

Dear Prospective Student,

You will be spending a semester or more studying in Brussels and you are trying to anticipate what it is “really going to be like”. No matter how hard you try, your actual semester(s) or year(s) abroad will rarely be what you had imagined. Thus the most important thing for you to bring along is an open mind. Be ready for anything; you never know what new experiences may come your way!

That is not to say that you should not organize your trip. The Infofile is meant to give you an overview and suggestions on how to prepare for your move to Belgium. It will also serve as a guideline when you are in Belgium to remind you of what you have to do, so **bring it along**.

The Infofile contains a multitude of important information. **Please read it carefully and try not to skip any of the pages!** We hope that you will be able to find answers to all your questions and if you need any help, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Bert Mosselmans, Ph.D.
Dean

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Special thanks to: Forstis-VUB (creator of the Infocfiles)

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1. Introduction

First of all, we would like to congratulate you on your acceptance to Vesalius College and we wish you good luck in your academic career. The Infofile will give you information about non-academic aspects of your stay in Belgium. The administration of Vesalius College hopes to help you achieve your academic goals in the best possible conditions. The Infofile contains valuable information about the formalities you have to take care of before you leave for Belgium. It will also give you directions to Vesalius College.

1.1. Belgium

The country

Belgium is a small country (30,518 square kilometers) in the north-west of the European continent. In the north-west of Belgium there is a small coastal strip, where it meets the North Sea, which separates the European continent from the United Kingdom.

Belgium's neighbours to the south are France and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (an even smaller country); in the east, the German Federal Republic, and in the north the Netherlands, a slightly larger country than Belgium. The country is flat in the north, and hilly in the south, the highest point is about 700 meters above sea level (Botrange, 694 m.). The climate is moderate, with great variation between seasons. In the summer temperatures are usually somewhere between 20°C (68°F) and 30°C (86°F), in the winter between minus 10°C (14°F) and plus 10°C (50°F). It usually rains a lot, no matter what season.

The people

Belgium has approximately 10 million inhabitants. There are two main language groups, French-speaking Walloons, mainly in the south and east (42% of the population) and Dutch-speaking Flemish mainly in the north and west (57% of the population). There also is a small German-speaking community in the east (approximately 1% of the population).

Not all people living in Belgium are native Belgians: at present some 9% of the population is of foreign origin, in other words about 900.000 people. Foreigners originate from countries both inside and outside the European Community. The largest groups of foreigners are Italians, Moroccans, Turks, French, Dutch, Germans and British.

The state

Belgium is a constitutional monarchy, founded in 1830. This means that the King's power is limited by the constitution. The present King of Belgium is Albert II.

The history of the Belgian State has to a large extent been determined by the way in which the two main cultural groups have related to each other. From 1970, the country has evolved from a unitary state into a federal state.

At present the state consists of three "language communities" and three "regions". The language communities, Flemish, French and German, have authority over cultural and "personal" matters. The regions Flanders, Wallonia and (bilingual) Brussels have authority over "territorial-bound" matters. This all adds up to a total of no less than six governments: the federal government, the Flemish executive, the Wallonian regional executive, the Brussels regional executive, the French community executive, and finally the German community executive body.

1.2. Brussels

Geographically Brussels lies in the heart of Belgium. The city is bilingual, but predominantly French-speaking. About 80% of the population of greater Brussels is French-speaking. Brussels is, nevertheless, completely surrounded by the Flemish region. The bilingual aspect of Brussels is very obvious: all streets have a Dutch and French name, and even many of the 19 communes that together form greater Brussels, have a Dutch and a French name.

Brussels has many faces. As a city, it is the capital of Belgium, where the King resides and where the federal parliament and government have their seat. The Flemish parliament and government also have their seat in Brussels, so although Brussels is not part of the Flemish region, it is its capital.

Brussels is also called “the Capital of Europe”: the European Community has Brussels as its main administrative center next to Strasbourg in France. Many European administrators known as ‘Eurocrats’ live in Brussels. This European dimension has also turned Brussels into an important international business center: a lot of foreign and multinational companies and businesses have branches and people in Brussels. Add the large groups of Moroccans, Turks, Congolese,.... and you will see that Brussels is a place where not only the different cultures of Belgium but also the cultures of the world meet.

Brussels is also a region in itself, with its own parliament and government with territorially orientated authorities. This region comprises the 19 communities that form greater Brussels. Since Brussels is officially a bilingual region, the French and Flemish language communities have authority over cultural and personal matters of their language groups within the Brussels region. As this short introduction illustrates, Brussels is a junction in many ways. Want to know more about it? Come and see for yourself!

