

Exchange Report

Computer Engineering
La Salle, Ramon Llull University
Barcelona, Catalunya
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Introduction

I was supposed to go on Erasmus as part of my AP program, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I had to cancel the trip. After that, I was sure that during my Top-Up I would want to try, and apply again and I am so happy I did! I have always heard that Erasmus is a life-changing opportunity, but I didn't really understand it until it really did happen.

Why Spain?

I have always wanted to try living in a southern, warmer country, such as Spain. I knew it would be a very different cultural experience than what I am used to, and even though I do not feel like I would want to live my life here, it was really beneficial for my personal growth to expose myself to such a different environment. I believe if I chose a culturally more similar country to Denmark then the experience would not have been the same.

I would like to highlight that I am Hungarian and Denmark was already a foreign country for me to start my university education, however, Erasmus was a completely different experience than just studying in a different country.

About La Salle

La Salle is a private university at the foot of Tibidabo mountain. They offer architecture, design, business and engineering programs. The school's student clubs regularly organise events on campus (e.g. chestnut festival, Oktoberfest, Halloween party, Christmas party). The school has a dormitory, canteen and a gym with a swimming pool on campus (costs around €40/month).

The teachers and coordinators are really easy-going, nice and understanding. Most subjects are 3-5 credits, so you will have to pick 6-8 subjects if you want to complete 30 ECTS. This can be a little overwhelming at times. As a perfectionist myself, I would suggest you not aim for perfect grades at this school. The grading happens in percentage and it is almost impossible to get perfect grades. On the other hand I'd say in general it is very easy to get "good grades". Attendance is often part of the grade.

Experience at the host school

The overall academic experience at the school was good. The school has its own challenges and by the time you figure out how things work here, you have to leave.

Arrival

Upon arrival, we had to face the fact that things here are not as organised as in e.g. Denmark. They have their own ways of doing things, but you do not necessarily understand it as an outsider at first. We received a list of subjects that they proposed to us that we can take, however, that did not show when the classes are taking place, and classes are often overlapping. It took us over a month to get our courses figured out, which was quite stressful, but once that was done, everything went fine. Teachers and coordinators are also quite flexible. I managed to take a course that was not even proposed to me at first, that was very nice.

Way of teaching

The education is more practical than I expected, however, each teacher has their own way of doing things. This also applies to the use of “e-study” which is like moodle in Denmark. That can be confusing and frustrating as there are teachers not updating the e-study while other teachers completely rely on it, that is something that you will have to experience on your own. The school offers different types of classes, when a class is a “project” then usually it means that there will be minimal amount of lectures and that you will be working on different assignments during the semester on your own or in pairs. (Please keep in mind that these courses will require you to work a lot outside of classes.) Regarding any coding assignments, if your code doesn’t run properly you can end up failing or getting a 1 (lowest grade) very easily.

One thing to note about the way of teaching at this school is that in each year they usually have either morning (08:00-15:30) or afternoon/evening (15:30-21:30) classes. However, when you arrive as an international student you will get subjects offered from different years which means that you will end up with a mix of morning and afternoon classes. I had days when I was at school from 08:00-18:30.

In the following part of the report I will introduce all the subjects I took in detail, and mention some other ones that are worth mentioning, and my friends were taking.

Courses

User Experience I. - 6 ECTS

Teacher: Ernest and Antonio

This subject was not part of the original classes offered for incoming students, however as I have a great interest in UX, and I work in the field I managed to convince my supervisor to let me take the course. The class was mostly in English, however the course is part of a Spanish/Catalan degree so I was the only international.

Personally, I would say this subject was the highlight of my stay in the academic regards. This is mainly due to my great interest in the subject and the field. We had 4 hours of

lectures a week, taught by 2 different teachers. We had 1 lecture in the afternoon and 1 practice late at night (19:30-21:30) on another day.

During this class we were mostly focusing on theory and recognising Usability and User Experience errors. I believe if anyone is to work in this field this subject provides a very good foundation for your studies, however you will have to put extra effort in it. There were 4-5 recommended readings for the course. I only read 2 of them but they were very interesting and beneficial.

For this course you will have to work a lot at home, if you want to get a good grade. There is a short weekly reading for every "theory" class along with a practical assignment. During the "practice" class you will be working on a portfolio that will be handed in at the end of the semester.

Data Mining - 5 ECTS

Teacher: Carlos

I would recommend this subject to someone who is truly interested in data mining and took university level Maths courses prior to this subject. I would say it is a very interesting subject but it is also overwhelmingly complex and you will have to know a high level of maths to understand the algorithms. I soon realised that I do not really meet the entry requirements, but the professor was very kind and understanding and he supported me that I should not drop the course.

There are some practical assignments where you will have to implement some Machine Learning algorithms in Python. Honestly, after taking this course it still feels a bit like dark magic, but it was very interesting to see how these algorithms work.

There are also 2 theoretical exams (online multiple choice). At the end of the course you will have a presentation and a short oral exam as well.

