

***Dear International student,***

**Welcome to the University of the French West Indies and Guiana ( U.A.G.)!**

As you may already know, UAG, one of the 102 French universities, is not located on the European continent but 7000 kilometres away from France. However, UAG is particularly privileged as far as the original geographical context in which it evolves is concerned: it has 6 campuses on three different territories, namely Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Martinique which are known as DFA's (Départements Français d'Amérique) or DOM's ( Départements Français d'Outre-Mer).

UAG is at the crossroads of the South American continent and the Eastern Archipelago of the Lesser Antilles. You may have to travel by plane or by boat from one campus to the other. It takes three hours by plane to travel from French Guiana to Martinique, and four hours by boat from Martinique to Guadeloupe (although only forty-five minutes by plane!).

As you arrive on one of UAG's five campuses you will probably be charmed by the temperature and the vegetation around but, without a good preparation ahead, you might very soon be disappointed because life on the islands or on the South American continent is very different from what you have been used to so far.

Most of the following information has been written by Dr Ben Fisher for the students from his university, the University of Bangor in Wales. Dr Ben Fisher has become a specialist in students' advising and it works!

I have adapted his to document and added a few more details for you. So, please, read this information very carefully and your stay at UAG will be an unforgettable one.

**Maryvonne Charlery, Programme Coordinator**

## Introduction

Testimony from students over many years suggests that a lot of what you need to know is in here. Inevitably there are things that aren't covered, and conditions change. Comments from your own experiences are welcome at any time.

The year abroad is a big step, and it's perfectly normal to feel a little apprehensive about it. It's also entirely normal to feel homesick, or even a little tearful, when you first arrive, and the first few days or weeks are bound to be the hardest of the year. However, **DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHATSOEVER, TURN ROUND AND RETURN TO** your university. You can make it - thousands of language students have done it before you, and Bangor students have an excellent record of making a go of the year abroad. Much of this information is to do with the dreaded French administration. So, two basic principles about paperwork:

- Keep photocopies of everything. Make more as you need them.
- Never, ever surrender original documents if you can possibly avoid it. Certainly you should only ever surrender the originals of birth certificate or passport if required to by the police (and nobody else). This is extremely unlikely to happen.
- When you have to deal with awkward or obstructive officials, don't take it personally.

Before coming

## When will I hear about UAG?

Those of you coming on an ERASMUS programme or from a partner university are known of, since you a "formulaire de pré-inscription" is sent to you, as soon as your university sends the list of their students to the Bureau des Relations Internationales. . Anyone who's applied to UAG and hasn't had a response by July should contact the Bureau des Relations Internationales (bri@univ-ag.fr) to introduce yourself. As you aren't going under an exchange programme, we may well be unaware that you exist. The same information applies most of the time to the university "lecteurs" (language assistants). The official notification of your appointment is a document called the "arrêté de nomination". It is important to keep it carefully and make copies too. You will get all the necessary information from the "Service du personnel" at the university. You will also need to make contact independently with the local CROUS (explained later) to have some information about your accommodation ([www.crous-antillesguyane.fr/](http://www.crous-antillesguyane.fr/))

## *What needs to be done over the summer?*

Apart from building up your finances, there are a number of items of paperwork you will need to sort out. Reasons are explained in more detail later on.

- **BIRTH CERTIFICATE**

You will ALL need a certified translation of this, plus the original. It MUST be the «long» version of the certificate, which shows the names of your parents. If you only have the «short» version you will have to apply to the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths where your birth was registered, to get the «long» version, as the French authorities simply do not recognise the «short» version as proof of your existence. If you present yourself in France without a certified translation you will almost certainly be sent to get one done by an approved local translator. This is expensive.

- **PROOF OF INSURANCE**

Applies to everybody.

- **School certificates**

You will need certified translations as well as the originals of the documents showing the modules you have taken at your university, and your level of attainment in a form our university should understand.

- **FINANCES**

You should read the section «Proof you have enough money to live on» under the notes below about the “carte de séjour”.

- **STUDENT STATUS**

Everyone will also get a bilingual document confirming that you have student status for the year abroad

- **FORM E128 / E11**

European students need to travel with a E 128 or E 111 Form - see below under Health & Insurance.

