

STAP Experience Report for: University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 2024/2025

Fall term, 12.09.24 - 20.12.24

Completed Courses:

Gender, Power and Representation

Politics of the Middle East

Europe and Migration



Choosing Edinburgh & The University

When choosing my preferred schools for my semester abroad, I was sure I wanted to spend my time in an English-speaking country. Which I feel like was the right choice, allowing me to go through the city fairly easy and a feeling of settling in came to me easily. The University of Edinburgh provided a very international surrounding, with several regular students being international students as well. In order to study here you need to have a certificate for your English skills, however no further certificates were needed for the University specifically.

I did moreover choose Edinburgh as one of my study abroad options, due to the cultural aspects of the city and its environment. Edinburgh offers quite a rich art and night life culture with many museums and pubs, with lots of different atmospheres.

While the aspects of Academia were kind of secondary to my initial decision, the University of Edinburgh surprised me with how fitting it was for my studies. The course list for political science was quite rich in topics, in the end I took the recommended three courses, which allowed for a manageable workload exam wise. However do note that readings can be quite lengthy. You should be prepared for quite a lot of writing, since both midterms and final exams often consist of writing assignments of over 1000-2000 words.

One of my courses was “Gender, Power and Representation”, which consisted of a 3-hour seminar, which was used for reading-based discussions. It was probably my favourite of the courses, due to the engaging topic, which we also constantly discussed regarding current news, and the excellent professor, which was constantly engaged in discussions herself as well as always open to answer any questions one might have. Furthermore it did offer me a great insight into gendered aspects of politics. The readings and exercises were really interesting and allowed for a better understanding of representation. While women were the majority in the class, there were a few men in it, so don't feel discouraged to take such a class, they are not gendered and really allow for broadening everyone's horizons.

My other two courses consisted of a lecture and a tutorial. The lectures were similar to my home institution, however much shorter in length and the tutorials were more like small seminars, where we discussed specific questions and topics, regarding the week's lectures.

The first course was “Europe and Migration”, which discussed the current situation of migration and immigration politics throughout Europe and the EU, giving insights into the politics overall, but also taking a closer look on the recent influences of the radical right parties across Europe. My tutorial group was actually led by our professor, which resulted in really fun discussions. Especially with a European background it was relatively easy to understand the materials and partake in the discussions. Due to the different backgrounds of students, the discussions offered a wide variety of insights about the topics. In addition to this the courses grading was 10% based upon a kind of Model parliamentary discussion of migration laws, which was a fun exercise in addition to the great discussions we had in class.

My last course was “Politics of the Middle East”, which had several guest lecturers, all of which were presenting their fields. The topic is obviously very important currently and gives you a proper background knowledge to look at current developments from a more academic

██████████,
B.Sc. Sociology & Politics
University of Cologne

perspective. The reading in this course can be quite a lot, but is important especially for the tutorials, in which we could really discuss about every week's topics quite nuanced. The only downside in this course was, that due to the changing set of professors, there was not as much interaction with them, as opposed to my other two courses. Furthermore some of the professors were not the best at giving presentations, resulting in rather dull lectures from time to time, yet the quality of the education given was still at a high level.

Overall the University really offered a great time of studying, which I surprisingly cherished quite a lot and really helped me to find new perspectives for my academic future.

Accommodation and Finances

If you want to live in the University accommodation, I would highly recommend to reach out to the Allocations team after the end of the applications deadline, since they will likely not reach out to you before your arrival date. Since visiting students, who only stay a semester, are not guaranteed to get allocated, it is important to contact the allocations team. I did this slightly to late, but after frequently checking in with the team via telephone, they did find a spot for me. The financial team was also very helpful if you have problems with the money transfer.

If you do decide on university accommodation, I would just be prepared to not have utensils in the kitchen nor sheets or pillows. The University does however offer a "Take what you need" event, where previous students offer their left behind items for free to the new arrivals, great opportunity to get anything from pots and pans to clothing hangers and even small shelves.

Overall I was very happy with the accommodation itself, however the offered rooms can be quite pricey so be prepared for this. I ended up in accommodation for master students, because it was one of the few places left, but generally they do try to place you with people of similar age.

In general I would advise you to have a credit card with you, since in the UK most online payments are either made via UK-debit or credit cards, which I had to struggle with, since I do not own a credit card myself. Otherwise I barely had trouble with the payment systems in Edinburgh. However it is good to have a little cash on hand if your international card doesn't go through at all. Yet this only happened like twice to me.

All over Edinburgh can be a little expensive when it comes to restaurants, but groceries are in similar price ranges like Germany, especially when you are shopping at Lidl, which meant cooking really helped with my budget. When you are getting drinks, try to find places that offer student deals, since there are a lot across the city and they often offer great deals.

Arrival and Departure

Before arriving at the University, I decided to take a trip through the Highlands with my Mother in a Campervan, which was an amazing experience. I highly recommend to plan something similar to everyone staying in Edinburgh. Whether you do it before, after or during your stay, there are plenty of opportunities for such a trip. While I was staying in

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Edinburgh, both the ESN and my accommodation team offered highland trips over the weekends, but if you are an experienced enough driver, you could always rent a car with friends and plan the trip yourself. Taking the car offered me to pack a little bit more, however due to taking a flight back this was kind of problematic later. The flight home was really relaxed though even with two heavy suitcases, especially the Airport in Edinburgh is very calm and easy to get to via Uber or the tram.

I do highly recommend to arrive for Welcome Week and not later, since there are many activities and information events for you to join during the first seven days. It also makes settling in a little bit easier, since the start of the semester kicks off quite intensely after the first few lectures.

Life in Edinburgh and Recommendations

During my stay I found Edinburgh to be a great city for activities. Especially in early September I was able to still enjoy nicer weather and took a trip to Portobello beach, which is only a 30-minute bus ride away and has a few cute locations to get food.

You can take great hikes around Edinburgh, especially Arthur's seat is a must do! But even just walking through the city is always a workout due to its many hills and there are many places you can see and easily get to by foot. Another tip for good weather is the royal botanical garden for a little break, but green spaces aren't rare and you will find a great deal of them all across the city.

Overall there are many great sights scattered throughout the city and just walking through it was breath-taking every single time. The old cemeteries for example are quite beautiful. One of my favourite activities was visiting almost every single museum that Edinburgh has to offer, most of which are free, allowing to experience art and culture easily. Even if you are not a big fan of museums, most of them are really fun and beautifully designed, and if you don't have to pay, what do you have to lose? Another great part of the city is its wide availability of thrift stores where I found some great clothes!

When it comes to going out, the pub culture in Edinburgh is a lot of fun, I really advice you to get a group together for weekly trivia nights, which are offered by most places! If you want to go dancing "Stramash" really was my highlight of the nightlife, offering live music every night and often playing rock and disco classics, the atmosphere in here was always amazing, even on a Tuesday night!

If you do go over the fall semester, Halloween is really fun in Edinburgh and the Christmas time is really amazing, even though the Christmas market is even more expensive than those in Cologne, the city is beautiful around the season.

The University offers a wide range of clubs and societies to join, which I did not, but heard great things about, so be sure to really check out the activity fair during Welcome Week!