I studied in France, in the northwest part of the country in the city of Nantes, in the Pays de Loire-region. From having an AP graduate in multimedia design, to continue studying Digital concept-development at KEA, I went to the school **L'ecole design** to study **Digital media design**. As the description of the program says;

"The Digital Media Design program is specifically tailored for students with an academic background in graphic design, interaction design or multimedia design"

The program

I initially found the program suitable for me. Of all the different schools I could choose from, around the globe I was more attracted to L'ecole design from the beginning. Browsing around the programs on the different schools and countries, my impression was that this school was more design-oriented than academic and analyzing. I needed a break from the academic aspect of writing theses, analyzing companies, researching and defining target-groups.
As I discovered that L'ecole design offered After Effect classes, 3D-drawing, photography and french language, I felt that this is what I needed.
So, I will briefly explain which classes I had, what they taught us, and the outcome of it.

The **graphic design** classes I had was:

1) After effects
This class was a 4-hour class, consisting of only After Effects. The school is well-equipped with computer-rooms and enough computers for everybody. For the first half of semester, we had only one project. The teacher gave us ten different songs to choose from, and from there our job was to create our own universe with a music-video. The teacher taught us many different tutorials, tips and tricks on how to work with the program. During the tutorials, we had to create our universe, starting from brainstorming, moodboards and storyboard.
I was very excited to have to opportunity to go in depth with after effects and get to know the program. The teacher was very skilled and had a 20 years of experience. It was up to us as individuals to decide what we wanted to create and how much energy we wanted to put in this project, since it was not the typical "youtube-tutorial" way he was teaching us (Copy what I do and that's it). So it required us to be very independent at personalize our content. During the lessons, the teacher did not really understand the amount of time that it took to create all the graphic design, and would often spend the whole class explaining tutorials, which made it confusing it we we're supposed to be working on the video, or follow his tutorials.

2) Keyshot
Keyshot is a 3D-program that are commonly used by product designers. It can be very advanced, but our class was for beginners, so we didn't get very far. We were taught how to create shapes, and give them patterns and make them look rustic and authentic. This program go hand in hand with 3DS MAX, and would be appropriate to combine those to subjects. In general I was curious to get to know the program and be able to create shapes

and objects that were very real-life look alike, but it's not very useful for graphic design. It's more optimal for creating products.

3) Photography
With a passionate teacher, we were taught all the basic skills of photography. It is useful for beginners such a more advanced users, since we go through the standards as aperture, shutterspeed, ISO etc. At every class the teacher gave us different tasks, from playing with shutter speed, to create a specific vibe, or shooting in a unconventional way with mirrors. The school has cameras, green rooms, and camera-lamps, so it's also very useful for any hobby-project.

4) Unreal engine
After the first half of the semester, we ended after effects and started Unreal Engine. It's also a 3D program, when creating PC-games. It has the process of java-script in it, when programming the navigation and effects of pushing differents buttons. It was interesting to have to opportunity to try making your own PC-game at beginners level, but again, not very relevant for my industry.

5) Digital drawing
A pretty useless class. We were supposed to be taught how to draw on wacom-boards and draw 3D in photoshop, and other cool stuff but the teacher was not able to pass on his knowledge. He somehow thought it was better to give single individual lessons instead of in plenum, so he would go to every single student, giving the same lesson to everyone, showing one little effect, and then continue to the next one. That meant that we had to wait for 20-30 minutes after every short tutorial he would give, while having no idea of what we were doing, or what the goal was.

In general, I found the graphic design classes very interesting, and the teachers are skilled at working with the program. The communication was on the other hand a bit sloppy. Sometimes it seems like the teachers are here to fulfill the agenda, and go through a check-list but they don't have very high expectations to the students.