Passport

### *Pièces d'identité : Passport & Carte de séjour*

*"The carte de séjour is a bit like the Holy Grail; it's something that must be obtained, but cannot be obtained." (quote from a Bangor student)*

The card (not required for European students) is obtained from the local Préfecture (in the town which is the chef-lieu of the département, it may also be possible (this varies) to get the card through a Sous-Préfecture. You must inform the Bureau des Relations Internationales on your campus of your arrival. The officials at the Préfecture or the Sous-Préfecture will be contacted and will give you an appointment as soon as they can. A list of all the documents you need will be given to you by the Bureau des Relations Internationales.

Don't expect to get the "carte de séjour" immediately. After you have provided all the documents required, you will be issued with a document called (usually) a *récépissé*, i.e. a receipt and acknowledgement of your application, which you should carry with your passport. When your card is ready you will receive written notification (so advise them if you change address), and you will have to call back to collect it in person. This process takes anything from a couple of weeks to (likelier) some months.

#### **DOCUMENTATION:**

The following list of items needed should cover most:

- **Birth Certificate**

The authorities will wish to see the original certificate (long version, including the names of your parents) and the translation. Photocopies alone will not do, although it is a good idea to have spare photocopies with you in addition. Just occasionally some officious type may insist on your having the translation verified in France (at a charge), but this is unusual.

- **Proof of why you are entitled to a residence permit**

for "lecteurs", your official notification of appointment. For students, your French university student card

- **Passport**

Take photocopies of the section showing your details, and the first few pages as well, plus any pages which have been stamped when crossing borders. It must be a Full passport.

- **Proof you have enough money to live on**

For assistants, the letter of nomination will do here as well. For students a variety of solutions are possible: if you have a grant/loan, and that is your only source of income, have a photocopy of the documents notifying you of the sums. If your parents are financing you, you will possibly need a letter from the French bank, saying that remittances are arriving. Alternatively, if your parent writes good French, he or she can simply write the letter in French. If you have a small grant, topped up by parents, have the evidence of both sources. If you are independent, with an income of your own, a letter from your bank may be sufficient.

UAG has a set figure for what we consider to be enough money to live on. Life being quite expensive in our regions, you will need approximately **650 EUROS per month** to live decently (accommodation, food, personal expenses).

- **Proof of your French address**, sometimes known as a “certificat de domicile” or “attestation de logement”. This should be furnished by your landlord, or hostel authorities.
- **Proof that you are insured.**
- **Photographs:** It's wise to have a fair quantity of passport-size photographs with you when you arrive, as they can be useful for all sorts of cards.

Money

### **Money**

The start of your time abroad is likely to be the most expensive period of your university career. Take a fair amount of money with you, though, as invitations are likeliest to appear during your early weeks, and you don't want to give the impression you are unfriendly, by refusing due to lack of money. You may need some funds too for odds and ends for your room. You should certainly estimate several hundred euros. Many credit and debit cards are valid in France (Visa international, Mastercard American Express etc.- scarcely at all in the sorts of places you're likeliest to be spending) - but some shop staff may take some persuading. This is because of the prevalence of smart cards (cartes à puce) in France; these are validated by entering a PIN number (code secret) at the point of sale. If you do not open a French bank account, be prepared to explain, very regularly, along the lines of "*c'est une carte Visa, à piste magnétique, qui est tout à fait valable*". It is common for shops to accept only cash for sales up to 10 euros, cheques from 10 euros upwards, and cards from 15 euros upwards. So the old student dodge of using a credit card to buy a bag of crisps won't work.

- **BANKS**

"Lecteurs" must open a bank account very promptly on arrival, as salaries are paid in directly. Students, particularly those staying for the whole year, are strongly advised to open an account, if only for an easier life. However some have managed a single semester using cards, travellers' cheques and Euro cheques drawn on their account; to do this with confidence that everything will keep working, you need to be sure that you are in close touch with the state of your account, and that its balance is adequate for routine and emergency purchases.

There is no set advice on which French banks are better than others, as they can vary from branch to branch. However, ask your local bank (if you're on speaking terms with them!) if they have any specific links which might enable them to help you have an account set up before you arrive (obviously wait until you know exactly where you're going.

