

ERASMUS Exchange Report  
University of Westminster, London

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## **ERASMUS Exchange Report: University of Westminster, London: 5th Semester**

The current report presents the reason for choosing the University of Westminster in London, the courses offered, structure of the subjects and some general advice.

### **Why University of Westminster?**

I decided to go for the 5th semester abroad, because I heard one of the partnership schools with KEA was University of Westminster in London. Since I started my studies in KEA I had planned to do my 6th semester internship in London. I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to study there for one semester to build some industry related contacts and information.

### **General information about London**

Location:

University of Westminster is located in central London (zone 1), close to Baker Street station and opposite of Madame Tussauds.

Accommodation:

I started looking for accommodation in the beginning of August. As I had already moved to England in the beginning of the summer it was easier to go for viewings and get familiar with the areas. I have to say that if you choose not to apply for the student accommodation, it is very expensive and can be problematic to get anything good. Without viewings, there is minimal chance of getting a place, therefore I would suggest arriving earlier and start looking for a place before school starts.

I applied through the agencies for months before I managed to find a good place to live. As the centre of London is extremely expensive, I would suggest zone 2 or 3. I found an en-suite room in the east of London for 1000 pounds a month with all the bills included in a zone 3. Most of the rooms are around the same price, to get anything lower than 700 pounds, you would have to know someone or be very lucky. Also the deposits in London are quite high, I had to pay 6 weeks rent as deposit. Majority of places were around the same amount, therefore I would suggest that you come prepared with at least 3 months rent saved plus living costs.

Transportation:

London is very expensive when it comes to transportation. I chose to use Oyster card as it ended up being the cheapest option for me. I ordered the student Oyster card, that gives you weekly and monthly discounts. I always used the monthly top-up, it was the cheapest in the end and you can travel as much as you want monthly.

Once you know which zone you live in, you can see how much it will cost you and which option is the best for you.

If you choose to top it up daily, there would be no discounts. To get the student Oyster card, you have to have the University of Westminster student card in your hand, therefore I would do it on your first week when you have already been enrolled officially to the University. There is a good website where you can read about how to apply and how much it will cost.

<https://tfl.gov.uk/fares-and-payments/adult-discounts-and-concessions/18-student>

Life in general:

London is the most multicultural place to live, you can find absolutely anything here. There are so many different events, places to go, shops, restaurants etc. If you choose to go for the introduction week, they will also organise some events and gatherings to help you settle in. This is the best way to meet new people and make new friends before the semester starts. I have lived in London before and I have many friends here, therefore for me the city is already familiar.

## **My semester in University of Westminster**

General information:

When I applied for the exchange, I asked about the overall structure of the courses and if there would be any group work involved. I was told that all the courses would be based on individual work and there would be no group work. I read a report of a KEA student who went to University of Westminster for the 3rd semester and in his report he stated the same thing, that all his projects were individual work only. Unfortunately that was not the same case for me. Most of the projects were group based, which was a huge disappointment for me. As it turns out, every semester in Westminster University is different and so I would suggest to read the course information thoroughly before applying to ensure you are fully aware.

Courses:

When I applied for the course, unfortunately I could not choose which subject I would like to take, they have been chosen for me.

CT3 - Construction Technology 3

SPS - Site Production Studies

DS - Building Design Studio B

## CT3

General information and coursework:

15 ECTS points

Once a week 3 hour lecture

3 main lecturers and 1 guest lecturer for installations

Coursework of CT3 included group work and individual rational. We were given a project to work as a group. It was a project of a visitor centre for a North West Country Park, and we were told to construct the building according to UK building regulations, with a 20% increase in target emission rate. We were given the plans of the proposed concept and told we were not allowed to make any changes with regards to original plans or orientation of the building and with placement on the plot. The idea was to come up with the structural solutions and installations in the building. The proposal had to include the chosen method of construction.

