



Faculty of Law, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium)

Study Guide

1 Overall impression

Overall, I enjoyed my time in Leuven and at KU Leuven. The city was very quaint and student-friendly, making it easy to get adjusted to student life, while the institution had many opportunities for students to take different courses and learn from individuals involved in relevant fields of work within European institutions and global corporations.

2 Making preparations

(e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

The KU Leuven website was fairly helpful in finding most of the information for payments and other administrative tasks that needed to be handled. I contacted the responsible person for the double degree program and the international student team for most issues outside this and they were helpful in these situations. Other than this, as a U.S. citizen, I had to deal with the Belgian Embassy in the United States to coordinate my student visa, which was time-consuming, but other administrative matters regarding university things were fairly easy to handle with KU Leuven's assistance.

3 Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

The most important contact person for me and anyone in the Double Degree program at KU Leuven is the double degree coordinator. She wears multiple hats for the students in the program, so she is often the primary contact point for Double Degree students at KU Leuven. As such, her response time is often delayed and it is recommended that you contact her well in advance to address your needs.

4 Housing

I opted to find private housing, instead of organized student housing for my time in Leuven. I got a fairly affordable studio apartment in the center of Leuven, near the Law Faculty, through Syus Housing. I used their website for my apartment search and initial contact. The whole process took approximately 1 week from initial contact to signing the contract. The entire process was very efficient and they were accommodating for the fact that I needed a quick turnaround on renting the apartment since I was looking to move in within 2 weeks of my initial contact.

5 Arrival

The university had a well-organized and involved welcome week for students on campus, including orientations, tours, activities, and other socializing events. Overall, arrival was fairly seamless and there were plenty of opportunities to ask any burning questions about university culture or getting settled in. I would recommend attending the international student welcome sessions and orientation sessions to get better acquainted with Belgian local and academic culture and to be better prepared for the academic style.

6 Telephone

(e.g. costs, carriers)

I got a monthly top-up plan through Orange. I had to initially get registered through an Orange store to get my SIM card and for them to register my passport and local residential address. However, after that, I could easily top up on a monthly basis through the Orange app on my phone. I paid approximately 15 Euros per month for my phone plan, which had about 100 minutes of calling time, 1,000 text messages, and 4GB of data (if I remember correctly). This was usually more than enough, as you have access to KU Leuven wi-fi throughout most of the central area of Leuven. However, for months when I did more traveling and would run through my data more quickly, I could easily top up another 1GB of data through the app for approximately 5 Euros.

7 Bank account

I opened a bank account with ING Belgium. There is a branch located between the center of Leuven and the train station where you can open a student account. As I am a U.S. citizen, the process was more involved and took significantly longer (a few months to be exact), due to the fact that I had to provide personal tax information, scans of my U.S. Passport to have verified by the ING head office, and had to provide my residence permit information (which took a significant amount of time -- several weeks on its own -- due to the several steps and bureaucracy involved in the registration and waiting process in Belgium) prior to being able to begin the process to open the bank account. Outside of that, once I had everything opened, it was fairly easy to access everything through the online portal and ATMs.

8 Transport

I came from the United States, so I flew to Brussels and took a train from there. It was a fairly easy transfer. From Leuven to Zürich, I opted to rent a car from Aachen, Germany, and drove to Zürich from my place in Leuven. Then I returned the car to a car rental agency on the German side of the border near Konstanz.

9 General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

In general, the Partner Faculty was helpful but could be difficult to get in contact with at times due to the culture of separation between faculty and students in Belgian academia. This could be frustrating at times, but it was more of a cultural obstacle to adjust to while living in Leuven. Student life was enjoyable but was definitely impacted negatively by the COVID pandemic during my time there. I

heard from many people that during a "normal" year the experience would be significantly different and better. Overall, Leuven is largely a student city, so it is easy to enjoy the social aspects of student life there. Brussels is also a very short train ride away, significantly widening opportunities to escape the small-scale student life if needed. However, I do wish that I knew about the Belgian culture of going home on weekends before I arrived. This was a big shock for me. Belgian students would typically be engaged locally in Leuven in student life and social life from Monday to Thursday, but would almost always go back to their family's homes from Thursday night/Friday morning through Sunday every week. Therefore, the dynamic and demographic of the city would greatly change every weekend. Primarily, the only student left behind in Leuven over the weekends would be international students.

10 Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

Academically, I found KU Leuven to be much more demanding than UZH, but I felt that they made up for this disparity by providing opportunities for exam re-takes and a 3rd exam session in the summer. Overall, I also felt that KU Leuven provided a wider range of courses for Double Degree students than UZH, and if you wanted to take a course that may not have been listed but could justifiably be considered as meeting the requirements for the program, KU Leuven had a fairly straightforward petition process for these requests. I appreciated this aspect of the academic organization of the Double Degree program at KU Leuven because it provided for more flexibility in pursuing your personal path through the program. Outside of this, I did find that the actual lecturers and faculty at KU Leuven were harder to get in contact with and create connections with due to the culturally established divide in the hierarchy between students and faculty in the Belgian system. I personally did not appreciate that aspect of my academic experience in Leuven, but I also understand that is a cultural concept and I made sure to consider this through my communications with individuals in positions of power throughout Belgium -- this information was also disseminated to use during the international student orientation sessions, so it seems to be a fairly well-known concept in Belgium.

11 City

(e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

Leuven is well-located for short trips and such through Belgium and that area of Europe because it's a quick trip to the Brussels airport from the Leuven train station and it is easy to get to the Netherlands or Germany from Leuven by train as well! Within the city, there are a few museums and even a local Football Club that offer student discounts, so it is easy to keep yourself entertained. Also, throughout the year, there are plenty of events and festivals that make their way through Leuven. Furthermore, Brussels offers many discounted and even free museum days for young people/students that are well worth taking advantage of while in Belgium. There is also a sports center and many outdoor sports fields, as well as bike paths and rock-climbing/bouldering opportunities, within the vicinity of Leuven.

Date: July 2022