During the spring 2015 semester I participated in the exchange program and attended the University of Bath in England. I was admitted into the Management program at the institution and the majority of my courses were in the marketing field.

Before beginning my exchange, there are definitely a few things I wish I had known. I wish I attended an SFU event in which I could talk to past University of Bath exchange students or students coming from Bath. I found the Bath website confusing to navigate as different terminology is used (course=module) etc. and talking to a former or current Bath student would have helped me with this. I would have also asked about student housing and which dorms were the best and other general questions about the city. I would have also found it helpful to know that I didn’t need to get a student visa in order to go on exchange under my circumstances and that obtaining a visitor visa was so easy to do upon my arrival at the British airport.

When packing I wish I had packed a larger variety of clothing. I would recommend anyone going on exchange (especially in England) to pack for very cold weather. Although packing large winter jackets may seem difficult to accommodate on the plane, it will make a huge difference. It is important to pack for different extremes in the weather as you never know where you may end up travelling or what the weather at your exchange institution will be. I also suggest packing a school backpack as well as a travel backpack. These two items were extremely helpful both on campus and travelling around Europe. Make sure when buying a travel backpack that you check the size requirements for smaller airlines in order to avoid extra baggage fees while travelling around Europe.

My flight to and from England was excellent both in price and experience. I began searching for flights as soon as I was accepted for exchange. I looked as soon as possible in order to get the best price and flight. I would suggest trying to get a direct flight as this will lessen the chances of losing baggage and will make the process a lot easier. I really enjoyed my flight with British Airways and I would recommend the airline to any future exchange student. I was fortunate enough to have family situated in England pick me up from the airport and drive me to my University so I did not need to arrange transportation from the airport. It is easy however to get a direct train from the airport to Bath and most of the student housing is walking distance from the train station.

The cost of living especially food was almost double that it is in Vancouver so it is important to plan for this in your budget. I would suggest getting a credit card before leaving as this is the easiest method of payment and is accepted in most places in Europe—except taxis which only take cash. If you are in need of a taxi I would suggest using Uber as it is much easier to use and a lot less expensive!

When I arrived in Bath I was in awe of the city. You are surrounded by beautiful churches and buildings that have been preserved for thousands of years. The ancient Roman Thermal Baths are located here and are still able to be viewed and toured by the public. Along with the incredible architecture, Bath is full of rolling hills and stunning gardens which make the everyday commute to the campus breathtaking.

I was very surprised at how different the teaching and grading practices at the University of Bath were in comparison to SFU. The lectures for one were much smaller, on average 30 people per class. The focus of the school was more so on independent learning and less on in class learning. I had a full course load.
and was only at school 8 hours a week. There was much less evaluation as well. Most of my classes included one essay and one exam at the end of the semester. There were no mid-term exams and all of the final exams were in essay format. The grading was also different as it was almost unheard of for any student to achieve above 80% on any assignment or exam. They do not have letter grades and instead define your mark depending on how you ranked in the class ex: a `first` was considered the top percentage of the class or at SFU an A+-A- letter grade range.

I was very lucky with the weather during my exchange. Contrary to what I had been told about England, it was mainly sunny while I was there. There was maybe three-five days of rain in total which was wonderful. Bath is very much so a student town with the majority of inhabitants being students. Even though it is a small city, there are three Universities in the city. If you are not a student in Bath you are most likely a tourist as it is a very popular city for tourism. This often made streets and shopping districts very busy and hectic at times.

Due to the fact that I arrived for my exchange during second semester, it was difficult to join any university hosted extra-curricular activities. However, there were many fun things to do in the city. Some of my favourites included going to comedy shows, plays, going on hikes and beautiful walks, enjoying food from a variety of different restaurants, going on walking tours and much more. Bath is also a ten minuet train ride from a larger city Bristol which offers many fun things to do as well. I strongly suggest any student going to Bath to venture into London and stay for at least one-two weeks as it is one of the greatest cities in the world. There is an endless list of things to do in London and as it is only two hours from Bath via a comfortable scenic train ride it is a must do on every exchange students list.

The main challenge I faced was learning how to live on my own and to cope with home sickness. I had never lived alone before so this experience was way out of my comfort zone. Things like skype made the transition so much easier as my family was just a click away. I was able to learn a lot about myself and uncovered my strengths and weaknesses while on exchange. It truly was a life changing experience for me and I think I have grown so much as a person since I was a part of it.

There are seldom opportunities in university where marks and course outcomes are not a main focus. It is a unique experience to have grades just count as a pass or fail and I wish I had taken advantage of this more. This is not saying that you shouldn’t try in class, however I found that I spend a lot of my time stressing and worrying about the courses I was in which tainted the experience for me slightly. In the end if you keep up with your work and attend all your classes you will do fine. Try to enjoy the experience as much as possible and don’t put too much pressure on yourself with regards to courses. I made this mistake and regret it now looking back on my exchange.

Initially it feels like you are going to be in this new home forever and it is easy to sit back and not make the most of the experience from the very beginning. Time flies and before you know it you will be on the plane returning home. Make sure to take in the experience as we are so lucky to be presented with an opportunity like this one. Don’t take the exchange for granted and try to live every day to the fullest. Take risks and go out of your comfort zone as this will just make your time and memories even better.
My friend Josh and I outside of the University in our matching school attire!
Myself and many of the other students that were participating in the same exchange outside our university
The main cathedral in Baths city center
Pultney Bridge over the river also in the city center