Even though we had to come up with the solutions as a group, we were told that we should work on the side with individual proposal. The idea being that all the solutions presented as a group came from different students, therefore as for the individual rational showing your own ideas not presented in the group proposal. Even though throughout the semester the main focus was on the group report, the individual rational had more weight for the final grade, and could not be done without participating in all the lectures and group meetings.

Every Monday we had a class from 10AM-1PM. Every week, depending of the plan, there was a lecture in the morning from 10AM-12PM with 1 out of 3 lecturers and from 12PM-1PM we could have consultancy with the lecturer. The rest of the week we were asked to have extra meetings as a group. If we had any questions we were told not to email the lecturers but post it as a query on the university site called blackboard, where every subject had a discussion board. This was so that all the groups could see the questions already asked along with the answers, avoiding groups asking the same questions all the time.

I enjoyed all the lectures, I found them very interesting and helpful throughout the semester. I learnt some interesting construction methods and solutions for the future. After all the lectures I had a very nice conversation with the lecturers, where I had a chance to present my ideas and ask for guidance with regards to the semester's project.

Project team:

The team consisted of 6 people, which 3 (including me) were from Architectural Technology and 3 from Building Survey. Lecturers put together the teams and we were not allowed to change them during the semester.

Project had to be delivered as a group work, where everyone can propose their ideas and learn from each other.

Examination:

1. Group work 40% of overall grade

For the group work we had to hand in a report of our semester project and put together 4 x A3 posters and present them in front of the lecturers and peer students.

Deadline 15th of December 2016

2. Individual rationale 60% of overall grade

Write a critical report about group work. Rational decisions made as a group and propose a better solution of your individual proposal to drive the building near zero-energy. That report was strictly 1500 words and had to be handed in online as pdf form.

Deadline 9th of January 2016

Overall:

CT3 was an interesting class and I hope in the future they will organise the group work in a better manner. I would recommend the class and if you attend and want to learn, it is a good place to learn about the building structure and methods of how everything works in England. Also to find out about different materials and installation solutions.

## **SPS**

General Information and Course Work:

15 ECTS points

Once a week 3 hour lecture.

2 lecturers

Project team:

Team consist of 5 people. Lecturers created 5 groups online and we were allowed to choose ourselves which group we would like to be in. All the exchange students chose the same group and we had 2 domestic students as well.

During the semester, the group had very little to do, we divided the work weekly and uploaded it to the group conversations for everyone to see.

A week before the hand in we sat down and put the presentation together and rehearsed.

We got to go on 2 different site visits, related to our semester project. All the equipment needed was rentable through university.

Examination:

1. Group Work 10% of overall grade
2. Individual rationale 90% of overall grade

Overall:

Overall the group worked together well and the domestic students were extremely helpful to the exchange students. Whenever we had a question or did not understand something, they helped explained what we were expected to do. I enjoyed working with that group and our presentation went well.

## **DS**

General Information and Course Work:

60 ECTS points

Once a week

3 lecturers

Design Studio B was the only class we had that was individual project based. Our assignment was to build a new gallery building for White Cube in Marylebone. The location of the project was located 5 min from University and the plot was currently empty, being used as a parking lot.

First week we had a site visit and we had to take pictures of the surrounding area, count all the bricks of the building to produce elevation drawings and make a traffic analysis of cars, pedestrians and etc.

We were asked as a class to produce the elevation drawings of the site in AutoCad and build a site model in 1:100 scale. No one was allowed to use any other site drawings for elevations or build their own model of the existing buildings. That was the only assignment we had as a group. The rest was individual. Everyone got a building or two to draw and later on we had to put all the files together and share it with the rest of the class.

From the second week onwards the course was once a week on Thursdays, structured with a revit class in the morning and seminar in the afternoon. Revit classes in the morning were conducted by a BIM coordinator from Foster + Partners. As revit has been slowly introduced to all the students and all the classes were in the beginners stage, KEA students were told it will not be mandatory for us to participate if we do not want to.

For us it was only mandatory to come in for the afternoon seminars. However, there had been a mistake in scheduling and we were also booked for the Site Production for that time. We were given a chance to see one of the lecturers every Thursday from 12-1PM.

