

Boston University School of Law

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Boston University School of Law

Study Abroad Final Reports



Graduate Institute of International and
Development Studies
Geneva, Switzerland

FINAL STUDY ABROAD REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Please provide a written assessment of your experience abroad this past term in light of your academic and educational objectives. In particular, please touch on the following: your overall experience at the foreign institution, the quality of the faculty and the quality and availability of courses offered. Please also comment on other topics you feel might be helpful to future students, such as quality of life, financial, housing, social or other considerations that had an impact on your experience. Your report need not be longer than two pages.

- 2) Please indicate whether we can share your information with current BU Law students interested in participating in our study abroad programs.
 - a) Will you share your personal email address with students who request to contact former program participants?
YES
NO

 - b) Will you share your final study abroad report (with any identifying information redacted) in a binder housed in the OGIP?
YES
NO

Please write your Final Study Abroad Report below.

Name:

Semester/Institution: Fall Semester 2023 – Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID)

REPORT:

I greatly enjoyed my semester in Geneva and recommend the program to students interested in public international law. I believed the semester helped me further my academic and career goals, and I really enjoyed living in Geneva.

The Graduate Institute is a welcoming institution with a diverse student population. Classes are mostly taught in English, but some French courses are offered, including French language courses. Some professors also offer to grade papers written in French (I personally did not choose that route). I especially appreciated the diversity of courses taught at IHEID. The school offered traditional international law courses such as international criminal law, as well as a variety of other courses covering topics such as internet regulation, carbon pricing, and migration law. I appreciated this variety given that most American law schools focus on domestic law.

I overall enjoyed the faculty who taught my classes, although teaching styles ranged greatly depending on the subject matter. Most of my classes required a final essay in lieu of a final exam; final essays could cover *any* topic or idea related to the course subject matter. As a result, most professors did not follow a strict teaching method in hopes of preparing students for a final exam, and most courses were discussion-based. In my opinion, some professors were harder to follow, while others presented their subjects very well. Nevertheless, I learned from all of my classes and found all of the faculty experts in their respective fields.

The workload was similar to that of my BU classes. However, none of my classes employed cold calling, and the final assessment for all but one of classes was a final essay on any topic related to the course. Furthermore, most of the assigned readings were treaties/articles/reports rather than cases. As a result, I felt less pressure to carefully outline a case in comparison to regular law courses, despite the number of readings sometimes exceeding what I would be assigned at BU. This was my experience – some of my friends took courses that were taught in the Socratic method and were more similar to U.S. law courses. I sometimes wished I was challenged a bit more, but I overall enjoyed all of my courses. I achieved some important academic goals I couldn't at BU alone, while still feeling less stress overall due to the pass/fail nature of the semester.

Beyond the courses offered, IHEID hosted many educational events, and many organizations partner with the institution. I was able to create connections not only with other IHEID students, but with influential alumni and members of important international organizations.

The quality of life in Geneva is also excellent. I enjoyed the proximity to nature and other beautiful cities. The city is expensive, but I did not find it drastically more expensive than New York or even Boston. Traveling around Switzerland was more expensive than expected, as was eating out at restaurants. Housing was similarly priced to what one would pay in Boston. I recommend living in the Picciotto Residence rather than Grand Morillon – Picciotto is closer to the institute, more centrally located, and has absolutely breathtaking views. All residences are run like dorms, so there are housing rules that one should keep that in mind.

Overall, I really loved Geneva and my semester at IHEID. Geneva itself is such a cosmopolitan city, and more diverse and exciting than expected. I loved Switzerland and life in Geneva – I loved seeing the mountains every day from my dorm, walking alongside Lac Lemman, and making meaningful connections with amazing people. I would recommend it to anyone interested!

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YES X
NO

Please write your Final Study Abroad Report below.

Name:

Semester/Institution: Geneva Graduate Institute, Fall 2023

REPORT:

I absolutely loved my time in Geneva. The Geneva Graduate Institute is the most diverse and energizing academic institution I've ever studied at, with students coming from all over the world to earn their masters and PhDs. I genuinely feel that I learned just as much from my professors as I did from my peers, many of whom have already spent some years working in NGOs and transnational corporations. It was also interesting to take legal courses with students

from other concentrations. Here, the international law subject matter is presented from a slightly different perspective than what would be offered back home, often with more policy and economics discussions mixed in. I found this very helpful for contextualizing complex international law issues. Additionally, most courses here involve not only a final exam, but also presentations and/or research papers. I think it was beneficial to be pushed out of my comfort zone for these presentations since I haven't had to do any public speaking since undergrad, and this skill needed to be exercised. The professors also held well-structured classes and review sessions and made themselves available outside of class through office hours and flexible appointments.