If you decide on travellers' cheques rather than a bank account you will have problems, unless you return home for the holidays to collect the next lot!

- **CHANGING MONEY**

Travellers' cheques can lose you a lot of money if you exchange them at a bank which charges high commission. Some charge a fixed lump sum in addition to a percentage - avoid them like the plague! Some charge a percentage. Some charge nothing. Shop around. This means time, so have enough euros when you arrive to keep you going. Make sure you have a few low value notes to pay for coffees, left luggage etc.

- **PUT IT ON THE PLASTIC**

Credit cards are an invention of the devil and at the same time your guardian angel! You don't want to run up debts on high interest, but a credit card is ideal if you want an air fare home in a hurry. If you can get the sort with no annual charge (charity affinity cards often work this way) they can solve the sort of problem for which otherwise you might have to contact home for money.

- **CLOSING ACCOUNTS**

When you return home, you will in all probability be closing your French bank account. Discuss before leaving the best way to transfer any balance back to your country (e.g. your last month's salary). It may be easier to withdraw it on the spot. Do make sure that instructions to close your French account have been carried out, as sometimes banks neglect to do this, and then charge for keeping the account open!

## *{mospagebreak title=Health and Insurance}Health and Insurance*

- **FORM E128/E 111 & INSURANCE**

Most of you will not need medical assistance - but previous students, including those who needed no treatment, agree that the peace of mind afforded by insurance is worth it. You may well be familiar with form **E111**, which covers essential hospital treatment in EU and some other countries, and entitles you to medical treatment on the same footing as the French who pay a part of the cost. Having an open-ended one of these is a good idea

anyway, but for the year abroad (or semester) you need form **E128**, which is for longer periods abroad. **On no account** set off without this. It isn't an insurance policy; it just establishes your basic entitlements. Without it you are liable to the full cost of treatment; the sum arising from (say) chance involvement in a road accident could be enough to bankrupt not only yourself, but your family too.

Your **E128** does not cover other forms of liability, including the cost of returning you to your country for treatment here. Hence you need separate insurance (or a French student Mutuelle) - preferably something comprehensive which covers just about all eventualities and loss of luggage, money, etc, and you are also very likely to be asked to show you have insurance cover as a tenant when finding accommodation.

When you have your policy, photocopy it. Give the photocopy to the parent or friend who looks after your affairs at home. You don't want your only copy lost or unreadably damaged! If you have the sort of passport with a space at the back for the names of persons to be contacted in case of accident, leave a copy of the policy with both of the persons whom you name.

- **SÉCURITÉ SOCIALE ÉTUDIANTE**

It is compulsory for all foreign students residing in France for more than three months, but it is not for European students who have their **E128 or E111** or can prove that their insurance has been paid for in their country.

**N.B:** "lecteurs" will have to pay for French social security, which is withdrawn from their salary.

- **MOTOR INSURANCE**

If you are taking a car, discuss the insurance aspect with the representative of a competent motoring organization, unless a member of your family is an expert. You may also find that a recovery package that covers you with a French or international motoring organization as well as one in the UK is worth it for peace of mind. The AA and RAC (etc) sell such packages; getting yourself included under your parents' cover is often a good deal.

- **DOCTORS AND PHARMACIES**

When you visit a doctor you have to pay. Much of the cost can be reclaimed. The same with prescribed medicines, from which you should always keep the printed label on the packet. This means it is wise to have enough money at hand always to be able to pay the doctor.

If the problem is not too serious, ask the nearest pharmacien. They have extensive training and can often save you a doctor's visit, although you'll then pay in full for any over-the-counter remedy they prescribe. Any pharmacien will provide a drink of water if you want to take painkillers on the spot when you buy them.

Here we have pills and capsules. The French also have cachets - powders in rice-paper or similar. Only accept these if you know you will have water available, or they will stick on the way down! The French also have a passion for administering suppositories as remedies. This can be complicated if you are travelling, without good washing facilities. Check before accepting!

If you are regularly taking medication here, your doctor will prescribe a moderate supply before you leave, but not for months on end. Get a copy of the prescription from him/her to show the French doctor. If you have a favourite over-the-counter remedy here, take the

packet with you and show the ingredients to the French pharmacien, who will identify a similar product.

