

MBA Exchange Report: ESADE Fall 2019

ESADE Business School



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Introduction

Anna: Going on an exchange has always been my plan when I started at UBC, since it is an unparalleled opportunity to get a taste of life as a local in another country and really immerse oneself in its culture and history. I have previously worked and studied in the UK, Poland, Sweden, Australia, and, naturally, Canada and was keen to get a chance to live and explore a Spanish-speaking country while being a part of a highly international and impressive community. I had been a fan of the city already and was excited about being able to actually experience it properly. Furthermore, I heard extremely positive opinions from my friends around the world about their time at ESADE and the many ways in which the school allowed them to develop personally and professionally. I have witnessed firsthand how tight their global community is and how many rewarding friendships they made in Barcelona. Together with the excellent reviews the school is continuously garnering, it made opting for ESADE an easy choice.

Monika: I had always wanted to do an exchange as part of my school program. I completed a Masters degree prior to the MBA program, got accepted into an exchange in Europe, and at the time decided not to pursue the opportunity which I regretted, so I saw this as my chance and took it. I am so glad I did. Barcelona is a very fun city to both adventure and study in, not to mention how incredible it is to have all of Europe at your doorstep to explore. In terms of my background, I completed my BA and MSc studies in Ontario, Canada before pursuing additional education at UBC (I'm originally from Toronto). An urban planner by trade and with a real estate license, I followed some paths through networking and fell into commercial brokerage and real estate development for four years in Toronto prior to the MBA which I thoroughly enjoyed. Most of my professional and personal life remains in Canada, therefore, residing in Barcelona for three months offered me a different way of life, a brand new culture to witness, ample travel (one of my hobbies), a new language, interesting food and drink, great weather and avoidance of winter for the most part, and most of all, stepping out of my comfort zone to take on an adventure I could call my own. I will also add that I joined in on the MBA sailing regatta in Porto Cervo, Italy in September prior to the start of the ESADE semester and it was one of the best experiences of my entire life. It may seem like a big commitment, but I promise you that going on exchange will provide you with unforgettable memories, travel, learnings, friendships, and laughter that you will cherish always. I highly recommend undertaking a semester abroad at ESADE!

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Orientation

We both arrived in Barcelona at different times and were not greeted by anyone at the airport, though this was really not needed. One of us visited home for the month of September and the other joined the Sauder team as part of the MBA Sailing Regatta in Italy near the end of September, heading straight to Barcelona afterward. ESADE will send out an email in September regarding the ESADE App for updates, the Ecampus platform, and welcome session information. There was a welcome session for the exchange students on the first day of classes in the morning which included presentations from ESADE representatives and the student organizer as well as a campus tour. There was no buddy system but it's fairly easy to integrate yourself with the exchange group once starting classes, and it helped that there were two of us together living together to orient ourselves both at school and within the city.

Courses and Registration

We found out about our host school for exchange in February from Sauder and received our first email communication from ESADE in April which covered required documentation, exact exchange semester dates, course information, language course information, visa information, and some tips on living in Barcelona. We received our ESADE admission packages in May for pickup at RHL. The package included the official acceptance letter, ESADE's accreditation title (required for visa application), proof of accommodation letter (required for visa application and sometimes rental contracts), and information regarding program dates.

The official workload at ESADE is 4 electives. The school has a bidding system for registration that only allows you to register for 4 courses, but an exception can be granted by email if a student chose to take more. For Sauder's full-time MBA requirements, 5 courses are required for the final semester. However, one of us chose to do GNAM at Bocconi in Italy in October (worth 1 credit) and the other decided to make up for their 1 credit by taking an elective in Vancouver over the summer before departing for Europe. You will receive an email in May containing your online platform credentials in order to sign in to manage your ESADE profile and register for courses. You should receive the bidding system email by end of May and will have about 5 days to bid for your preferred elective courses. The bids are processed for the entire class after the application deadline based on rankings and points attributed by you in the

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system rather than a first-come first-serve basis. Each elective equates to 100 points and you need 400 points in total to meet ESADE's course requirements (i.e. 4 courses). The process is fairly self-explanatory and both of us received our preferred course choices with no issues.

