

## Exchange Semester Report

This report describes my academic, social and personal experiences throughout my exchange semester at EPFL – Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne.

I began the semester at February as the only Israeli, let alone Technion student on campus. I lived in a student building in the center of Lausanne and knew nobody there at all. Throughout the first couple of months I felt a bit lonely (being the only Israeli person to go alone to an exchange semester) and I found it really hard getting to know people on campus. Eventually, I got to know people, mostly from my residence yet barely any from campus. Although I made some friends on campus from group projects, my close friends were mostly from the residence.

I spent my free time on the weekend traveling Switzerland, skiing and hiking together with friends. Socially, it still felt like I wasn't really close to anybody from campus. At some point I accepted it and at the middle of my exchange semester I started to have a really good time with the friends from my residence, as we traveled more, went to music festivals and got to know each other really well. To this day I still keep contact with those friends via Whatsapp.

Academically speaking, I initially planned to take 3 courses but as I got more familiar with the registration system, I found 2 other interesting courses that were recognized by my faculty and ended up starting the semester with 29 credits. Looking at hindsight, I understand it was a mistake taking so much credits that early on, as the courses I chose were really complex. I ended up dropping one course in the middle of the semester to make more time for other courses and generally, make more time for myself to explore Lausanne and Switzerland. The four courses I ended up doing were really fascinating, and I didn't experience any trouble with studying in English. The professors were great, the assignments and projects were interesting, yet the only thing I found upsetting was the teaching method of the tutorials, where we had several T.A (teacher's assistants) sitting in the room and in case we had any trouble with the homework they would come and give some vague clue that ended up confusing me even more. Overall I would say it was a great experience studying there.

If there were a couple of insights I could pass on, I would say that it's ok to be lonely and confused during the start of the semester, especially if you are going on your own. It takes time to get to know the right people for you and to open up to people but once you do, get out of your comfort zone because the time with them is short and precious.

I would also like to say that although I didn't experience a lot of antisemitism or criticism on the war, when you do experience it, especially from close friends, you have to pay attention to the situation and see if it's something you are willing to put aside to keep your friendship with that person. Personally I found myself in a scenario after an exam where a friend started to argue with me on the metro about the ongoing war, as soon as I saw him get to an emotional level, I told him I prefer to put everything aside, as it's ok to disagree on the subject and my priority is to keep our friendship intact rather than ruin it over politics.

To sum it all up, I had a great time during my exchange semester. I'm glad for the places I've been to, the friends I've met and the things I experienced. If given the opportunity, I would happily do it all again.

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