

University of Helsinki

Exchange start semester	Autumn semester 2023
Study level	Graduate (Master)
Home faculty at GU	IT-Faculty
Studies at GU	Communication

Courses during exchange

- Media and Communication Ethics
- Populism, Polarization and the Media
- Propaganda and Persuasion
- Shifts and Challenges to Journalism
- Programming for Digital Humanities
- Computational Literacy

Main difference compared to studying at GU

The higher education system in Finland is similar to the one I'm used to in Sweden. The main difference was the fact that I had to take three courses at the same time, worth 5 credits each, whereas back home I only took two. This was quite stressful at times, but luckily all teachers were extremely understanding and granted extensions to the deadlines, in case I needed some more time to finish my assignments.

Arrival, orientation and housing

I was lucky to be granted a dorm room from HOAS, the Finnish student accommodation agency. I picked up my keys on the day of my arrival and I moved in immediately. I was sharing an apartment with 5 other students; this was a great decision because I was never lonely, there was always someone at home to talk to and hang out with. I arrived a week before orientation was scheduled to start, so I had some time to get to know the city and my roommates.

The university organised numerous events for incoming exchange students, and had us grouped into so-called tutor groups with others from the same faculty. Each tutor group was led by two Finnish students who helped us with any questions we had. The first weeks were quite busy with orientation, registering for courses, and social events; we did all this as a group, so by the end all of us got pretty close. It was much easier to navigate the whole process together, since we could all help each other with documents, accommodation issues, applying for scholarships, etc.

Finances

The living costs in Helsinki are a bit higher than in Gothenburg, in my opinion, but it is not unbearable. I shared a dorm with other students to save money, and I had lunch at the university canteen, where one could buy very tasty lunch for 2,95 euros (2,85 for the vegan options). In the summer and autumn months I rented a city bike instead of taking public transport, which was cheaper and also a great way to get to know Helsinki.

The Erasmus grant helped cover my rent, and I also received the Adlerbertska scholarship, which was enough to pay for my groceries and other day-to-day costs. I am not a Swedish citizen so I don't receive CSN, but I believe that students who do receive it would not need any additional funds to be able to afford this semester abroad. Even without CSN, I could go out for dinner or for drinks once a week. The Finnish railways also offer student prices on all trips, so I visited a few other Finnish cities without spending a lot of money.

Life in a new country/culture

I had a great experience during my exchange semester. Initially I did not expect to meet many like-minded people, since I'm a master's student and a lot of the exchange students I met were doing their bachelor's degrees. Yet, because I was part of a tutor group (as I mentioned earlier), I became incredibly close with some of the other students. We found a lot of things in common, we attended classes and social events together, and some of us even went on a few weekend trips together.

The Finnish students were also very eager to share their culture with us. They made sure everyone felt included and comfortable, and organised various events, not just parties, so that everyone could take part in something they enjoyed - like workshops, Finnish music nights, cooking classes, etc. I am very thankful for that, I feel like I have made friends for life.

Overall exchange experience

I am very happy that I picked Helsinki for my exchange semester. The courses I signed up for were incredibly interesting, and I got to 'branch out' into subjects I would not have studied at home since they're not part of the GU curriculum. My teachers were all very well-read and passionate about the topics they taught, and they all supported me and helped me with my assignments and group projects - some even suggested potential topics for my master's thesis. I suppose I was lucky that my programme at GU allowed me to choose whichever subjects I was interested in, and that all my credits would be transferred.

The city of Helsinki itself felt very safe and welcoming. Since Finland is so close to Sweden, I did not have a major culture shock, but it was still different enough to be exciting. Everyone I met was polite and helpful, and I enjoyed spending time downtown and exploring the many museums. The people I met were the best part of the whole experience - as I said earlier, I found a lot in common with some of the other students, both Finnish and exchange. I'm eager to visit Finland again soon.