- **Food**

If you are a vegetarian, you are likely to find less understanding in France than in your country, and catering for yourself may be the only solution. However ingredients are listed on supermarket foods, so you should be able to enjoy varied food, even if cooking facilities are skimpy. Markets generally offer fresh food of very good quality and value, and are an experience in themselves (unless you don't like the sight or smell of meat).

In general, you are likely to find that eating well in restaurants may be cheaper than you think - look out for fixed-price menus - as well as being an important part of social life. Don't be afraid to experiment, or even to discover local restaurants...

- **EMERGENCIES**

If you need medical aid, the emergency numbers are on every public phone: for the SAMU (ambulance service) 15; police 17; fire service 18.

It is better to make an emergency call if a companion seems seriously ill or injured, as private ambulances do not have a medical attendant - they are more like taxis in which one can lie down. If the local pharmacie is closed, it will display a list of pharmacies "de garde". If you can't locate a dentist in a hurry, the local commissariat de police will be able to give you an address.

- **PERIODS OF ILLNESS**

Should you return home on medical grounds your University as UAG will need to be informed. Get from the doctor the precise dates for the period when you are unfit for study or work; "lecteurs" may have trouble with their pay if this is not done.

## Safety

Students at university should ensure that they know the fire exits from all lecture rooms and any safety requirements of the UAG.

It is in your interest to avoid making yourself noticeable as foreigners, by using guide books in French rather than English, studying maps before you go out rather than in the street, and using French when talking to other British visitors in public places, or, if you must use English, speaking quietly

Check with the local Syndicat d'Initiative/Office de Tourisme on areas best avoided at night, and get your bearings in your new town before sampling any night life. Other French students of your own sex should be in a position to advise. It is quite common for night clubs to be at out-of-town - indeed rural - locations, so be sure you have safe and reliable transport; don't be afraid to use taxis, they're economical for a small group sharing the cost.

Should political/social demonstrations occur in your area, please remember that you are foreigners, and thus have no inherent right to participate, even if you sympathize. It has been known for foreigners to be deported for taking an active part in such demonstrations; it has also been known for students who have found themselves caught up in unrest to find it a more traumatic experience than they expected; what starts off as a peaceful, good-natured manif can turn nasty in a matter of seconds, and restraint is an alien concept to the French riot police (CRS). Above all, be normally sensible, just as one could expect you to be in your country. Every now and again one meets

students abroad who seem to have forgotten the everyday commonsense care of self and property which is expected at home.

Travelling alone at night is not recommended. Women are likely to encounter more unwanted approaches from men than they are used to.

You might encounter aggressive begging. It will vary in character from the traditional beggar in the church porch to the apparently disabled individual who will distribute badges (pin's) in a café and invite you to buy them. A straightforward stony-faced “non” will almost always stop you being bothered; do not engage in conversation.

In Martinique and Guadeloupe, you run a risk of being robbed in some isolated places or on some beaches. Students have sometimes found that they can defuse a situation by speaking French or even Créole if they've picked it up. But do not put yourself at risk, do not «have a go»; belongings can be replaced, you cannot.

## **Travel**

- **LUGGAGE**

You will have plenty of luggage. Never leave it unattended, as apart from the authorities being tempted to treat it as a dangerous package and blow it up (!), theft is fairly common. Put a name label on your luggage and another one inside it so that in any claim that it is yours you have a starting point to prove your ownership. Theft is less likely if the luggage looks distinctive, and always make sure it is locked; if not fitted with locks, use padlocks. Keep money and passport, credit cards, travel documents and the like inside your outer layer of clothing, and don't put valuables in the back zip pocket of a rucksack. Some have found it useful to stitch an extra pocket inside jackets or anoraks so that pickpockets would not have an obvious target. Money belts can be uncomfortable, but are worthwhile.

- **BUSES**

Town bus systems vary, but most have an “abonnement” or season ticket, sometimes with student rates. Tickets are often cheaper if bought in a carnet (set of ten), sometimes from an office, sometimes from a local newsagent. Some are obliterated by the driver, but most you have to push into a machine inside the bus. Some are valid for one journey, some for any journeys except a return, within an hour. Be sure to enquire at the local “gare routière”, at the same time enquiring whether they have a bus map and a timetable. Buses **DO NOT RUN** in the evenings nor on holidays and weekends. Think about transport availability before renting accommodation.

