Exchange Report

Preparation for exchange

I did my exchange at Laval University in Quebec City, Canada. I am French major and Political Science minor at SFU. I was accepted into the bachelor's degree program in French Literature studies for the fall semester from September to December, 2018. I was emailed a list of courses in the program being offered the semester of my exchange for me to choose from. You are allowed to take 1 or 2 courses out of your program. I choose to take a french vocabulary course outside of my program. It was part of the FLE (Français Langue Étranger) program (FLE 3219). If you are taking 300+ level french courses at SFU, these courses will be too easy for you. I took a french syntax course (Ling 2002) which was a good difficulty level. My other two courses were french literature, Québec Literature (LIT 2129) and French Literature from the 18th century (LIT 2125). Both the literature courses were a good challenge for me. The literature courses have a significant amount of reading per course so be aware when picking your courses. We were required to read 6-8 novels per course.

Make sure to pack and invest in quality clothing for cold weather! The temperature drops quick. By mid-november we had a significant amount of snow on the ground and day time highs of -15 some days. My significant other and I made the trip to Quebec by car in the summer and therefore had a car for our stay in the Quebec area. We rented a place through Airbnb that was a 10 minute drive to the university.

There is a bus system here that is very easy to use if you do not have a car though. I would recommend staying on campus if you do not have a car as you would have access to the tunnels to walk to and from class when the weather gets cold. As far as budgeting goes, grocery stores are relatively pricey here compared to in Vancouver. There is also a lack of choice in foods that you may be used to after living in a very multicultural area back home. Taxes are higher as well so it adds up!
During Exchange

I arrived a week before the start of classes. I was not required to do a language placement test online since I have a DELF Certificate. Prepare to spend hours waiting to register at the registrar. The lineup is extremely long. You will need to provide proof of residence in Canada and health care in order to opt out of their mandatory health care for inbound exchange students. You have to register in classes in person at each department for courses you wish to follow. This is very time consuming and each department has its own set of paperwork to fill out (same as paperwork done at the registrar) and different pre-reqs for taking their courses. Ensure you check all this prior to arrival to ensure a smooth transition into classes. I did not have any issue getting into the courses I wished to follow. I attended the orientation as it was mandatory, however, it was geared towards students coming from overseas (talk about visas, health care, etc...) and I did not find it useful as a Canadian Citizen.

Despite the cold weather we are not used to being from Vancouver, Quebec does a great job at snow removal and have quite the efficient system to get snow off the roads as soon as possible following a storm. This allows for less interruptions in school hours due to weather conditions. As far as academics go, all my courses consisted of a three hour lecture once a week. I found my class schedule a little weird since night classes (6:30-9:20pm) are very common here. I unfortunately had an 8:30 am start the day after my night class which made it hard to get a proper sleep going into that class. It did end up being manageable though, just not ideal. Course outlines are well presented at the beginning of the semester and the grading system is fair. I was told towards the end of my semester that I should have let my professors know that I was an exchange
student and French was my second language and they would have taken that into consideration while marking my work. I did not feel that I needed to say anything, but it could be helpful to know that going into the semester, especially if you are worried about a particular assignment or something. Course difficulty and number of assignments is very comparable to SFU.

The culture here is slightly less diverse than back home. There are some really cool French-Canadian traditions to take part in and foods to try. I would recommend trying sucre à la crème and Caribou (traditional festive alcoholic beverage). I would also highly recommend attending a celebration at a Cabane à sucre. Some of my favorite activities that I got to participate in were skating at the Place D’Youville and hiking at the Parc National de la Jacques-Cartier. The skating rink is a small outdoor rink just outside of downtown that opens up once it gets cold enough. I hiked the trail “Les Loupes” to the viewpoint that offered an outstanding view of the valley and park. I also enjoyed my visit to a waterfall just south of Quebec City called Les chutes de la chaudières. These falls were not as crowded as the Montmorency Falls and equally as beautiful! If you have a car, it is worth the drive to head north east for at least a day to see the Charlevoix area. It is the beginning of the Canadian belt and offers spectacular mountain views, gorgeous bays, etc... I went in the winter and it was beautiful in the snow! Just do not try and go on a stormy day as the roads can be very dangerous (and often get closed during storms) due to large hills. Also, plan lunch at a bakery called À Chacun Son Pain. The closest location is in Beaupré, however, their food and pastries are absolutely delicious! If you head out that way, stop by the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. It is absolutely stunning Catholic church. You will not believe it is in Canada!
Reflection After Exchange

I have learned a lot about living on my own and having to buy my own groceries and make my own food. It was hard at times to properly plan my meals but I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to experience living away, on my own. More importantly for me, this trip gave me the opportunity to improve my spoken french. It was hard at first to learn how to go shopping in french. It sounds ridiculous but although I am fluent in french, I had never gone grocery shopping before where everything was labeled in french and all the employees spoke french to me. I was surprised at how few people switched to english when speaking to me. I hear stories all the time about people hearing english accents and automatically switching to english. I must say I barely experienced this. I did do a day trip to Montreal and almost everyone there spoke english to me. If you are going on exchange to improve your french I highly recommend you pick Quebec over Montreal!