

- **Preparation:**

*For the best preparation for your stay abroad I would recommend to check if you need a visa for your stay in France as soon as you receive the confirmation from Viadrina. For my case, as I am a non-European living in Germany with a long-term visa, I needed to apply for another visa for my stay in France (for the duration of stay more than 3 months). And since the process is quite time consuming and sometimes the consulate may ask for additional documents (like my case), preparing for it well in advance will make it easier for your arrival. If you have to apply for a visa, my advice is to have all the documents translated in French. Your application will be proceeded faster.*

*Regarding insurance, generally you are required to have it for your stay. If you already have a European insurance subscription, that should be okay. I had a German insurance covering European zone, so I did not have to apply again for the compulsory insurance (sécurité sociale). Usually your university in France will ask you about that. But even if you are already covered by German insurance like me, I would advise to ask your French university to give you a certificate for the "sécurité sociale" (in such case they will assume that your German insurance is equivalent to the mentioned compulsory one) and keep that certificate for yourself. That will be very helpful as in my experience, I was always asked to give that certificate whenever I do any paperwork here in France.*

*Another thing I learned as I have been in France and dealt with all the application process and paperwork is to be proactive to make sure that you have everything in time. Do not hesitate to write an e-mail or even better a call to the respected person and ask about the status of your application and gently push the process. Because that way, as far as I experience, works best in almost any situation in France.*

*At NEOMA BS specifically, they organized several events and also had the Buddy program. They also have several other events throughout the semester. But I would not say that such programs are as good and well organized as I expected. This may be due to the fact that the school is not a public university so they do not have such a strong network like Interstudis. Still, the events definitely helped me to know other international students and we later also had our own bonding activities.*

- **Accommodation:**

*I had the school apply for my housing in a university dorm. Usually you are required to buy a housing insurance before you receive your accommodation, whose cost varies. Before you buy one, I suggest to first contact the Student Service of your French school to see if they have some partnerships. For example in my case, NEOMA BS have a special agreement with their insurance partner at a very competitive price.*

*Generally the rental cost and the cost of living in France is higher than what I had to pay when I was in Germany. That, of course, depends on your choice and needs, but overall a typical room may cost between 300 to 500 euros. Luckily, if you are a student you can apply for the housing aid (eligible for all students even international students), which will be calculated from your second month onwards, so do take this advantage and ensure that you send the application before the end of your first month.*

*The host city for my first exchange semester was relatively small, so the location of my accomodation did not matter that much. But if it is not the case I would suggest to live in or near the city center. That would make it much easier for you to join the local events or activies and enhance your social life in France.*

- **Studying at the university abroad:**

*The very first thing that surprised me during my courses is the way they are structured and assessed. Unlike what I was used to at Viadrina, at NEOMA BS all of my courses were assigned to me instead of me choosing on my own, and the assessment is broken down into many different items, e.g. in-class contribution, homework, assignment (individual and also in group), presentation, and final exam. Although we may do them all at Viadrina, the course's grade may count on 2 or 3 items out of those at most. Sometimes I saw some students who did not even care to go to the final exams as they already did a lot on others and the final exam just counts for a small part. This structure can work well in some situations and I am sure there are reasons for its practice, but I personally would prefer to have more flexibility and adaptation.*

*During my semester, there was a French language course for international students, which I participated in. The course itself is very good: from the teacher to the content. But it would have been more effective if there are separated courses tailored to students' levels for the fact that we all had just one course. Sometimes those who have better French proficiency dominate most of the time, leaving little, if not no time at all, for entry-level learners. Another limitation is the course's time. We had just one class per week and it lasts around 1.5 hours for basic students like me, so in the end we did not have a lot of time for in-class interaction and activities.*

- **Day to day life and free time:**

*As mentioned earlier, I found the costs of living in France in general higher than in Germany. It may vary depending on your housing choice and spending needs, but around 670 euros per month would cover your basic spending on housing, charges and foods. Unlike in Germany, public transportation cost is totally separated, i.e. you have to buy*

*the tickets/subscription on your own, though you can get some discount as a student. It is always better to take use of the periodic subscription, e.g. monthly or 3-month package. If you are in Paris, it is either monthly or yearly; there is no 6-month option.*

*Off-campus life during my exchange semester includes traveling, exploring the city, and socializing with other students. If your destination is Reims I strongly recommend visiting the champagne caves there, as it is what the area in general and the city in particular is famous for.*

- **Conclusion:**

*During my semester at NEOMA BS, I had a chance to know a lot of friends, not only local friends but also other international students and see the cultural differences between Germany, France and also my own Vietnamese culture. Also, learning another language and adapting to the local life is a very enriching experience. I would say those make it the best experience of my exchange time. On the other side, the administrative processes are the downside of it. It may be due to the recent merging of the schools before NEOMA establishment.*