- **CARS**

If you plan to rent a car you should check with the AA, RAC (etc), or get the brochure 'Motoring in France' from a French Tourist Office. Whatever you do, you must be familiar with the French Highway Code. Remember that speed limits vary according to conditions and are lower than the advertised speeds in poor weather. Always lock the car when you leave it, as a foreign registration makes thieves expect tourist luggage, cameras, etc. and you may wish to consider having an alarm fitted. You will have to have the lights and mirrors adjusted. Some students buy a French car during their stay. Do think, though, about how you will sell it when you leave. Again you must be sure you understand the French code. One of the biggest problems for GB drivers is “priorité à droite”, which gives cars coming from your right priority over you unless a sign indicates to the contrary. Watch out at roundabouts too, where GB instincts sometimes take over.

- **TRAVELLING OUT BY AIR**

The only ways to reach Guadeloupe, French Guiana or Martinique, is by plane or boat. Most planes arrive late in the afternoon or in the evening. So, don't expect anyone from the university to meet you at the airport. It is very easy to hire a taxi from the airport and indicate your address to the driver. It will cost you about thirty euros from the airports in Guadeloupe or Martinique to their main campuses. Taxis is safe on the islands and taxi drivers generally are very helpful.

- **HITCHING**

One rule: **DON'T!** It's not just that you don't know the drivers, but you don't know how they drive either, or how much they may have been drinking (don't get into any car with a driver who has been drinking, even if you know him/her. If you still insist on hitching, don't get stuck in the back of a two-door car, don't let the driver drive off with your luggage, leaving you standing in the road, make sure your insurance is up to date, and don't do it alone. Men, please remember that it is not just girls who have to be careful about hitching. Alternatives are shared expense trips.

On the islands you may find that hitching is more common practice because of poor public transport, and at times may be the only alternative; be cautious about your safety nevertheless, and consider whether organizing your journey using a communal taxi may be better.

### **Accommodation**

Don't expect to find a room at the CROUS for the duration of your stay, the number of rooms being very limited and the priority being given to those “boursiers” students coming from the neighboring islands.

It would save misunderstandings if you could explain this to your parents/boyfriend/girlfriend, so that they know that it is legally impossible for us to find rooms for you. However, international students can be accommodated at the CROUS for a few days in September, before the arrival of the local students. They charge about fifteen euros per night. The Bureau des Relations Internationales are doing their best to find student rooms near the campuses or family accommodation for you. A list of the rooms available will be sent to you so that you can choose the right place.

Advice is difficult here as you all have different habits and priorities - distance from town matters more to some than others, as do independence, cooking facilities, etc. Most rooms are fully-equipped

If you take a fully-equipped flat, inquire if there is an inventory (état des lieux) - if there is, check the contents of the flat against it before you move in or you may be held responsible for missing objects. This checking can be educational - you can learn a lot of culinary vocabulary! If you have a contract (bail), always be honest about how long you are staying, even if it is less than a year. In fact, always be honest about everything - ignorance of the law is no excuse in France - "*Personne n'est censé ignorer la loi*" - and at all times you should avoid getting on the wrong side of it. Long-term renting of a flat may involve other responsibilities, and you need to be clear if these are yours or your landlord's. You may have to contribute to the copropriétaires' fund to pay the lady who cleaned the stairs. Lighting on stairways is often on the minuterie system - i.e. it goes out after a fixed interval. Unless you like dashing upstairs to beat the lights, a small torch can be a useful alternative to heart failure!

What is inside includes some things requiring inspection.