2. Arrival: Practical Information

Warning: due to some changes in the legislations, you may be asked to state proof of the purpose of your journey when you enter our country. Have your letter of acceptance from the university (or a legalized copy) at hand so that you can show it when asked.

Mailing address:

Vesalius College
Pleinlaan 2
1050 Brussels
Web: www.vesalius.edu

Physical address of Vesalius College:

Triomflaan 32 and Schoofslaan 8
1160 Brussels
Tel: 32 (2) 629 28 21
Fax: 32 (2) 629 36 37

Vesalius College is open from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 12:30 and from 13:30 to 17:00. The office is closed on August 15th (public holiday) and for the week between Christmas and New Year.

2.1. Off-campus housing

Please let us know when you will arrive in Belgium. You should complete and return the confirmation of attendance form to us to let us know of your intentions.

Vesalius College does not have on-campus housing. Students are responsible for making their own housing arrangements. However, Vesalius College will help students find suitable off-campus housing if requested. Student rooms are available in a wide price range (350 to 600 Euros per month on average) and many are conveniently located to the campus. Housing cannot be arranged before you arrive in Belgium. The earlier you arrive in Brussels, the easier it will be to find accommodation. We suggest that you arrive one week before Orientation if at all possible. We advise you to arrange temporary housing in advance of your arrival (see the suggested list of temporary housing).

2.2. Temporary housing

Youth Hostels in Brussels

Hôtel de Jeunes “Sleep Well”

Rue du Damier 23
1000 Brussels
Tel: 32 (2) 218 50 50
Fax: 32 (2) 218 13 13
e-mail: info@sleepwell.be
web: www.sleepwell.be

Centre Sportif de la Forêt de Soignes

Chaussée de Wavre 2057
1160 Brussels
Tel.: 32 (2) 672 22 60
Fax: 32 (2) 672 19 39
e-mail: info@csfds.be
web: www.csfds.be

Auberge de Jeunesse “Jacques Brel”

Rue de la Sablonnière 30
1000 Brussels
Tel: 32 (2) 218 01 87
Fax: 32 (2) 217 20 05
e-mail: brussels.brel@laj.be

“Bruegel”

Heilige Geeststraat 2
1000 Brussels
Tel: 32 (2) 511 04 36
Fax: 32 (2) 512 07 11
e-mail: brussel@vjh.be

PLEASE RESERVE YOUR ROOM BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR BRUSSELS

Hotels near Vesalius College

Hotel Lambermont
Boulevard Lambermont 322
1030 BRUSSELS
Tel: 32 (2) 242 55 95
Fax: 32 (2) 215 36 13
email: lambermonthotel@skynet.be
web: www.lambermont-hotel.com

Forum Hotel
Avenue du Haut-Pont 2
1060 BRUSSELS
Tel: 32 (2) 343 01 00
Fax: 32 (2) 347 00 54

Hotel near Brussels airport

Novotel Brussels Airport
Bedrijvenzone Diegem-Vuurberg
Da Vincilaan 25, 1831 Diegem-Zaventem
Tel.: 32 (2) 725 30 50. Fax: 32 (2) 721 39 58
E-mail: H0467@accor.com

2.3. At Zaventem airport (Brussels airport)

2.3.1. Money-exchange agents, telephones

When you have passed the customs and leave the passenger-zone, you will find money-exchange agencies at your right-hand side, next to the arrival-exit. Do not exchange too much money there because these agencies are slightly more expensive than banks elsewhere. It is advisable to get at least 30 Euros. Ask for coins (1 and 2 Euro) as they come in handy.

At the end of the hall on your left-hand side, you will find a room with public telephones. You can buy telephone cards at the post office next to the room with the telephones. There are other telephones in the arrival hall, at the other end of the hall, past the cafeteria.

Card-operated pay phones

This card is a kind of credit card which gives you credit for a certain time. Every time you use it, the machine deletes the amount of money you have used. The price for a card is 5 Euros. If you have a credit card you may use it too.

Take the receiver off the hook, wait for the dial tone, and then insert the card. The small window on the phone will display the credit on your card. Dial the number. When a small light starts flashing and/or you hear a sound signal your card is almost empty. If you have another card at hand if you want to continue your call without interruption, you have about 20 seconds to push the button marked with an arrow, remove the empty card and replace it with a new one. If you want to check how much credit you have left, insert your card in the apparatus without taking the receiver off the hook and the remaining credit will be displayed.

