

Report of exchange to ETH Zurich

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Last year, I was honored to get the chance to exchange to ETH, Zurich from September 2013 to July 2014. I am writing this report to share the experience this year including the information of application, preparation, life and study of my exchange process.

Application and preparation of exchange

· Motivation

I am interested in the architecture by Swiss architects when I was still in my bachelor study. Luckily, I got to know more about ETH since I entered the Chiba Lab. As Professor Chiba ever worked as the guest professor in ETH in 2010, we have a good connection of ETH and the University of Tokyo. Every year some students from ETH will exchange to our lab and so do our lab members. By communicating with them, I became more curious of the study in ETH, which was my main motivation of exchange.

· Application

I began to prepare for the application of exchange since February 2013. As I already took the TOEFL exam before, so I mainly worked on the study plan at that time. In order to get the approval of Professor Chiba, I have discussed with him on my study plan of exchange for several times. He is so nice that not only willing to recommend for me but also gave me some advice about the life and study in Zurich. After submitting all the needed documents, I was interviewed by the officers in OICE. Everything was going quite well and at the end of March, I got the approval from the University of Tokyo. In May, I received the official nomination letter from ETH, Zurich.

· Preparation of new life in Zurich

Accompanied with the nomination letter was other useful information from ETH, including the German language course, finding lodge, course selection and so on. All these application needs to be submitted before arriving in Zurich. Please pay attention to every deadline.

· German intensive language course

There are four official languages in Switzerland. In Zurich, people mainly speak German or more precisely Swiss German. In department of architecture, most of the courses and studio are in German; as a result it is recommended to learn some German in advance. Basically the Swiss people are very good at English; it's not a big problem of not knowing any German for daily life though.

The university of Zurich provides intensive and regular German language courses for students of different level. I chose the German intensive course for the beginners, which was quite useful. The online application was really competitive, normally all the seats will be full within one day. So it is better to apply it as soon as possible.



main campus of ETH, Zurich



the Hngerberg campus in snow



final presentation of the German intensive course

· Finding lodge

In Zurich, there's an official housing agency intended for students called Woko. Many useful information of house hunting can be found through their website. I was succeeded in finding a room in an international student lodge before I went to Zurich. It's easier to apply for the international lodge than finding an apartment by yourself because normally dozens of local students apply for one apartment and interviewed will be required. It's more difficult to find an apartment comparing in Tokyo.

· Course selection

About one month before the new semester began, I received the email from the department of architecture in ETH informing me the course selection. We had to decide which studio and seminar trip we were going to take for the coming semester. So it is strongly recommended to read the website of each professor and the description of both the studio and seminar trip carefully in order to make a decision. For the exchange student, we only got the priority C in studio selection; as a result, there are times when we are not able to choose some popular studios. But the quality of the studio on a whole is very nice. Besides the studio, for other lectures, we could decide or change afterwards.

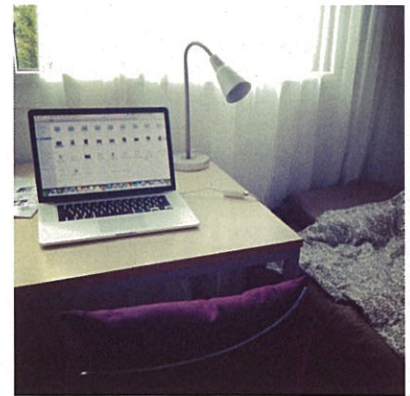
Study in ETH

For the exchange student, we need to achieve at least 20 credits for each semester, while the studio takes up 13 or so. The studio is a bit more demanding comparing in Japan. Every week we have discussion with the professor and assistances twice on Tuesday and Wednesday. For the midterm and final critique, some famous architects will be invited to give commend towards the student's work. The students are very engaged in this environment.

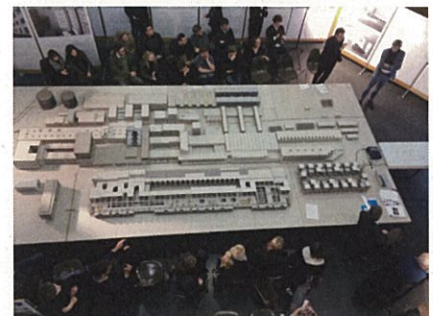
I chose Adam Caruso studio for two semesters with different themes. Caruso studio is said to be the most demanding studio in ETH, yet I really enjoyed it and benefited a lot during the process. The design approach is quite different from Japan. For the several weeks at the beginning, we had to work on the reference study and the reading discussion, which helps to guide the following design process. We were divided into groups of two persons to proceed the design. For me it is a big challenge to get used to this tense environment because on one hand, we need to discuss and express our way of thinking all the time and on the other hand, I feel my knowledge of the culture and art history in Europe was quite insufficient. But finally, I worked quite well with my partner and we got a rather good comment in the final critique.

Besides studio, I chose some lectures in English from different grades. We were free to choose whatever lecture we want to take and can cancel it at any time unless those with the exams.

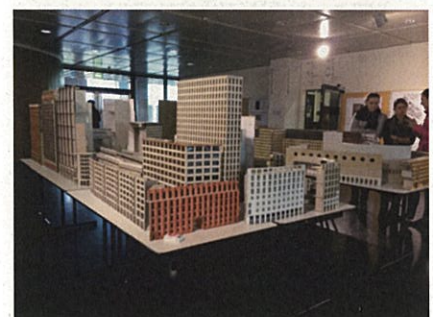
Every semester, there are architectural trips guided by professors called seminar trip. Those trips are with different theme and usually very well organized. Students can get supervised by the professor during the trip and sometimes can visit some buildings, which are normally not open to the public. The application is taken at the same time of studio selection without priority preference.



my room in M62



final critique of the studio



students' work of studio



seminar trip with Caruso studio to Rome

Life in Switzerland

The living cost is pretty high even compared to Tokyo. Thanks for the University of Tokyo, I was honored to get scholarship of 80,000 yen/month. But it only covered the rental fee (545 chf/month) and my insurance (86 chf/month, with the student reduce), the cost of food and study have to be covered on my own.

I was living in the international lodge Meierwiesenstrasse 62 during my stay in Switzerland. It's the largest student lodge in Zurich with 170 single rooms and share bathrooms and kitchen. Although the kitchen and common area are a bit nasty sometimes, it's very convenient to go to both the central of city and the Höngerberg Campus(where the department of architecture locates). And there are many chances to meet new friends from different countries. I had a good time in M62.

In ETH, the exams are taken at the end of the vacation. So the official students have to spend most of their vacation in preparing for the exams. As exchange student, we don't need to take as many exams as they do, so we can enjoy the leisure time besides study. As traveled is one of my favorite hobby, I have almost traveled around Europe during my holidays. It is so excited to see those masterpieces of architecture in person and to experience the difference of the culture in every country, which is one of the greatest memories of my exchange this year.

Conclusion

I have been asked these questions for many times: as a foreign student, why did you choose to exchange again? How do you cope with the different environment? I personally think it is the difference that makes me always be on the way. In the end, I would like to appreciate my grateful for the University of Tokyo and ETH Zurich, the officers in OICE and Darch and countless people who ever helped me. I hope the information would be helpful to the following comers, who dare to dream and start a new journey.



city of Zurich



the Matterhorn