- **The lock.** Does it work? Obviously a room without an adequate lock invites possibly unwanted callers. Always leave the key immediately accessible especially at night, in case of fire, so you don't have to hunt for it.
- **Electrical fittings.** Your appliances won't work without an international adapter, since France uses different 2- and 3-pin plugs. But check by sight whether wires are properly insulated. If not, you have the right to have them dealt with. Never tackle electrical repair jobs yourself in someone else's room or flat, however handy you are at home. Some French wiring is eccentric, and you can't be sure the current is safely off. Naturally you can change the fuses of your own appliances when they are disconnected from the mains, but check the rating of the fuse to match the original. (Fuse = un fusible, but to complain that a fuse has blown = les plombs ont sauté). Always have a torch (and spare batteries) handy in your room/flat, for potential electricity strikes as well as failures. Never run too many appliances off one adapter. The capacity is marked on the adapter and the load on the appliance. Make a point of checking.
- **Gas appliances.** If you feel at all groggy in a room with a gas or oil appliance, switch off and open all possible windows and then go for a walk in the fresh air while things clear. Sooty stains on or just above appliances may indicate carbon monoxide risk. If the flames are orange or yellow instead of blue (unless you have just spilled water on the gas ring), switch off at once and get the window open fast. Never move furniture so that it blocks vents.
- While gas and electricity should be left alone, a small set of screwdrivers and a pair of pliers (or some form of pocket multi-tool) for less lethal jobs can be valuable, and they can make you very popular with others who've omitted to obtain them. If the wash basin or sink outlet blocks, ask the propriétaire for a débouchoir. Anything more serious should be referred to him/her at once as the propriétaire is responsible for damage done by leaks etc. to the flat below and delay on your part might make you liable.

- **TAXE D'HABITATION**

If you live independently in the DFA's for long enough (e.g. in an HLM) you will also encounter a tax (taxe d'habitation) for living there. If they catch up with you - pay it. You are liable. If they don't - you are lucky. But don't ignore the demand if it arrives. If you don't pay, the bill will reappear demanding an increased sum (majoration).

You may also eventually get a card asking you to visit the local Commissariat de Police at a specific time. Don't panic - but don't leave it until after the date mentioned. It is only a routine check on foreigners. They may check whether you are still at the same address and how you get your income.

- **ASSISTANCE WITH RENT**

If you pay more than a quarter of your income in rent you may be eligible for reimbursement of part of the cost from the local authorities. This can only be done, however, if you have kept all receipts (quittances) and if you have either your carte de séjour or proof that you have applied for one. You also need proof from your propriétaire of the sum per month you are paying, so be sure that your landlord isn't tax dodging over your rent. Get the proof at the beginning of your stay, before everything is signed and settled. Just explain that you will be applying for Assistance Personnelle Logement (APL). To apply you will also need your carte de séjour, so you can't hope to actually get a rebate paid until you have this; the récépissé may be enough, but don't bet on it, as it states that you have applied, not that you have definitely got the carte de séjour successfully. There are two forms of benefit, APL (allocation Personnalisée au Logement) and ALS (Allocation de Logement à Caractère Social). Apply for the latter, as it is less complicated, at the local Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (CAF). As well as your carte de séjour and your receipts (quittances) you should take your student card if you are a student. You may not get a rebate on the first month, and you can only be paid after the end of the month to which the rebate relates, so budget for full payments and enjoy the rebate if and when it comes. Also, payments are likely to take some time - perhaps two months - to arrive. It is also quite common for payment to be withheld until you finally get your carte de séjour, so whether or not you ever get any APL can depend on the efficiency of your Préfecture.

- **PAY YOUR RENT!**

Avoid leaving any debts behind you when you leave. The notion of «doing a runner» is in no way a guarantee that you won't be subject to legal action. Also, leaving a bad impression behind you can have serious negative effects for internal students in later years. Leaving your accommodation in a clean and tidy state can also be more of a help to your successors than you might imagine, as well as being an act of general courtesy.

## HOLIDAYS

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Since the point of the year abroad (or semester ) is immersion in the language(s) you are studying, it is obviously undesirable to return to your country frequently. Naturally you can expect to return home for Christmas. You may also if you wish to come home for either the carnival (February) holiday or the Easter holiday. In any case, you must inform the Bureau des Relations Internationales about the length of time you will be away. At the end of their stay, students at UAG should obtain a certificat d'assiduité/de présence and a relevé de notes from the staff who taught their courses, and send it to their university when they leave.