In general, I found ESADE to be of less academic rigour than Sauder and courses to be generally easier. There was definitely more leniency towards attendance and deadlines than UBC. Overall, the workload on exchange is significantly lighter than the first year of the MBA program and there is plenty of time to explore the city and travel around Europe if that is of interest. Of note, grades at ESADE for Canadian exchange students are marked on a pass or fail basis and your transcript will reflect this.

Teaching Style

The teaching style depends considerably on the class and the professor. However, overall the classes are much more interactive and based on a discussion as compared to UBC, with participation being not only heavily encouraged but also expected. The volume of material is in general lower, which allows time for in-class conversation and exploring any relevant and interesting topics. The pace is very manageable and allows time to reflect on and absorb the content. You can expect to have an assignment due every week for each class, although these are usually not too time-consuming compared to UBC. Quite often the homework will involve group work (presentation, case study, etc.) or short individual assignments, typically aimed at testing whether you have read the suggested materials before class. The amount of reading required for each class is usually very reasonable and manageable. We found the selected readings to be interesting and helpful. Notably, all of the materials – cases, books, articles – are provided online free of charge, which was very much appreciated.

Language Courses

Spanish courses were available for free and are held twice per week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6:15pm-8:15pm. The course is not an elective and therefore not mandatory, however, if you register for this course you must commit to it in its entirety. Registration for this takes place in June. Due to the demanding commitments of this course, unfortunately neither of us were able to make it work every week to participate but we would have liked to learn more of the Catalan language.

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Campus Facilities

It's important to note that campus is quite far from the city centre so keep this in mind when arranging travel and commute times depending on your class schedule. The campus is relatively new with nice facilities, classrooms, meeting rooms, a swag store, and two main cafeterias. A nice feature is that the MBA building is only shared with business and law students so it's never too overcrowded and there's no shortage of places to study or find some quiet time, though it is much smaller compared to UBC. We recommend bringing your own laptop to class but be careful with keeping an eye on it as there were a few theft incidents on campus during our semester. At first, it sounded as if laptops were not allowed to be used in class but we both found that for the majority of classes the professors didn't mind the use of them during class. We both felt very safe on campus, the neighbourhood of Sant Cugat is a very nice and family-friendly area and there is also ample lighting on campus and between campus and the metro station for when it gets darker earlier on in the evenings.

International Students - Resources Available

While there is no international office per se, you can expect to be well taken care of by the MBA office. The full time MBA program manager, Paula Niembro, was very helpful from the moment we have received our exchange nominations. She was always available to answer any questions regarding courses, admin matters and life in Barcelona in general. Additionally, ESADE's student body is considerably more international than UBC's (around 96% of each MBA cohort is made up of international students), so you are almost guaranteed to find classmates from your country in case you have any particular questions. Overall we would recommend getting involved in all of the educational, social and career events at ESADE – as it turns out, a lot of the MBA students were not informed of the exchange students coming to join the program, so you should definitely show some initiative and make yourself known.

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Housing Facilities

We found our housing arrangement through Airbnb in Gracia relatively quickly and only a few days after arriving in Barcelona (staying in a hotel in between). There are housing options hosted by the school with shared facilities that one can choose to stay in, both on and off campus. Bear in mind that housing standards are a bit different than in Vancouver: structures are made with lower quality, cleanliness is a bit less, and in general the buildings in Barcelona retain moisture so it might seem a bit musky with less fresh air. We advise trying to find a place with some decent air flow whether that be with a patio door or windows. Be sure to do your due diligence when looking for a space and it's highly recommended to do a tour of the space/meeting with the landlord prior to signing any contract. Due to the fact that we were staying in an Airbnb, all necessary features and appliances were included (internet, laundry, etc.). We found Gracia to be a very safe and comfortable neighbourhood to live in, close to lots of amenities and restaurants, and a good middle ground between campus and Barcelona's waterfront. Common neighbourhoods for students to live in are Gracia and Eixample due to its high level of safety and proximity to campus. Eating out can of course be expensive or cheap depending on your choice of restaurant but overall it is generally affordable to dine out in Barcelona because of the many tapas locations around.

