Exchange semester at
Guanghua School of Management – Peking University
MBA Program
Summer semester 2021

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1. Application period

1a. Application at TUM School of Management

The first step towards a semester abroad at Peking University (hereafter referred to as PKU) is the application at the TUM School of Management. The application process is described in detail on the website of the TUM School of Management. The deadline is in January (for both the summer and winter semesters). Your grade is the most important factor in the selection process, but you can earn extra points if you participate in the buddy programme for incoming exchange students or sublet your flat to them. The DAAD language test for English is sufficient as a proof of language skills. You can pass the DAAD language test at a good level without a lot of preparation. Some knowledge in Chinese is a plus but not a must.

In general, it is also possible to apply to TUMexchange, but we think that you have a better chance of getting a place at your chosen university with TUM SOM, as all TUM students can apply to TUMexchange.

The semesters at PKU run from end of February to end of June (spring/summer semester) and from early September to mid January (fall/winter semester). So if you go to Beijing in the summer semester, you will most likely miss the exams at TUM. Due to the overlap of the semesters, fewer students apply for the summer semester, which is why some of us explicitly applied for this semester to increase their chances in the selection process. We were going during the spring semester and actually only had courses in the first part of the semester (until end of May), as the second part is mostly for compulsory classes and courses in Chinese.
1b. Application at Peking University

Once you have been nominated in the TUM SOM selection process, applying to PKU is really just a formality. You have to apply with your transcript of records, degree certificate (if applicable), CV, nomination letter of TUM SOM, a copy of your passport, a letter of motivation (one page) and fill out an application form (picture required, but no letters of recommendation, only two names and contacts). At the same time, the people from PKU who were responsible for the exchange program were very friendly and helpful. Questions were answered immediately, and problems were handled quite flexibly, making things much easier in times of a pandemic.

2. Preparation

2a. Visa

As our semester was only conducted online due to Corona, we did not have to apply for a visa. But in general, you will need a student visa and apply at the embassy, consulate or with an agency. As you are already a student in China, to get the visa should not be a problem. Remember to apply for a double or multiple entry visa in case you want to travel to Hong Kong, Macau or any other country during your time in China and you want to return to China after. But better have a look at former experience reports for visa matters.

2b. Accommodation

We were not in Beijing due to Corona but were told there is no student accommodation available for exchange students. Therefore, you will have to take care of an accommodation for yourself. As far as we know, prices are similar (or only slightly cheaper) than Munich.

2c. Scholarship

Unlike an exchange in Europe with Erasmus, you do not automatically receive financial support in Beijing. However, several scholarship programs for exchange programs in China exist. These programs are often limited in time but a sophisticated search for scholarships can save you money and help you with student networks.
3. University

3a. Peking University

You must be aware that Peking University, together with Tsinghua University, is the top university in China and comparable to Harvard in the US or Oxford in England. Therefore, millions of Chinese students strive to get into a program there and put significant effort into the central admission test. Nevertheless, less than 1% of applicants are admitted, for non-Beijing students it is much less. We can’t tell you a lot about the campus as we weren’t there, but the pictures looked quite nice.

3b. The MBA program at Guanghua School of Management

If you are in your master’s while doing an exchange at Peking University, you will automatically join classes of the MBA program of Guanghua School of Management (the equivalent to TUM School of Management at PKU). Therefore, most of your classmates will probably be foreigners as well, most already worked for some years before doing the MBA. This is cool, because you get to know people and can make contacts with professionals from all over the world. But on the other side it may be harder to get to know Chinese students, as they only account for 40 or 50% of the class. But the MBA program also means that classes will be small and classes and professors will be more practice oriented than in most normal masters.

3c. Introduction

The spring semester normally starts at the end of February, but it was delayed to mid-March in 2021 due to Corona. The semester started online a week before classes started with a 1.5-hour orientation class where we got some information about Peking University in general and some advice about how to apply for courses and what were the next steps. Also we got to know other exchange students and were assigned to a buddy group and some chats in WeChat.

3c. Courses and exams

Courses can be elected online from start of January in the spring semester (about two months before the start of classes). You will receive a how-to and exact dates in time. There you can assign points to classes according to your preferences. As most exchange students won’t take as many courses as non-exchange students, you will probably have a lot of points to spare and can assign the maximum to the courses you would like to take. In the week before classes start, you will be able to make changes to the courses assigned to you. But as an exchange student it is also possible to cancel courses up to two weeks before the class starts (or even after the first class).
Most courses are only offered in Chinese but there are also around 20 courses in English. Courses always are offered in blocks, so it can be that a class is conducted once a week over two months, twice a week over a month or a week full time. The English courses offered during the spring semester 2021 were all online and many of the international MBA students also were abroad. Therefore, the courses were mostly in the evening hours in Beijing, which means noon to late afternoon in Germany. But if courses are on the campus, times are probably different.