Aside from academics, I loved Geneva as a city and the people I've met here. I will say, I think I had an easier time making friends because I'm a very extroverted person and go out quite often, but I did notice that some people had a bit of a harder time because Geneva can be a bit quiet (and lonely as a result) if you don't put yourself out there and actively seek out social plans.

For simplicity, I'm going to organize my remaining thoughts into lists:

THINGS I LIKED:

1. Orderly – well-connected, reliable, clean public transit; clean and functional living spaces (with biweekly housecleaning)
2. Diverse
3. Charming – the lake, old city, walks by the botanical garden, etc. are breathtaking
4. My apartment! I lived in a studio in Picciotto and had a balcony with unreal views of the mountains and the lake. The location is also amazing—right in front of the institute and 5 stops away from downtown on the tram, or a half hour walk. I highly, highly recommend living in Picciotto rather than Grand Morillon (which is very nice as well, but further outside of the city and without nice views unless you're on the rooftop...also no balconies and the rooms are smaller).
5. The people are kind and openhearted – don't let anybody tell you all French/Swiss people are cold! I've found that if you give out kindness it is returned to you, no matter where you are 😊
6. Fondue (go to Buvette des Bains or Café de Soleil)
7. Sunbathing at the Bain des Paquis with friends
8. Lots of great hikes and quaint towns nearby
9. The Institute hosts many interesting networking and social events. I would definitely take advantage of the free weekly salsa classes!

THINGS I DIDN'T LIKE

1. Transit, restaurants, laundry, gyms/studios, and cosmetic appointments (nails, hair, etc.) are VERY expensive. (Notably, I actually found some other things to be cheaper than in the US, e.g., groceries and rent)

2. The dominant age group at bars/clubs is often 16-18 (drinking age for beer/wine is 16) which can make you feel elderly
3. Most restaurants close between 2/3pm-6/7pm, which is precisely when I like to eat lunch
4. Most grocery stores are closed on Sundays
5. It has been raining almost every day for two months (but maybe you'll have better luck with this if you go in the Spring)

TIPS

1. Live in Picciotto (like I said earlier), and book early because it's first come first served, and the applications open up early. I promise I'm not just biased! My friends who lived in Grand Morillon also confessed that they wished they'd chosen Picciotto instead, but the pictures on the Housing website can be a bit misleading.
2. Join the second-hand WhatsApp groups for students to see if you can find any of the home goods you need before spending too much money (e.g., towels, extra pillows, etc.)
3. Go out in Lausanne – it's easy to get to on the train and the nightlife is infinitely better
4. The best coffee shops for studying are:
 - a. Pages and Sips
 - b. Bastide
 - c. Boreal
 - d. My Little Cup
 - e. Le Fix

I hope this can be of some help for students considering the Geneva program in the future, and I'm more than happy to be a contact if anybody has questions or just wants to learn more about the program!

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Name:

Semester/Institution: Geneva, The Graduate Institute of Int. & Development Studies, Fall 2021

REPORT:

Studying at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies has been a life changing experience. A big part of the reason I wanted to come to Geneva was the chance to learn from and alongside people with diverse backgrounds, and that goal was definitely achieved at the Grad Institute. My classmates were from all over the world and my professors were world-renowned in their field. My international law professor teaches only part time and works at the WTO full time and his real world insight made the class more interesting and made learning trade law much easier. Yet while the quality of the professors was high, the lack of courses to select from was a definite downside. I did enjoy my courses and feel like I learned a lot I would not have learned in the same way at BU, however, I felt like the 5 classes I took were my only options. There were only about 8–10 to choose from and a few of them did not align with my interests or educational outcomes at all so it made the selection limited. The main difference, other than the fact that the topics are far more theoretical than at a traditional law school, was the over the top almost unbelievable amount of reading. Some professors expect 100+ pages a week. However, I only had one professor use the cold-calling method and he used a panel system. Classes were small, 4 were under 15 people and only one was a normal sized class of maybe 60, so professors encouraged class discussions and it was normally never an issue. I enjoyed sharing my perspective as an American and learning about other vastly different ideas and perspectives particularly surround international human rights law. We did not just discuss what the laws were and their applications. We also discussed what the law is and why people and states follow it. It was tough at first because I was not used to such an abstract conceptual approach, but I think learning these topics in this way changed the way I think and will ultimately make me a better lawyer. Professors also welcome debate or even pushback if a student thinks differently. I was

fairly surprised by a student flat out telling a professor he was wrong, but it simply stimulated a lively debate. Lastly, the style of examination was very different. Only one of my classes had a typical law school style exam. The other 4 classes were papers or presentations of various styles. I found that having to do such an extensive amount of additional research really helped solidify what I had learned over the semester and while the papers were all incredibly grueling I think I learned a lot from this method.