International Business - 5 ECTS

Teacher: Hugo

This subject is a first semester business subject, where they teach the basics of international business. You will be working with different case studies during the semester. There are 3 assignments, of which 2 are individual and one is in a group of 4. In my point of view, you can hear some interesting facts about international companies and learn some strategies about how a company can expand to the international, global market. I would say it was a fun subject, the teacher is nice and relaxed, the assignments are not too hard and the lectures are not too theoretical, they are more like just encouraging you to think of possible solutions to given problems.

There is a written, paper based exam at the end, and you will also have to make some presentations during this course.

Distributed Architecture Projects - 4 ECTS

Teachers: Alvaro & Joan

This subject and Joan are very well known at the school, which explains why this was the most challenging subject of my exchange. I have to say that as much as students are scared

of the teacher, he is very nice and understanding, especially to Erasmus students. However, you will have to put a lot of hours and hard work into this subject outside of school, to make your projects work.

The class has 1 hour of lecture a week and then 2 or 3 hours of practice. You will have to work on 5 projects of distributed systems throughout the semester in python, Java, C and C++. Most assignments are to be created in a specific language. I would suggest this subject to people who are interested in backend.

There is no written exam or oral exam if you hand all your assignments in, in time.

Software Methodologies II - 4 ECTS

Teachers: Vicor and Javier

I believe this subject would be nothing new to most Top-up students coming from Denmark as the first part of the course is mostly focusing on different software development methodologies (e.g. Agile, Scrum, Kanban etc.). The classes are usually quite interactive and there is always some small practical in-class assignment. (Attendance is important in this class.)

The second part of the course is focusing on a more technical aspect, quality of code. You will mostly be learning about design patterns. I did not learn the design patterns before as it was an elective that I did not take, so it was nice to learn them eventually. There is 1 report and 1 practical assignment.

50% of the grade is given from the first part of the course and the other 50% is from the second part.

Business and Technology - 4 ECTS

Teacher: Lisa

This course is like an advanced English course. The original curriculum is on the level of B2 and C1, however as the vast majority of the class was speaking perry good english the teacher decided to raise the bar to C1 - C2 level. All assignments are related to technology and you will hear about a lot of interesting current events etc. Furthermore we learnt some business skills that can be applied at your work and in your professional life or when applying for jobs.

As we were all speaking good English we also learnt a little Spanish during the course and even went on an offsite trip to the mountains. 😊

I would like to take the chance to highlight that the teacher of this subject is amazing. She is really motivating, she always made my day, her energy is incredible and I always enjoyed her classes and the conversations with her. She is Scottish, native English speaker.

I would recommend this subject to people who do not currently have a job yet, or introverted people who want to challenge themselves as this course will require you to talk a lot in English, and gain your confidence.

The final grade is given based on your in-class assignments, presentations and a final written English test.

Career and Technology - 4 ECTS

Teacher: Larisa

This subject is quite similar to the previous one, however it is more focused on career and professional life. Here you will be imitating work-life scenarios, work on your CV and cover letter and give A LOT OF presentations. The subject is heavily focused on giving oral presentations, engaging your audience etc.

There will be regular vocabulary tests and graded presentations and a final oral presentation at the end of the course.

The teacher is very organised and helpful. I would recommend this course to people who do not have a job yet, I believe it can give you a great foundation on how you should approach your future employer.

(+) System Design and Administration - 6 ECTS

I did not attend this course, however I had classmates who did and I thought it would be worth mentioning it.

The subject focuses on low level programming, you will be creating your own operating system based on linux. There are few lectures in this course; it is mostly based on project work, however there are also weekly exams.

The subject requires a lot of extra hours outside of school (for the projects) and in my opinion is very hard, so I would only suggest it to students who are really interested in such things as many fail this subject.

(+) Computer Architectures - 5 ECTS

I was to take this subject however after attending the first class I realised it is not for me. It is quite technical and you will be learning about physical components of the computer (e.g. microchips.) There is a weekly technical reading of 20-40 pages, and class participation is very important. As far as I understood, this is more like a theoretical subject, but it is hard if you do not have prior technical knowledge.

(+) Spanish Language Course - 1-5 ECTS

Spanish Language courses are offered to Business students for 5 ECTS, but not to Engineering students. If you are in business I would recommend contacting the school as soon as you know that you will go there as this course gets full almost immediately. As there were a lot of internationals interested in engineering as well, they started a mini-course for us, but it was only 1 time a week for 1 ECTS.

Social and Cultural experience

As mentioned above there are tons of events happening at the school. I would recommend participating in all of the ones you can. Sometimes they would stop classes so that students can attend the events (some of these are free, or very cheap).

Food

You will find a lot of different cuisines in Barcelona and I recommend you eat out as you can get a lot of quality food for your money. Barcelona also has numerous restaurants with Micheline stars or recommendations. If you are a foodie it is definitely a city for you.

Museums

Barcelona is a home to many museums and most of them you can visit with a discount or for free. I would recommend you going to the National Museum of Catalunya, the Natural Science museum, MOCO and I will let you discover the rest. There are really many options for anyone who likes art and museums.