Courses you could choose in the spring semester 2021:

**Core courses** (for normal students, electives for exchange):

- Academic Norms and Thesis Development
- Corporate Finance I
- Corporate Finance II
- Operations Management
- Marketing Management
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Venture Strategy Simulation
- Integrated Practicum Project
- Primary Business Chinese I
- Primary Business Chinese II
- Intermediate Business Chinese

**Electives:**

- The Art and Science of Business Communication
- Managing the MNCs in China
- Case Study on Corporate Finance
- Case Study on Advanced Corporate Finance
- Entrepreneurial Management
- Negotiation
- Design and Deliver Action Oriented Presentations
- Real Estate Investment and Development

Our selected courses were:

- **Managing the MNCs in China**
  Starts at the beginning of the semester and is conducted once a week over two months.
  The professor is Paul Gillis, an American who worked and lived in China for thirty years and helped building up PwC in China. The interesting thing about this course is that the professor will also talk a lot about his own experiences and assessments of all kinds of business and career aspects.
Every week you will have to prepare a case study from Harvard Business School concerning a certain topic or difficulty faced by Multinational Corporations (mostly in the context of China). Cases can often be 15 to 20 pages long and you will have to answer questions about the case on four written pages which you have to hand in. They count 40% of the final grade. The cases will be discussed in class (class participation is 20%) and often the professor will just ask random people about their result or opinion. In the end of the semester an additional report of about 1,500 to 2,000 words has to be written and shortly presented about a self-chosen topic concerning MNCs (40% of the final grade). So overall the course is quite time consuming, but you will also learn a lot about how to manage international corporations, sharpen your decision making and overall acquire a lot of practical business knowledge (especially about China) otherwise not often taught in class.

- **Entrepreneurial Management**
  Starts after one month and is conducted twice a week for a month.
  The course is taught by two professors, Gregory Slayton and Yan Gao. Gregory Slayton teaches the first half of classes and is the archetype of an American entrepreneur, having started and led several software companies in the Silicon Valley and later became a Venture Capitalist with big names in his portfolio. He also teaches at Harvard and Stanford and can really inspire one to start an own start-up. He is very enthusiastic, and shares loads of business, career and personal advice and knowledge and insights into his own life.
  The second half of the course is taught by Yan Gao, VC investor and professor who talks mostly about the more theoretical (VC) financing of ventures, also in the context of China.
  For every class you will have to answer questions about entrepreneurial cases from Harvard Business School on two pages in a fixed team (33% of final grade). Also there are several readings for each class. Both are then discussed in class (participation is also 33%). In parallel and continuously you will work out a business plan and pitch presentation about an own start-up idea which you will present several times and then in a final version in the last class (33%).
  Also this course is very time intensive but you can really gain a lot of insights if you are interested in Entrepreneurship.

- **Negotiation**
  Is a block course over one week around 2.5 months after the start of the semester.
  The professor is Tim Cullen, who worked some time at the World Bank and founded the negotiation program at the University of Oxford.
  The course is very interactive, and you will first learn some background about negotiation and tactics as well as many interesting experiences of Tim Cullen himself.
Then you will apply everything in loads of negotiations between students getting more and more complex and with more parties involved.

40% of the grade is participation and negotiation skills, 30% is a short multiple-choice test and 30% in 1,250 words where you apply your learnings on a chosen negotiation situation. Also a very good course with loads of learnings when you put in the effort.

- **Case Study on Corporate Finance**
  Starts at the beginning of the semester and consists of 10 classes over 10 weeks. It is taught by Douglas Coulter, a very kind and experienced professor who has served in the Vietnam War and previously taught at Harvard University and Moscow State University.
  His course is very hands-on, meaning that each lesson is focused on a specific case that has been previously distributed. Most of the time, you are also required to turn in some calculations before class, which can be quite time consuming in some cases, but really helps you dive deeper into the subject. The lessons itself are also very interactive, meaning that the professor is steadily asking students about their opinion. Thereby, the focus is on the reasoning behind the chosen approach rather than the result. The final grade is then composed of attendance, quality of assignments, and individual contribution to the class.
  Unfortunately, at the end of the course Douglas stated that this was his last semester at PKU and he will be working on other things in the future.

- **Primary Business Chinese I**
  Starts at the beginning of the semester and consists of 12 classes over 12 weeks. This course is a hands-on introduction to the Chinese language. Before the exchange semester, I had already taken Chinese A1.1 and A1.2 at TUM and wanted to continue with the **Primary Business Chinese II** course at PKU. However, I realized in the first lesson that the level was too high and decided to consolidate my basics with the Level 1 course. So I was quite familiar with the content in the first few lessons.
  However, a big advantage of this course compared to the courses at TUM is the small course size with 5 participants and the quite long duration of 3.5 hours, resulting in a very high intensity. With a motivated (Chinese) teacher, all words (much more varied than at TUM) and grammatical points are repeated several times by all participants and dialogues are practiced. Thus, a very solid basis for the Chinese language can be acquired.
  The final grade is then made up of attendance, quality of assignments, individual contribution to the class and the result of a final exam.

Overall, all courses we took were held by international experts in their field mostly with a strong business and practice background (of course also because this is an MBA and no normal Master). So you can really learn a lot if you put in the time. Also classes were small (15 to 20 students) and very interactive, so you could compare them to seminars at TUM.
Grades are overall better than the ones at TUM, but you also have to invest a lot of time and stay put.
But hard work gets appreciated and in our opinion it is much easier to control your final grade if it consists of class participation, written case studies, workshops, discussions, presentations and written reports/papers than only a final exam.
If you don’t have more than two courses simultaneously, the workload should be fine and if you place your courses smart, you will have some free weeks between courses or after the first two quarters of the semester to travel.

8. Conclusion

Even though the semester was completely online, we can fully recommend an exchange semester at Peking University and Guanghua School of Management. The courses are very interactive, taught by interesting and knowledgeable professors and provide great opportunities for learning in the respective fields. Also you get to know a lot of exciting people from all over the world (and of course China), due to the international setting of the MBA.

Beijing itself we have not visited during the semester but can recommend it from former visits. Lots of history and monumental buildings to see as well as the old life in the hutongs. And in parallel of course a very modern city. Together with Hong Kong definitely the most interesting city in China.

In case you should have any questions, feel free to contact us at sebastian-bartl94@gmx.de, jonas.noegel@tum.de or yagmur.hasan44@gmail.com.

Good luck with your application and loads of fun in Beijing!