The city of Geneva itself is amazing! It is a small city with great public transportation so it was very accessible. It is also the perfect place to study any international law topic, especially human rights. That is why I went there and I found that was the case with many classmates. However, the city is VERY expensive. I could not even find a cheeseburger for under \$18. The student housing is decent enough but almost a 20 minute walk to campus and the only place where buses were not very useful. Though it is easy and you will not find anything cheaper. There were around 40 other exchange students, with only 5 from the US and only one other person was in law school. But because everyone is there for a short time everyone is very eager to make friends and it is easy to be social if you seek out the opportunity. Also, Switzerland is so central and is wonderful for weekend trips if that is of interest. Overall I would highly recommend Geneva.

FINAL STUDY ABROAD REPORT

Please write your Final Study Abroad Report below.

Name: _____

Semester/Institution: Fall 2020, The Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland

REPORT:

I applied to the Graduate Institute for study abroad because I wished to undertake specialized and comprehensive study in International Law. I did this having mostly avoided specialized International Law classes prior, as I wished to have a holistic legal education. My main objective was therefore to learn about specific subdivisions of International Law.

Overall, my objectives were fulfilled. I took classes named Laws of War, International Trade Law, Law Without the State, The Place of the State in the Time of Globalization and International Migration Law. The course offerings were diverse and I was very satisfied with the education I received in each course.

One word of caution, however, for those wanting to study at the Graduate Institute, is that study abroad students have lower priority when it comes to class registration. This means that study abroad students often may not get into the most popular classes. Some classes are also exclusively for students in the core International Law program there. Despite this fact, I was satisfied with the courses I chose, and managed to get into most of them.

I am unfortunately unable to evaluate the actual facilities of the Graduate Institute, as Geneva went into lockdown due to COVID shortly after the semester began, requiring a transition to remote learning. That being said, the transition and online experience was very smooth.

Regarding non-academic aspects of the experience, I would advise prospective students to do a lot of research and preparatory work ahead of time. One aspect to consider is that Geneva is quite expensive, especially in terms of food. Even casual restaurants or fast-food, and indeed groceries, are significantly more expensive than in the US. Rent can also be expensive, depending on where one stays.

Housing was the most challenging aspect of getting set up. The housing market in Geneva is challenging to navigate, because prospective tenants must apply for tenancy, and are usually

rejected. If it were not the case that my wife were Swiss and already understood both the system and had the pre-requisites to rent, I do not know how I would have managed given that the Graduate Institute housing was unavailable due to COVID. Even with this advantage, it took us weeks to find a place to live for such a short period of time, as most landlords will not rent for less than a year.

I am happy to share my email to prospective study abroad students, and for this report, with redacted personal information, to be shared with OGIP.

FINAL STUDY ABROAD REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Write a one page report assessing your experience abroad, in light of your academic and personal goals. Topics to consider:

| | | |
|-------------------|------------|---------------|
| Courses | Professors | Housing |
| Social Activities | City Life | Money Matters |

- 2) Please indicate whether we can share your information with current BU Law students interested in participating in study abroad programs.
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- YES NO
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- YES NO

Please write your Final Study Abroad Report below.

PROGRAM NAME & SEMESTER: Geneva, Fall 2013

I'm not sure I have much to elaborate on, beyond what I wrote in my mid-semester report, but I'll talk about everything again.

Courses & Professors:

Courses are awesome. The selection can be a bit limited, but the school is very flexible with exchange students about their schedules. Additionally, as someone who took full advantage of add drop to class shop, there really are no bad classes. The professors there are all very smart, passionate, and supportive. I'm very pleased with my experience with my courses.

The one drawback is that there is *a lot* of reading. Much more than you think there should be. While classes only meet once a week, you *will* need that time to complete all the assigned reading.