Costs and Expenses

As mentioned, we chose a nice accommodation in an excellent location. For this reason, our place cost more than the local average and we paid about \$2,300 CAD per month (split between the two of us). There is opportunity to find cheaper accommodations, particularly if you have a roommate. Neither of us encountered any unexpected costs. What we were surprised about was the cost of local high-speed trains to nearby cities such as Madrid. If not planned well in advance, these can be quite expensive to take and it's sometimes cheaper to fly to such cities. There were no additional costs for textbooks or academic related materials. Local transportation (the metro) was very affordable, you will have the option to purchase different transit passes depending on number of trips. We found the "T10" pass made the most sense giving us 10 trips at a time which cost 10 euros each. Aside from travelling to and from campus or heading down to the waterfront, we found we walked just about everywhere. Groceries are pretty cheap in Barcelona compared to Vancouver because of access to fresh fruits and vegetables

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and you can live quite frugal if choosing to cook at home. The Canadian dollar was quite low while on exchange and it did have an impact on costs – something to consider when budgeting.

Student Health Services

There is no health care facility in the Sant Cugat campus. We were both covered by UBC AMS/GSS health insurance plan, however we have not had the need to use it. European Union residents can also apply for a health card in the home country in order to take advantage of the free public healthcare. Other than public clinics, there are many private clinics (including English-speaking), where you can book an appointment online.

Social Events

In June, you will receive a welcome email from ESADE's MBA student government representative who will outline the Esade MBA Class official Facebook page and WhatsApp group for your class year. The WhatsApp group is very handy for receiving updates on social events that are often happening with the class. There are many bar nights, weekend sailing opportunities, excursions, and more. There is a great student-led organization called [Studentfy](#) that constantly releases new trips dedicated to students and it's highly recommended to take advantage of these opportunities considering how affordable they are. For example, one of us went to Morocco for 5 days and very much enjoyed the experience. Studentfy promotes all events from parties, galas, day trips, long excursions, sailing events, etc. so keep an eye on the app/website. There is an ESADE Sailing Club you can join as well. In addition, you can sign up for the Studentfy card for 10 euros to receive further discounts on not only trips but also local stores. Of note, the social event highlights included Halloween, Gastrofest (showcasing different cultures and foods), and the year-end Christmas party for a final send-off.

We found we mostly associated with other exchange students during our time here but we had a great group. We often all went out for drinks/tapas with weekly dinners and some house parties. It was very easy to form relationships once school started and being together in Barcelona is a lively surrounding with never-ending adventures. Take as many strolls to different neighbourhoods as you can to learn

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about the city, the only thing to be aware of is perhaps El Raval or Gothic Quarter at night. Barcelona is a lot different than Vancouver in terms of retail times. For example, majority of stores are closed on Sundays and don't open until around 10AM on most days, taking a 'siesta' for a few hours in the afternoon around 3pm, and re-opening in the evening around 7PM. The most popular time to eat dinner in Barcelona when dining out is around 9PM. Clubs peak at around 2AM. There are lots of places you can go during the weekends such as Sants-Montjuic, taking a ride on the funicular and gondolas, exploring the Barceloneta waterfront and beaches, local markets, architectural feats such as Sagrada Familia church and Gaudi buildings, hikes at Montserrat, catching a football game, and even trips to places such as Girona, Valencia or Ibiza.

Career Services and Resources

Exchange students can take advantage of all the career services available to regular ESADE students. These include events such as career fairs (including a 2-day one which takes place in October and participation is highly recommended to attend – many students receive job offers as a result), company events, workshops allowing you to refine your job search skills (interviewing, writing a CV and a cover letter), talent days and recruitment sessions. Not a week goes by without a number of these events taking place – in Barcelona, but also abroad, e.g. in Berlin or London. Additionally, you will have access to a constantly updated job search platform. The openings are highly diverse and international, with the majority of the opportunities being located in the EU (mainly Spain, Germany, Italy, UK and the Netherlands). Additionally, students also have access to a networking and mentoring platform. It is worth adding that as an exchange student you will be treated as an ESADE alum and therefore will have a lifetime access to these resources.