For the more **academic classes**

1) Anthropology

As I am very interested in anthropology, I was very excited for the course. Our project was about "feelings", where we in groups had to pick a feeling and work on that throughout the semester. By doing research and observing other people we in the end had to present the feeling, but not in a very deep level. Since I have been interested in anthropology and involved myself with this subject for a long time, I didn't learn a lot of new stuff. Our teacher was a sociologist, so she had a lot of knowledge, but was not very good at communicating. There were a few instances of her arguing with the teachers if they asked critical questions to her theories. It seemed like she was not able to receive critique, and got frustrated instead of enlightening us students.

2) French language and culture

This was one of my favourite subjects - learning a new language.
All the internationals got split into three groups of beginner, intermediate and advanced, and I was at the beginners level. The speed is for everyone to follow, and the classes are very continuous. Our teacher is very good at communicating, and makes sure that everyone understands, and creates a good atmosphere. I would definitely recommend her to anyone who is interested in learning french, and she motivated me a lot to practice and speak the language. Besides that she is a very warm and smiling person, who makes it comfortable to be in class.

3) Project long design

This was a semester-long project that was very similar to the client-cases we have at my school in Copenhagen, in digital concept-development. We were supposed to have a client, who would introduce a problem, and then in pairs go through a 3-step phase to come up with a digital solution for the problem. On the first day, our 3 teachers told us that they weren't been able find a client, so they had come up with one. The client was a french statistics database, of different information on the city of Nantes. It was a big disappointment for the whole class, that the the client was a french website. Every international student got paired with a french student, and from there we had to follow a very specific process, that was very foreign for all the internationals. So, working on a french website (with no opportunity to translate), it made us internationals quite helpless, and the french people had to do double the work.
The whole class felt lost, and couldn't see the point in working with a non-existing client on a french based website, with the task "find a problem in Nantes and create a solution".
Let's just say that I would **NOT** recommend this class, as is creates nothing but frustrations. The teachers were very unfriendly, and got very offended when the whole class explained that the project was not working well. In general I have had no motivation for this project, and felt very uncomfortable in the class, with those teachers. I didn't get any real outcome from the class.

General experience with the school

First of all, the school has really good equipment, and new technology. There is Macbook-rooms, wacom-computer-rooms, photography-studio, green-room etc. So the school is a good facilitator, but I often experienced the teachers failing at passing on their knowledge and skills. Some of them had a loss of energy and motivation, and gave the impression that they were there because of their salary. So it was not really the teachers that taught me new stuff, but the other students, the equipment and the opportunities. I realised that I had to decide what I wanted to get out of it, and lower my expectations to what the teachers could give me. And also, all the Adobe programs are en french, so say goodbye to knowing why you do it, and hello to knowing how you do it.
Another thing to keep in mind, is the french school system. Be prepared for a very old-school almost primary school system. It came as a shock to me, that the most important value in this school is the grades. I often felt that I was doing hard work for the teachers sake and not

my own. The teachers and students are only concerned about getting a good grade, and there's a big gap between teacher and student. It means that the teachers act as authorities, and expect you to do exactly as told, or they will be very disappointed and threaten with bad marks. It has caused a lot of frustrations, and a feeling of being back in primary school (also taking notes on absence for every class). A big contrast to what I'm used to at KEA.

So be prepared for the fact that they have some very certain expectations to your way of working, and they take little regard for you being international and new to the methodology. Besides that, there is a language barrier, because the teachers are not fluent in english and sometimes don't understand what you are saying, or have a hard time explaining what they really want to say.

I really recommend french language, and all the graphic design classes, where you can get what you want, out of it, and develop your own graphic skills.

Being received in L'ecole

The welcoming of all us internationals was very nice, and all the teachers introduced themselves, told us about what events was going on in the city, and gave us tips on how to get by with public transport, bank accounts, nightlife etc. We started in school a week before all the french students, so we had time to explore the school and were not overwhelmed by everything from day 1. It was my experience that they had put an effort in welcoming us and acknowledging that we were coming from another country. Every student were supposed to have a mentor, who would help stuff, but I never got one, and I don't know why.