Coin-operated pay phone

These pay phones only accept 20 Cent, 50 Cent, 1 and 2 Euro coins. The minimum amount you can insert is two coins of 20 Cents.

Take the receiver off the hook, wait until you hear the dial tone, insert the coins, and dial the number. The amount of money that you have inserted is displayed in a small digital window. When the display starts flashing, your time is almost over. If you want to continue your call without interruptions, you have to insert more money quickly, or else the connection will be cut off.

If you finish before your time is up, the machine will return any unused coins. Therefore it is better to use coins of 20 Cents if you only want to make a short call, or if you only want to extend your conversation a little after the display starts flashing. The apparatus will not return coins for a 50 Cent coin that was not used completely. For international calls it is better to insert coins of 1 or 2 Euro.

2.3.2. Luggage

If you wish you may leave your luggage (or part of it) at the airport, and pick it up later. Make sure that you have everything you need for the first two days in a separate bag to take with you. Here's how it works:

Turn left outside the passenger-zone and walk straight on. Walk until you reach the end of the arrival hall and you can't go any further. You will find a room with lockers on your left-hand side (just follow the sign "LOCKERS").

The lockers work with tokens that you can get from a machine located in the same room. The tokens cost 2 Euro each. First select the number of tokens you desire then insert the money. The machine will return the change. There are three sizes of lockers. The small lockers take 1 token, the medium 2 tokens and the large lockers 3 tokens. If you collect your luggage before midnight the following day, you will not have to insert extra tokens. Next to the keyhole there is a small dial: within this period it will be in position “1” or “2” (the second day). If you collect your luggage before midnight two days later, the dial will be in position “3”. You will have to insert the same amount of tokens as you did when you stored the luggage in order to open the locker. If you come and collect your luggage after the third day at midnight, you will not be able to open the locker yourself. You will have to pick up the phone on the wall and dial 3974, 3971 or 3992. You will also have to pay an additional fee of 1, 2 or 3 tokens per extra day depending on the size of the locker.

If you do not collect your luggage within one month, your luggage will be considered abandoned and you will not be able to reclaim it!

2.4. From Zaventem airport to Vesalius College

2.4.1. Train

The cheapest way to get from Zaventem to Vesalius College is by train and tram. There are two ways of reaching the train station.

If you are near the exit of the passenger zone, just follow the “train” signs which lead you to the escalator. If you have a lot of luggage it is practical to take the elevator downstairs.

In the station you will find a ticket office of the national railway company. A ticket for Brussels costs 2.80 Euros. Go to the platforms. There are two platforms; an arrow will indicate from which of the two platforms the first train will leave. Trains operate regularly to Brussels (4 per hour).

Get off the train at “Brussel Noord”. From the platform go downstairs and to the main exit which is the direction of descending platform numbers. In other words, walk towards platform 1. You will enter a big hall, then walk through the glass doors and you will enter another big hall. Walk until you arrive between two rooms of escalators.

In between the escalators you will see an orange-colored ticket vending machine. This machine also gives instructions in English; choose the option “other languages” and then “English”. Buy a ticket; a one-ride ticket will do. (Cost 1.50 euros).

Take the escalator underneath the sign “90 Midi-Zuid” (there is one to your left and one to your right; both lead to the same platform). Take a tram with the indication “90 Zuid/Midi” above the windshield. Insert the ticket in one of the orange colored punching machines and take it out again. After leaving the “Brussels Noord” station, the tram will go above ground and at a certain point it will go underground again (after the stop at “Meiser”). After four stops, it will go above ground again. Get out at the fifth stop called “Etterbeek” station. On your left-hand side you will see the “Etterbeek” train station. Next to the train station (on the left) you will see the City Bank building. Opposite the City Bank you will find an oval shape building (building M) located on the campus of the “Vrije Universiteit Brussel” (VUB). Walk alongside the campus of the VUB and turn right at the lights on the “Triomflaan or Boulevard du Triomphe”. Opposite entrance number 7 of the VUB campus, cross the street and you will find Vesalius College (number 32, ground floor).

By public transport this is the fastest and easiest way to reach Vesalius College.

If you miss “Brussel Noord” station, get out at “Brussel Centraal” station. Follow the signs “Metro” (or a white capital M on a blue background). Buy a one-ride ticket at the ticket window (1.50 Euros). Stamp the ticket in one of the orange coloured ticket stamping machines and then take it out again.