We hope you will take every opportunity to enjoy the region. The Michelin Green Guide to the area will give you lots of ideas, as will a visit to the tourist office. It is preferable to buy a French edition of your Michelin guide as you will be less conspicuous using it, quite apart from the benefit to your French. The best maps for your purpose, since they show more places to visit are not Michelin ones but the IGN (Institut Géographique National) maps, available in many French bookshops. The Série Verte will probably suit your purpose. Remember that museums and the like tend to be shut on Mondays or Tuesdays, depending on who runs them.

### *Free time and meeting the local people*

UAG doesn't have a students' union as you know it, although it has excellent sports facilities. So if you are keen on sport you should find it catered for. Most towns have clubs of some sort which are more active at weekends when people have leisure.

If you have any religious affiliation, ask your minister/priest/rabbi at home where to write to in order to find out about similar churches in your area. However be cautious if approached by apparently religious groups you are unfamiliar with. It is not unknown for dubious sects and other pseudo-religious groups to prey upon foreigners they perceive as vulnerable. If you don't feel comfortable, make your excuses and leave.

Don't hesitate to sample new activities if it means sharing them with someone. You're never too old to try out a new hobby, but it may also enable you to meet others who happen to share your existing interests as well. Some students have made contacts through the local Chambre de Commerce or via regional clubs concentrating on local music, folklore, history, traditions. Get others to explore with you if you can, but if not, explore anyway.

If you eat student restaurant meals this is a chance to get talking to people. You need to make the approach - no one will realize you want to talk unless you do!

Naturally you won't be with people all the time - being alone doesn't necessarily mean being lonely - but if you are, make the effort to get out, even if only for a brief walk. It is a very good tactic to arrange that you always have something to look forward to

It is not unusual to earn a little argent de poche by offering private English lessons on a one-to-one basis. However, everyone (women especially) should be highly cautious about advertising, and the general advice is not to do it, let possible pupils approach you instead.

It's often quite common from local families to invite someone into their home. If you are invited for a meal in someone's home, a small gift or contribution to the feast will be very much appreciated as an act of courtesy and friendship.

### *Keeping in touch with your University*

- **ADDRESSES**

The pack of documentation you will receive from your university during the summer will include an address form, to be returned to your university as soon as you can.

If you have a change of address or other contact details while abroad, it is important that you let the Bureau des Relations Internationales know promptly about it and also inform your university.

- **EMAIL**

Computing facilities are much sparser at UAG than they are at your university, but this is improving slowly. UAG is online, and there are also possibilities for access in cybercafés and in the campus libraries. If you do not have a personal email account on the campus, there are numerous WWW services which offer free email accounts (as long as you don't mind a screen dotted with adverts), and a number of students abroad have found this a convenient option - Hotmail (<http://www.hotmail.com>) is one example, and there are plenty of others around too.

Anyone taking out a computer with a modem will find that the DFA's (French) phone plugs and sockets are different from yours; you can expect to need to buy an adapter or more likely a different lead once in France.

### *Lecteurs*

- **CORRESPONDENCE AND ARRIVAL**

You will have written to ask when and where to present yourself on arrival. Usually, your initial correspondence will be with the Directeur de département and it must be in very polite, formal and correct French style; see section 12 of "Le français en faculté", or the guide to formal correspondence in your dictionary. Your first letter should include an enquiry about accommodation, so you should have been given a clear idea of what to expect before you arrive. Don't worry if correspondence from the UAG is slow coming back, as the university closes down for August. Try to arrive looking neat, in case you are offered hospitality. In any case, first impressions matter.

- **TIMETABLE**

How soon you get this varies, depending on how many teachers are involved, and how many students you are working with. Be aware that you may have to work on Saturday mornings. You are supposed to work up to 14 hours per week in any combination. It is not unusual for the timetable to at the end of the semester, and your groups may also change at the same time.

- **WORK**

In theory, you should have one teacher to act as your main liaison (responsible). The work you are expected to do with students should be mainly oral in character and you will spend most of your time in the language lab. If you are unable to take your classes owing to illness, contact the secrétaire de département as early as possible on the day, and certainly well before your first timetabled class. Nothing makes a worse impression than unexplained absences.