Cultural and personal experience

Leaving your comfort-zone and traveling to a foreign country was of course very overwhelming and exciting. I felt very curious the first couple of weeks. I chose to stay at a big student housing, with about 200 other students living there. The location of Chanzy (the housing) was located very close to the city center, so I always had to freedom of walking to almost every location or event. There is a small island in the middle of the city, where there is many nightclubs, restaurants and events going on (very similar to Refshaleøen), which had a walking distance of 20 minutes. In general, Nantes is really good place to be as a student. There is so much culture for young people, whether its festivals, events og parties. The first two weeks after I arrived, there was a famous hip-hop festival starting, called "Hip-obsession", where I made some friends that became my closest friends throughout the whole semester. At these festivals there is always a really open and welcoming vibe.

In terms of food, you have something to look forward to! Never have I ever felt my mouth watering by the thought of eating a Pain au chocolat, or just buying groceries. Everything is so fresh and crunchy. The quality is a 10/10, and the boulangeries (bakers) will take you to heaven. Buy a baguette and walk while you snack the baguette, and you will turn into a frenchman, in a second. Also, go to the market Talensac. It's a foodmarket, where you can buy everything from food heaven. Fresh fish, vegetables, fruits, cheese, chocolate and so on, and it's cheap and delicious!!

Language

Before I left, a lot of people said "prepare yourself, that many french people always have to say before they start speaking english, that their english is not so good". And it turned out to be true. I see it as insecurity, that they are ashamed of not being very good at speaking english but in fact when they start speaking they underestimate themselves a lot. It's not that the french people don't speak english. It's that they don't like to speak english. So as a foreign exchange student, I think the only way to deal with this is to be a bit bold and just speak to them, without questioning if they speak english or not. It's more about getting them out of their shelves and "warm them up", which can be challenging to be that confident. Other than that, the people are very friendly, and warm. They appreciate when you try and speak french, and that will definitely make the communication more smooth between you and the person.

Accomodation
Before even searching for accomodation, I got offered a room in the student house "Chanzy", which I said yes to. The rent was only 250 euros, and I had my own bathroom.
The kitchen is shared, but it gets cleaned EVERY day, by a grumpy cleaning lady.
The rooms are fine to live in for one semester, it's not the biggest room but it's light and new. Mind that the bathroom looks like the bathroom on a ship cruise, but it's in a cute way. You can buy a blanket and pillow for 25 euros. There is no utensils, soap, pans, pots or whatsoever, so you have to get that yourself. I did not know this before, so let's just say that there was a small crisis when I went to the toilet the first time.
I would recommend getting the room if they offer it, its cheap, in a really good location and two minutes away from a baker and Intermarche (the local supermarket)

Expenses (where and what to buy)
In general, the price is a bit common to danish prices. It's about 30% cheaper, but the quality is way more better. Going to my favourite restaurant Thäigan, I would buy a delicious Phad Thai meal for 10 euros. Shopping, is very similar to danish prices, but again, better quality. Go to the fruit and vegetable section and knock yourself out. And then also remember to try the cheeses and saucisson (dried sausages) that are cheap and amazing! Second hand shopping is cheaper in Frip N' Shop, a really good secondhand store. Going out for drinks, can be all right. A glass of wine is always pretty cheap, around 2.5 euros, and beers can be a bit cheaper than the danish, but not that big of a difference. Luckily, there's Ubers, so going home at night is easy. I was also told not to go home alone at night, even though the city is vibrant and alive at day, it becomes a bit sketchy at night, and people say that you shouldn't be around commerce (city center by the trams) at night.

So, in general I had a good experience, and would always recommend going on exchange, to challenge yourself and get to know yourself a bit better. I had my challenges, and would probably rethink France again, if I knew what kind of "old school"-school system they have. But on the other hand, Nantes is such a cultural and lively city, that is perfect for young students to go to. Some of the best friends I made was outside of the school, so you will not feel alone, if you seek out people and social events. In the end, it's only four months, so enjoy everything you can, and when it gets tough, just remember that it's only temporarily.