

ERASMUS+ Exchange Report

Home university: **Brandenburg Technical University Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU)**

Program: **BSc. in Environmental and Resource Management**

Host university: **University of Eastern Finland (UEF), School of Forestry, Joensuu campus**

Program: **Non-degree Programme in Environmental Science and Forestry**

Duration: **2 semesters** (Sep 2017 - June 2018)

My study program includes a mandatory semester abroad that takes place during the fifth semester. It has the intent to take advantage of the course catalog of other institutions as well as adding an international experience to the students' curriculum, as it is a highly valuable asset nowadays. Even more so in our field of studies, which can regularly demand interdisciplinary and international cooperation. In this sense, I cannot underline enough, the value of experiencing intercultural differences first hand in both, academic and social environments. However, I should focus on the main aspects of this report for future applicants: In the following I will expand on my experience with preparing for the exchange, my arrival in Finland, studying at the university and social life.

Preparation Phase

The application procedure is managed by the BTU International Relations Office and therefore the requirements are known well in advance and it is easy to get advice in case it is needed. Once my application went through, the UEF replied promptly. **If you are not European, you will need a study visa for any stay longer than 3 months, and it costs 300EUR (at the time of my application).** You may start your visa process once you have the admission acceptance letter from UEF.

At UEF, you can apply for the Kuopio campus (Environmental Sciences mostly, supposed to be a bigger more lively city, haven't been there though) or the Joensuu campus (Forestry, my choice). So from now on I am writing about one of the possible exchanges at UEF.

In order to complete the "Before the mobility agreement", the [School of Forestry](#) offers a super detailed course catalog for exchange students. One is also allowed to take courses outside of said catalog, if the professor in charge of the course allows (as they do in my experience!). **Notice that these courses are Masters level courses, as the bachelor level ones are taught in Finnish language only!** This can be considered an advantage or downside, depending on you. In my case, as my program has a broad view in many fields, I found it beneficial to be able to focus in one field, in depth.

UEF assigns a student to each new international student. I contacted her before leaving to Finland and she gave me good advice regarding accommodation and transportation. The tutors are allowed to pick up the keys of the exchange students which is specially useful if you are arriving at night.

Arrival to Joensuu and Accommodation

The Autumn Semester starts in September (and ends in mid December) so the temperatures are between 5-15 °C on arrival but will decrease fast. Pack for a cold (and dark) winter and get ready to cycle: The bus service is not the best (low frequency outside the center and no service after midnight). Buying (or renting) a second hand bike is easy, but be careful: Winter weather takes a toll on bikes. My tutor fetched me at the airport and helped me with registration at UEF, paperwork at the housing company, bus card, etc.

Student accommodation is managed by a housing company and prices are quite good compared to the private market, starting at 180 EUR for shared flats (3 well-sized bedrooms and kitchen, separate shower and toilette), and getting more expensive for flats closer to the center or bigger units. I would suggest staying as close to the center as possible, as going back home in cold nights can be off putting (but doable).

You shall apply for housing as soon as you get your confirmation from UEF. However, in the autumn semester there are a lot of new students both for exchanges and to start their Master studies so they might take some time to answer. I suggest to write an email and call. Also keep in mind, one can not change flats if you are staying for less than a year (unless a flatmate issue or else).

Studying at UEF

The School of Forestry is a full-fledged department with lots of research, great facilities, and specialized courses going on. Education is personalized and professors encourage students to visit them at any time without appointment by knocking on their door. Professors and students address each other by their first name. Courses usually last between one and two months, with the final exam taking place immediately after the course. I really enjoyed this system as it kept me "hooked" to different topics, and allowed me to take several courses on the same subject.

The main library is beautiful and well equipped. It is open until 6pm and later access is possible with a badge (40EUR deposit). With this badge, you can stay as long as you like. Yes, you may spend the night in the library.

Student and Everyday Life

The mensa (student restaurant) is very cheap and has vegan, vegetarian, gluten-free, you-name-it options. Salad and bread bar are included with every meal. It opens until 6pm so get used to the Finnish way: Lunch at 11hs, dinner at 17hs.

Finally, there is an amazing sports arena blocks away from the campus called, well, Arena. The university offers several sports there. It also has a great climbing wall (25m high).

Joensuu is located in North Karelia, a region full of forests and lakes. Hiking trails with public huts and saunas are common, and well maintained. Also, there are many national parks all around, including for example, Patvinsuo (great to see the Ruska). Hitchhiking is easy and safe. Most people speak English.