City life

In Catalunya there are a lot of holidays and events in the fall semester. I would recommend you googling them and adding them to your calendar so you can join these events. There are also a lot of street festivals with food and carnivals.

On the streets people speak Catalan which is not to be confused with Spanish. They prefer speaking Catalan over Spanish and they will rather speak English to you than Spanish. I personally do not speak any Spanish or Catalan but I managed to get along. Even people who do not speak any English are very nice and understanding and they will do everything to understand you. Google translate works quite well as well.

Tours and trips

I would also recommend joining the Erasmus Student Network, I unfortunately only discovered it at the end of my stay so it was not relevant anymore, but they organise a lot of trips and events.

You should also search for @erasmusbarcelona on instagram or download their mobile app (orange). They organise cheap trips for Erasmus students all around Spain. We went to Ibiza with them and it was amazing. I would also recommend joining whatsapp groups as that is one of the main apps they use there.

You can also find other erasmus trips, just google similar pages, there are a few others you can find.

Nightlife

First of all, watch your pockets. Almost all of my friends got their phone stolen on a night out in Barcelona or just when walking on La Rambla. There are tons of clubs in Barcelona and they are also huge compared to the ones in Denmark. Clubs are not only open on the weekends but every day of the week. There are also some daytime parties

I would recommend you to look up “Shaz List”, “Friends list” and “Ashii’s list” on Instagram or online. They organise Erasmus parties and provide free entrance for Erasmus students to different clubs every day.

Normally the entrance fee is around €15-20 with 1 drink included.

The security guards do not speak English and they are very unfriendly and occasionally quite aggressive so please be careful when going out, as you can end up in unfortunate situations.

LGBTQ+ Scene

Barcelona is a very inclusive city with a very active LGBTQ+ scene. You will find a lot of bars and clubs especially in Eixample. Based on my experience within the community more people speak English than in Catalunya in general, so it is a nice way to make new friends. People are very welcoming, helpful and nice.

Healthcare

During my stay I got food poisoning and I had to be taken to the hospital. I spent one day there on IV. I did not have any extra insurance but I got complete healthcare with my EU blue card. Other than that I was not sick at all during my stay which I think is thanks to the nice weather and the lack of wind.

Tips & Tricks

During my stay, I tried to collect some practical tips about stuff that took some time for me and my fellow students to figure out. This section is more for students who already know that they are going to study at La Salle.

Fun Facts

1. They sell beer on campus in the cafeteria, which is also available with the lunch menu.
2. ***Officially*** you are not allowed to drink anything but water in class. (no sodas either)
3. The school is closed on the weekends, they will not let you in.
4. Buses are not reliable in the city, they are often late/don't show up/ don't stop. I would recommend using the metro.

About the school canteen

The canteen has its own weird way of operating, which took us a long time to figure out. First of all, lunch starts late at 13:00. Before that you only have the café open. For lunch, you can either choose to have a small or a big menu. It is not possible to buy separate plates of dishes, only as menus.

A small menu ~€5.7:

drink + 1 dish of your choice (Salad or “First dish” or “Second dish”) + dessert.

A big menu ~€8.7:

drink + 2 dishes of your choice (Salad or "First dish" or "Second dish") + dessert.

If you choose to have a big menu then you can also have 2 of the same dish if you'd like. If you ask for a big salad that counts as a big menu item and you cannot choose a second plate. In my opinion the portions are not big, but I also eat a lot so... 😊

Housing

I think it is not hard to find an apartment in Barcelona, but be aware because there are a lot of scammers. I overpaid for my apartment, which is sad, but it was in a very nice location and was close to school. In general I would recommend the company, just maybe choose a different room (Cotown). But there are many housing organisations for students in Barcelona you can find.

The general price for a room is around €450-600. If you want a private bathroom or a studio that will be around €1000 / month.

Budget

I did not have a strict budget for my exchange, and I ended up spending a lot of money. I honestly don't even want to sum it up. So if you want to keep track of your expenses you should really have a budget plan because there are so many places to spend your money...

In general I would say that eating out is cheap. 3 courses cost around 18-€20. Buying groceries is significantly cheaper than in Denmark and cooking is definitely the cheapest option. During my stay they had a discount on transportation so it was €40 for 3 months for students. All gyms cost around €40 a month. Cocktails range from €5-15 depending on the place.

Conclusion

To conclude, my stay in Barcelona was amazing and life-changing. I got a lot of international friends from all over the globe and I managed to visit a lot of beautiful places. Furthermore I managed to take a course that will really help me in my professional career and I could not have taken at my home school. I feel like I also learnt a lot by being placed in a different environment and culture, I also learnt how to live together with more (8) people. I can only recommend you to leave your comfort zone and go to Barcelona or anywhere else on Erasmus. 😊

If you have any questions please feel free to text me on instagram @dominikhasko and I will try to help you.

Photos



(Garden of University of Barcelona)



(Güell Park Barcelona)



(Barcelona Beach)



(Atempo Restaurant Barcelona)



(Spanish Jamon in a local Supermarket)