After graduating you can also capitalize on the school's vast network by taking part in alumni events, finding alums with the same expertise as you (the school has many cross-sectional clubs for various industries) or joining one of the school's international chapters which are based in over 72 countries and every Spanish province. Furthermore, if you find yourself moving or even travelling to a new city, you can let ESADE know and the school will connect you with alumni living in that city as part of the Landings program. All in all, I have been incredibly impressed by the level of support and quality of the career services, as well as the resources available to alumni.

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Sports and Recreation

We're not entirely sure of the sports opportunities at ESADE other than the Sailing Club as that was the only activity we participated in here, however, the campus itself does have a nice gym, [Corner4](#), which is very affordable. The student membership at this gym is subsidized by 67% for all students starting at 19 euros per month. The gym offers a variety of classes from yoga to weight training to cycling in addition to an open floor for your own workouts if desired. They have very clean facilities which includes a sauna, steam room, and change rooms with the option of towel service. Otherwise you can also stay active by going on hikes in the city and surrounding hills and natural parks,, skateboarding/rollerskating/jogging along the beach or playing beach volleyball. You can either join other students (e.g. ESADE has a very active running club - ask for the Whatsapp group link if you are interested) or one of the many Meetup groups.

Study Tours and Field Trips

There were no study trips included in the elective courses we chose. Core MBA students can take part in themed career treks (e.g. consulting, finance) that take place throughout the year. Recent locations include e.g. Japan, Israel, UAE, Switzerland, UK, US and the Netherlands. While priority is given to the host's school students, depending on the spot availability you might be able to join the trip. These usually last around a week and costs vary greatly based on location. If this is something you might be interested in, it's best to keep an eye on the Whatsapp group chat and inquire about this opportunity as soon as possible.

What to bring?

- Euro credit card to avoid conversion and ATM fees
- European plug adapter
- Unlocked phone – prepaid SIM phone plans are cheap in the EU, especially compared to Canada
- A bag/suitcase suitable for carry on, in case you decide to take advantage of the cheap flights in Europe
- A small bag/backpack/purse that will safely store your possessions while you're out and about, particularly at night - Barcelona's pickpockets are very crafty (many people get stolen from!)

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- Versatile clothes for the changing of seasons (despite it being a warmer climate it does get pretty chilly in Barcelona for the months of November and December)
- Student visa (*you can get away without one if your stay in Barcelona is under 90 days but keep in mind you will be required to get your passport stamped each time you travel and it will be monitored*)

General Impressions

What was the most rewarding aspect of your exchange experience?

- Travelling around Europe and exploring Spain itself
- Meeting new people and experiencing a new culture, cuisine, etc.
- Experiencing a new business school campus and learning environment
- Networking and connection opportunities as well as lifelong friendships
- Undertaking something equally exciting and challenging for yourself
- Interpersonal growth in a new country

What were the biggest disappointments and why? What steps would you take, in light of your experience, to have better prepared yourself for your exchange program?

- Not many disappointments per se but a challenge for some might be job searching for back in Vancouver if returning to Canada for work
- Catalan language barrier can be difficult sometimes and it is almost impossible to find a job here without fluent knowledge of Spanish and Catalan
- Be prepared for the fact that Barcelona will be your final destination and classes wrapping up your MBA and you will unfortunately miss out on the UBC 2020 Snowcase event, graduation gala, capstone project, and associated celebrations in Vancouver.

If you have any questions at all relating to the ESADE exchange and/or Barcelona, don't hesitate to contact either of us and we would be more than happy to share our experiences :)

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Our Exchange cohort on Orientation Day



Useful links:

Living in Barcelona ESADE website:

<https://www.esade.edu/en/programmes/undergraduate/living-experience-esade>

Student handbook:

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/d3928d7239576349cba7c38bd/files/74117296-7024-4eb9-878e-8caf04cb0c54/International_Student_Handbook_2019_2020.pdf

List of elective courses:

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/d3928d7239576349cba7c38bd/files/9c0be437-0f7f-4d7f-b9eb-7f61f8e13f08/Elective_Fall_Term_19_20.pdf

Electives syllabus:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Uq9Ok2RF5O4zINCGZ18uSJ0N1_keWFoy/view?usp=sharing