It was slightly inconvenient because there was three of us and we were only given an hour each week instead of 3 hours the others had.

Lecturers were very professional and helpful. Every week I got to meet with one of them and show my progress and ideas. Feedback was often different from each lecturer and sometimes contradictory, but I believe even criticism can be constructive because it helps you to see the problems and prepare for the presentations. As I was there for the first semester and the project ran throughout the year, I only got to be part of the concept design process and a bit of design development. The domestic students had to carry on with the project next semester where they have to do all the technical design as well.

I enjoyed this module the most, it was very creative project and we got to design the whole building from the scratch.

Classroom:

We had our own studio space, where we could go and use every day. They provided the space with a few computers that had all the programs needed and each student had a drawer space. It was an open plan studio, where you could see the other students from other semesters and courses.



Personally I decided not to stay there after classes, as the rooms were quite cold and a bit uncomfortable. The tables we had were not stable and sometimes other students used our studio and there was limited space and chairs. I did stay there few times with fellow students, but I preferred the library.

During our presentations, we had to pin up all of our work in the studio and gather around whilst presenting. The lecturers and external visitors were seated in front of the boards and the rest of the students were standing behind. Therefore everyone got to see each presentation. During the presentations, due to the open plan interior, it was somewhat difficult to hear. Getting feedback was the same.



Examination:

Group elevations and group model

2 interim evaluations - pin up all the work you had done with sketches and precedents. Each evaluation had external visitors from different firms to assess and give their feedback with the lecturers.

Hand in - sketchbook, sketch model, A3 portfolio of work process, A2 portfolio of final design, 1:100 final model and USB with A2 portfolio slides.

Printing:

Printing in London is extremely expensive. Even with student discounts it is ridiculous. I spent hundreds of pounds on printing during my exchange semester.

Best place to print is in the university. You have to top up your printing account online and you get to use that credit on every printer in the premises .

They have A4-A0 printers and 3D printers.

Colour printing

A4 - 30 pence a page (3 dkk roughly)

A3 - 70 pence a page (7 dkk roughly)

A2 - 1.20 pounds a page (12 dkk roughly)

A3 and A4 can be printed from any printer in the library

A2 can only be printed in the FAB LAB, which is open only few hours a day and the files have to be put on a memory stick. Before submission there is a very large queue, and it takes hours to



get anything done. I waited in a queue for my final portfolio, which was only 13 slides, for over 4 hours. I would suggest to print a few days before your final deadline because once the clock falls, even a minute later, you will not be able to hand in your work and it will be marked down accordingly..

Apart of printing, some projects have to be binded which will cost extra money and is done in a different room.

Some projects have to be submitted inside the portfolio, as I was on budget at the end of the semester, I bought the cheapest cover for A2, which cost me 10 pounds. Depending of the size and how much money someone has to spend, the prices can go up to 70 pounds for a portfolio, therefore I would suggest to go and see first what types there are and which one would be the best.

Printing outside of university - I went to a few different places to compare prices and close to the university A2 would have cost me a 10 pounds a page. A3 was around the same price, 7-8 pounds a page.

If you are on budget I would suggest finishing the semester work prior to the deadline and go to print out a few days before the submission date to avoid the queues and ensure that you meet your deadline on time.

Overall:

Out of all the three modules we were given, I enjoyed the Design Studio B the most. I believe that was the project were I got to show and develop my skills the most. I really liked the lecturers and had very interesting conversations with them about the industry, presentations, ideas, future opportunities and how to improve my general skills as an architectural technologist.

I believe the idea to use the external evaluators from industry related firms, is a very good idea and opportunity for students to learn how to present in the future. KEA should definitely consider implementing it to their evaluation process from the first semester onwards. It really helped me to understand how to present.

### **In summary:**

I enjoyed my semester in London. I believe studying abroad helped me to prepare for my 7th semester. I enjoy living in London and I am looking forward to see what else the city has to offer for me.