You need to get on a metro with destination “H. Debroux”. When you enter the passenger zone of the metro station, turn left immediately and go downstairs. The platform signs indicate the destination of the next metro-train. Make sure you get on a metro-train with destination “H. Debroux”. Check the destination above the windshield of the vehicle because the information on the platform is not always accurate.

Get out at “Petillon”, this is the seventh stop. Once out of the metro-train, turn left, exit “Vrijwillingerslaan or Avenue des Volontaires”. Outside the metro station, turn right and walk straight on. Cross the “Waversesteenweg or Chaussée de Wavre” and you will arrive on the “Schoofslaan”, walk straight on and you will arrive at the “Triomflaan or Boulevard du Triomphe”, turn right and you will see Vesalius College on your right-hand side (number 32).

2.4.2. Taxi

Much easier than the train but also more expensive! The official taxis that have a license for Zaventem airport wait right in front of the airport. They can easily be recognized by a diagonally divided blue and yellow colored shield attached to the front (radiator) of the car. The price should be approximately 30 Euros.

Please ask the taxi-driver to drop you off on the corner of the “Triomflaan or Boulevard du Triomphe” and the “Schoofslaan” in “Oudergem or Auderghem” (1160 Brussels). Our offices are located on the “Triomflaan or Boulevard du Triomphe” 32.

3. Important Messages:

Before you leave, make sure you have the following documents with you.

Photocopy them, and keep the photocopies in a separate place in case you lose the originals. They will either help you renew the lost documents (your passport mainly) or replace them:

- Passport: photocopy the page with the picture and the personal information including the date and place of delivery and the page containing your student visa.
- Your student international ID.
- Your ticket: remember it is also valid for the return, so do not throw it away.
- The guarantee of payment pledge that your family completed for the Belgian Consulate or Embassy. It is essential that you have it to obtain your Belgian residence card.
- Proof of medical insurance from your home country that covers you while abroad.
- Birth certificate.

3.1. Electrical appliances

Do not bring any with you if you can avoid it. American appliances used with voltage converters usually burn out or cause problems with fuses. You will be able to purchase small electrical appliances easily in Brussels i.e a hairdryer should cost between 15 and 25 Euros.

3.2. Medicine

Bring along any medicine that you are taking at the time of your departure. Your prescriptions will not be repeated unless you see a doctor in Belgium. The drugs have different names in Europe than in other countries. Please check this with your doctor before you leave!

For most of the medicine you will need a doctor's prescription. Medicine is rarely sold over the counter here, except for aspirins.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, bring along your prescription in case you lose them and need to replace them quickly. Otherwise, you will need to see an optician for a new prescription.

3.3. Money

You may be concerned with the problem of getting money for your expenditures in Belgium. There are various means. It is a good idea to have some travellers' checks. Most students open an account in a Belgian bank. You may open an account in Euros. One of the advantages of having a bank account in Belgium is that someone in your home country can send money or even wire it immediately if you have an emergency.

It is possible now to use the Visa card, Mastercard and other credit cards to withdraw money at certain banks and automatic teller machines (ATM's) in Europe. If you would like to do this, ask the bank in which you have a credit card account what you need to do, you will probably need a special access code for your card.

Please note that Belgium is quite an expensive country to live and study in, so try to make sure you have a small emergency fund available.

3.4. Cost of living in Belgium

Mail

The mail takes 7 to 10 days (outside Europe) and 3 to 6 days (within Europe). Mailing costs are higher in Belgium than in other countries. Postage costs vary depending on the weight and measurements of the letter, so you will need to go to the post office. To simplify your life always try to send the same type and amount of stationery so that you know the cost and can keep stamps at home to cover future mailings. The postage costs are usually increased at the beginning of each year. Post offices are generally open from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 17:00. You can find the post offices locations as well as the price of the stamps on this website: www.post.be, click on EN on the top left hand-side corner for information in English.

Travel

If you want to travel within Europe, there are a few rules that you should keep in mind:

- * Always take your passport and Belgian residence card
- * Tell someone where you will be and when you will return
- * Be realistic in your plans
- * Above all, do not miss classes!

In Belgium, the best deal for travelling by train is the “GO PASS”, 10 one-way trips within Belgium cost 45 Euros (For people under 26 years of age). For longer trips outside Belgium, the student discounts are available. You will probably be tempted to buy an inter rail pass.
Website: www.brail.be.