the furniture in the rooms and bathrooms are in the shade of white or light grey which makes them look bright and clean. I did not have to buy any pots, pans, bowls, plates or utensils as there are plenty left by previous tenants.

Marcolet is on the outskirts of Lausanne, so it falls under the commune of Crissier instead of the commune of Lausanne. Only 4 blocks of Marcolet is owned by FMEL, and the rest of the people staying there are families with kids. It is a quiet area, with a primary school right behind the blocks.

The residence is conveniently located. The population office, post office, and other important offices are a 15-minute walk (at a leisurely pace). Also, it takes 15 minutes to walk to the train station or 2 stops by bus. The frequency of the bus is between 15-30 minutes so it is a plus to be able to walk to

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the train station. The train station is also the terminus for métro m1 which I took to school. It takes about 7 minutes to reach school by métro. There are also supermarkets, DBS bank and an Asian mart near the train station.

There are weekly cleanliness checks which I really appreciate because it ensures that the flat is habitable for the current and future tenants. It also creates a bonding opportunity with your flatmates as it forces you to clean together. The downside is that you need to pay a cleaning fine if your flat does not meet cleaning inspector's standard of cleanliness.

The only problem that I had was the lack of space in the fridge as each flat in Marcolet regardless of whether there are 3/4/5 rooms are equipped with the same-sized fridge and it can be quite a challenge to fit food for 5 people in the fridge.

I would highly recommend choosing to stay with FMEL as the rent is decent, it is easy to apply, and the staff responds to email promptly. However, you will not have the choice of where to stay and instead, will be randomly assigned a residence and the type of apartment. Also rent-wise it is monthly or half-monthly and it is not possible to check in/out on weekends or public holidays.

## 3. Activities during SEP

**Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?**

The school organised an information session and also an orientation event organized together with ESN (Eramus Student Network) EPFL where incoming exchange students get to know each other over cheese fondue.

The ESN EPFL organises a lot of activities, some of which are free. For those that require payment, it is much better to purchase their membership card for 10 CHF as you get 5 CHF off for each event or special discount for drinks. These activities include skiing/snowboarding trips, Swiss cheese (La Maison du Gruyère) and chocolate (Maison Cailler) factory tours, trip to CERN and UN office, weekly pub nights, and an annual gala cruise for exchange students.

You can also choose to enroll in the buddy system that ESN EPFL offers as it helps in getting to know actual EPFL students.

## 4. Cost of Living

**Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?**

**Please list travel expenses separately.**

**Flight to Switzerland and back to Singapore:** 800 + 650 SGD

**Accommodation:** 580 CHF per month

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**Transport:** 304 CHF for half-fare card (up to 50% off for most of Swiss transportation) and voie 7 card (travelling on board trains between 7pm and 5am is free).

51 CHF per month for transport within zones 11 and 12.

**Entertainment:** 0 CHF. The scenery in Switzerland is lovely and free!

**Household goods and laundry:** 25 CHF per month on average. This includes things like toilet paper, soap, trash bag, etc.

**Food:** 155 CHF per month on average. This is a largely vegetarian diet. Expect this amount to double if you are a meat-eater.

**Additional transport** (for travelling to other cities in Switzerland): 420 CHF

**Other travel expenses and miscellaneous:** 4.3k SGD

## 5. Challenges

**Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?**

As I have only taken very basic French lessons before going to Switzerland, I was not able to communicate with my housing manager who understands and speaks very little English. My French classes only prepared me for things like purchasing items, making small talk, listening to announcements on trains so I found myself at a loss of words in regards to borrowing things like the vacuum cleaner, or adding credit to my laundry card. In the beginning, I really felt like I was playing a game of charades with the housing manager. Subsequently, I asked my French flatmate to teach me certain phrases that I need in French and actively continued learning French in my own time.

I also learnt that there Switzerland does not use standard French, but rather, Swiss-French. There are not many differences though. The most notable is that some numbers are referred to differently by the Swiss-French speakers. Only after knowing this, did I have no problems understanding the cashiers.

## 6. Overall SEP Experience

**Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.**

The results from SEP far exceeded my expectations. My goals were to better appreciate the new language and culture, learn to be more independent and survive alone, forge new friendships and ties with other international students and to share about NUS and Singapore, all of which I have accomplished. It has been a very rewarding experience as I had the opportunity to experience a different learning environment - sitting in classrooms full of passionate students eager to learn and are actively participating in the class.

It is also humbling as nobody blinks twice if you are bilingual which is different from the reactions that I received from the people of other countries that I have visited.

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Perhaps my biggest takeaway is that it is possible to live with less with no diminishing returns on happiness. It has made me realise that I live in abundance and be very grateful for what I have.

## 7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

**Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.**

Cook your own meals to save cost! The difference is quite significant.

Also, be sure to know some French as some of my English courses ended up having French words in them (even on the test). It could be a translation error, or that the lecturers are not as fluent in English (after all, it's not their first language!).

As trains, buses and metros have timings, it is very easy to plan your trip out ahead of time so that you can maximise your time!

This is not really a suggestion, but a friendly warning. You need to throw your trash into specific bags in your flat. These bags cost 2 CHF for a piece and can hold 35 litres. It is expensive as you are paying tax through buying these bags. My friend who used a normal plastic bag was fined. The police actually dug through the trash and found material to trace the trash back to her!

You need to have insurance when you are in Switzerland. I think most, if not all, of Singapore's travel insurances are not good enough as substitutes for the Swiss insurance. So perhaps it's wiser just to purchase insurance from Switzerland.