Social Activities:

The Graduate Institute Student Association (GISA) is very supportive of the student body and constantly holding and planning events. There are also many student organizations to join, and it's also easy to form your own. Plus, each discipline (law, development, etc.) has their own budget to hold their own events.

City Life & Housing:

Geneva is very expensive. There is no getting around that. Housing is also *very* difficult to find. While the school does have housing for students, it is *very* nice, but (in my opinion) prohibitively expensive. Factor in a lot of time and money for this semester.

Money Matters:

Despite being the land of banks, banking is a nightmare here. Opening up an account without a residence permit is impossible. Opening an account as an American is difficult. Trying to use a local branch of your bank back home is also, counter intuitively, also likely impossible. Most international banks in Switzerland are only for the very rich and large corporations, so you likely will not have access despite being a bank member.

Additionally, many places won't take credit cards, or will only take Swiss or European credit cards. If you can, change your pin number from six to four digits before you leave as

Europe seems to only have four digit pins. My advice, as risky as it sounds, is just to bring a lot of cash.

Misc.:

The visa process is very complicated and long. Housing is impossible, but you can't obtain a visa without a proof of residency, and, depending on the person going through your application, they can be very persnickety about proof of residency. Even after showing proof of residency in your visa application, you might be required to do so again when registering your stay at the local cantonal office and obtaining your residence permit (which is, of course, very expensive).

I hate to advocate any unlawful actions, but as a student staying for one semester (and therefore not likely doing anything which would require a residence permit), I would not worry too much about the visa or residence permit. Due a misunderstanding with the visa office, I entered the country without my visa. And after obtaining my residence permit, it never had any occasion to leave my wallet. One of my fellow exchange students only got his residence permit two weeks before the end of the semester. For as needlessly stringent Switzerland is about obtaining the visa and residence permit, once obtained they're basically useless.

Also, be proactive in regards to the administration. I think they had a lot on their plate this semester as the school was in the middle of moving and re-establishing itself, but the administration was not the most attentive. Sometimes it was easier to bring things to the attention of GISA, who would then work with the administration.

Lastly, the school is still under construction, so there are some attendant problems with that. But as BU is also currently under construction, it shouldn't be much different.

MID-SEMESTER STUDY ABROAD REPORT

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Write a one page report assessing your experience abroad, in light of your academic and personal goals. Topics to consider:

Courses

Professors

Housing

Social Activities

City Life

Money Matters

- 2) Please indicate whether we can share your information with current BU Law students interested in participating in study abroad programs.
 - a) Will you share your personal email address with students who request to contact former program participants?
YES NO
 - b) Will you share your mid-semester report (with any indentifying information redacted) in a binder housed in the OGIP?
YES NO

Please write your Mid-Semester Study Abroad Report below.

PROGRAM NAME & SEMESTER: Geneva, Fall 2013

The program so far has been a mixed bag for me, but I'll start with the positives.

First, the courses are great. Exchange students especially are given nearly free reign to choose among the course offerings. I'm enjoying my classes and the professors are fantastic. Although each class meets only once a week, there is *a lot* of reading so you definitely need that extra time to prepare. Second, GISA (Graduate Institute Student Association) hosts lots of events and provides information on various student groups you can join. It's very easy to get involved and everyone is very nice!

As far as Geneva itself goes, I had a general idea of what to expect and haven't really been surprised (negatively or positively) by much. Housing is impossible, of course. Geneva isn't a very touristy city so I would never come here expecting a European holiday. The city actually reminds me a lot of Boston, especially weather-wise. The one problem I ran into here is with banking. While there are branches of most major US banks in Switzerland, they're mostly "private" banks for high rolling clients. So although there's a Citi Bank down the street from me, I can't use it to access my account. Most bank employees in the US have no idea what I'm talking about when I mention the private banks, so be aware!

My main issue so far has been with the school, both the building and the administration. As far as the school itself, the main issue is that we're all attending courses in a half finished building. We didn't have trashcans for the first month. The rooms were built too tiny so almost every class is extremely over-crowded. Most rooms either have next to no outlets or the outlets don't work. There are only about 10 computers available for the entire student population to use (and we apparently aren't getting more!). For some reason, wifi doesn't work in half of the library. And, of course, the school exploded one Friday afternoon.

The administration is comparatively a minor issue, but annoying all the same. Prior to school starting, no one in the administration seemed to know what the exchange students were supposed to do. We were only officially "registered", provided with ID cards, etc. the day before classes started. While everyone working here is very nice, it sometimes seems like they forgot they had exchange students coming. Also, it seems that there's a lack of knowledge in general. For instance, the school website stated we could take PE classes through UNIGE, but when I asked about it I was informed that unfortunately that arrangement had lapsed. Surprisingly, I have since encountered many students that have signed up for several different PE classes at UNIGE.