- **YOUR COLLEAGUES**

It helps to be aware that the teachers you deal with will not all be of the same professional status, though you can expect to find that all will be dedicated and hard working. Teachers who have the higher qualification are paid more, and do less classroom work; there is sometimes a certain deference towards these more senior staff. However with all your colleagues, you should be aware of the French conventions regarding greetings, particularly in the workplace. You will quickly pick up what is normal about things like handshakes, kisses on the cheek and their number. With your colleagues, start off with “vous” when you first meet them; with many, they and you will quickly switch to “tu”, others won't.

- **YOUR STUDENTS**

The relationship with students needs a little care : the "us/them" divide can be tricky to establish; the ideal is a friendly relationship where it remains clear that you are a teacher and should be respected as such, so it can be best to err on the side of formality. If you find that you see any of your students socially, it is vital that you avoid any situation that could compromise student/teacher relations (yours or those of your colleagues); intimacy is to be avoided at all costs.

- **STRIKES**

You may find that during your time, one or more trade unions will take some form of action, typically a one-day arrêt de travail. Should this happen, our advice is that the lecteurs should not take part, and even if no classes are happening, make it clear to the school that you are available for work (e.g. make sure a senior member of staff or a secretary sees you come in at the usual time).

○ **REGISTRATION**

Exchange students will find that some coordinators ease the process for them; others will have to go through the full process, which may be divided between inscription administrative and inscription pédagogique. The Bureau des Relations Internationales will do their best in order to facilitate your registration procedures. They will have your dossier d' inscription ready for you before your arrival and a student (tuteur) will help you in filling in the different forms. You will need the originals and translations of the university's records, and evidence of your insurance (see notes above under C. Health & Insurance, including warnings about sécurité sociale étudiante).

Students outside the Erasmus or exchange programmes will need to pay Fees, at least in the first instance, and recently this has been in the region of 150 euros. UAG doesn't take cash. They expect you to pay by "mandat-compte", obtainable from the Post Office, or by credit card.

**COURSES**

International students have a fairly broad choice of courses to be chosen in consultation with the coordinator or other members of Relations Internationales staff. You have to take 30 credits per semestre and the number of courses varies according to the credits allotted to each course. All international students have to take the course entitled "perfectionnement linguistique", offered by ISEF (language centre on each campus) and are allowed to take courses in different departments.

All students must arrive with their learning agreement.

○ **PROOF OF ATTENDANCE**

At the very beginning of your course, ask how you can obtain a certificate proving you have followed the courses, before you leave. It is called "une attestation d'assiduité". You should send it to your university to show that you have satisfied the semester or year abroad requirement. If you have to take exams, let the staff at the Bureau des Relations Internationales know about it when you arrive, so that your result can be sent to your university on time.

○ **WORK AND EXAMS**

Exams on your courses will almost certainly involve "contrôle continu" at intervals during the year, and a bigger exam at the end, by which time many of you have gone. Please, let your teachers know about your situation so that special exams can be organized for you, if required. You may well have signed up to an ECTS learning contract (ECTS = European Credit Transfer System). They should count towards your university degree.

○ **UNIVERSITY CULTURE**

You may well experience a certain amount of culture shock when you start studying at UAG. Individual contact with staff is much more limited than in your university, and may be all but non-

existent. Similarly, teaching methods and expectations are often considerably more formal than what you are used to. Don't hesitate to look for a tuteur's assistance

- **ERASMUS**

Erasmus students should check for days/times when the local coordinator is available to see you; it is common for academics to have set permanences rather than being prepared to see students at any time. Our relations with our partner universities depend very much on you as ambassadors, so developing a good working relationship with the coordinators helps not only you, but the students who will follow you.

- **LEAVE A SWEET SMELL**

Bear in mind that future international students will be following you not only into the university, but also in many cases into the same accommodation. Make a good impression on the people you deal with you there, and do all you can to "leave a sweet smell behind you" at the end of your stay; even little things like making friends with concierges and cleaners can have real benefits for those who will follow in your footsteps.

- Ben Fisher, May 2001

*Legal bit: No liability is accepted on behalf of UWB, any of its staff or students, or any partner or host institutions or their staff, for any consequences whatsoever arising from the advice in this information is included in good faith.*

- Maryvonne Charlery, March 2009