In sum, I feel like I'm learning a lot here, but there are a lot of wrinkles for the school to straighten out. I'm hoping that most of this is caused by the transition the Graduate Institute seems to be undergoing and that future semesters will be less fraught with problems.

Graduate Institute Fall '10: Final Report

February 3, 2011

My semester at the Graduate Institute in Geneva was a positive experience. I enjoyed my classes, especially international investment law and the doctoral seminar in legal anthropology. Some, though not all, of my courses were taught at the level of law and graduate classes at BU, and though coursework was limited during the semester, the finals period ended up as busy as one at BU. I was able to take advantage of the less intense workload in September, October and November to travel and work on other projects (including article editing for the International Law Journal). In December, I had two in-class finals, two take-home finals, and two long-format final papers that took up the entire month and part of January. Though the school's policy of having all exams take place in the week before Christmas while classes are still in session makes the timing of finals awkward, the professors are aware of this and I did not have serious conflicts.

The Graduate Institute is a sensible choice for students with interdisciplinary interests. The school has substantial course offerings in international law, especially international public law and human rights, but the majority of its courses are in international affairs and development studies. My course schedule represented a cross-section of the Graduate Institute's programs; I took courses in political science, political economy, legal anthropology, international law and statistics. Students looking to exclusively take law courses might have difficulty assembling a schedule, especially if they are limited to English language classes (the Graduate Institute does not allow its exchange students to take free French courses at the University of Geneva, a privilege extended to regular students at the Institute). The program at the Institute was very well suited to my dual degree program. I was able to convince BU's International Relations department to accept the credits I earned at the Graduate Institute toward my Master's degree; after all, every course at the Graduate Institute has an international focus. As a result, I will be graduating from both the law and Master's programs this spring, saving me a semester of time and tuition – certainly the single most beneficial aspect of the semester at the Graduate Institute for me.

As I mentioned, the workload during the semester afforded me ample opportunity to travel. However, I would probably have been equally well served by interning at an international organization for 10-15 hours a week. When I arrived in Geneva, I made an appointment with the career services office. (I had to subvert the normal channels to do so, because the wait for an appointment was almost a month! The career services office was very much displeased by my efforts.) During my appointment, I was told that finding part-time work for the short length of time I had in Geneva would be nearly impossible. Most international organization internships (which is what I was looking for) are full-time (and unpaid) or for six months or more. I made a cost-benefit decision to focus on the coursework and enjoy my time in Western Europe. However, if I had known how difficult it would be to find an opportunity on arrival in Geneva, I would have worked harder at arranging a position during last summer. I think the best configuration would be to tie the semester at the Graduate Institute with a summer working in Geneva. Several other exchange students had done that, working full-time during the summer and part-time during the semester, and had a richer experience as a result.

In terms of logistics, students should be aware of certain Swiss idiosyncracies. First, though housing is difficult to find and expensive, the Graduate Institute has some secret student housing options that are only revealed via pleas for assistance from Concepta Canale, the Graduate Institute's sometimes-helpful administrator for the exchange program (I used glocals.com, an expat Craigslist, with great results). Second, student visas and registration with the Canton (required for those staying over 90 days) runs around \$300. Some of my classmates limited their stay to 90 days to avoid these costs; others took frequent trips to non-Schengen countries; and still others ignored the visa requirements entirely. I went through the residency process, but I would have found it less traumatizing if I knew the cost in advance. Third, if glocals offers a three-month half-fare rail pass, as it did during my semester, it's a fantastic deal and students with any interest in traveling around Switzerland should seek it out. Surely there are other tidbits like this; it may make sense for the BU study abroad office to compile these sorts of tips in a PDF for future students.

Overall, I'm glad that I studied at the Graduate Institute last semester. I was able to take a broader variety of courses in international development studies than I could have at BU; I benefited from a different take on global affairs; I had the opportunity to travel extensively; and I saved a semester of school. The program there is not for everyone: students looking to take legal courses exclusively might find themselves limited. However, students interested in academic study of international affairs, international development and international law in equal measures should be able to construct schedules that meet their needs. Students hoping to intern with international organizations should begin their inquiries long before the semester begins, and should consider spending six months or more in Geneva in order to improve their prospects and deepen their experience.