**Partner University:** University of Nottingham  
**Country:** England/United Kingdom  
**Faculty:** History  
**Dates/Terms:** January-June 2015 (Spring 2015 semester)

**Preparation for Exchange:**
When I was preparing for my exchange, it was difficult to know what to bring. When packing clothes, you should remember that you’ll likely end up buying stuff there. I brought one set of dishes, that I knew I could leave there if I needed the space on the way back. You should do that with a lot of your packing, because it’ll make packing for the return trip home a lot easier.

Nottingham is an interesting city to get to because it’s close to London, but the closest international airport is Heathrow. You can get a coach bus (like a Greyhound) directly from the airport to the Nottingham bus station, but that’s not made clear when you’re making travel plans. The bus company is called National Express, and the bus takes you to Broadmarsh bus station which is just outside the downtown core. When you first arrive at Broadmarsh, take a cab if you can to your flat.

You can use your Canadian debit card to take out cash at their ATMs, but the rest of the time I used my Canadian credit card as if it was a debit card. Take out a decent amount of cash each time you use the ATMs because of the service fees, and then store it in a secure place. Most places in Nottingham accept credit cards, but a few of the smaller businesses are cash only.

**During Exchange**
I arrived at my accommodation a few days before the university orientation, which was a good call because jetlag can take some getting used to. I lived in St. Peter’s Court, which is an off-campus, self-catered student residence. They have many different living options—in my case, I had my own bedroom (with a huge desk and a good amount of storage) and bathroom (with a shower), and I shared a living room and kitchen with my four other flatmates. For me this was an ideal living situation because my flatmates and I went grocery shopping together every week (there is a Lidl, an inexpensive supermarket, about a five-minute walk away, and an Aldi and Tesco also within walking distance, so you have options), and cooked dinner together every night. This saved on food costs, and gave some routine in my new life abroad, which was really comforting as we were all getting settled in. They became
like a family to me. Living with a bunch of other students, many of whom are also exchange students, means that St. Peter’s Court hosts events for you, and you live in the same building as some of your classmates, which is great as well.

There were two separate university orientations: one for exchange students, and one for those in the school of history. You should attend both, but the history orientation is particularly valuable because you can sign up for a mentor program, where a domestic student is there to answer your questions throughout your semester. The mentorship program is a fantastic initiative, and my mentor became one of my friends on exchange.

The lecture format for history is quite different than at SFU—primarily in the grade breakdown. Most of the courses don’t give marks for participation, but instead have your marks primarily come from one term paper, and a final exam. The papers for all your classes are due within days of each other, and usually before the Easter break, so try to start ahead of time. Make sure to use the library—you don’t necessarily need to buy textbooks, and the library has a whole host of books that are worth taking a look at. Classes typically occur once or twice a week, but the school takes care of your schedule for you, which often means you’ll have class everyday. The lower level classes have the equivalent of tutorials at SFU, and they’re important to attend even though there are no participation marks.

The University of Nottingham main campus is absolutely beautiful, and there are plenty of things to look at on-campus—including a museum, and a lake that you can walk around or rent boats to paddle on. On the north end of campus, across the street, is Wollaton Park, which is home to a number of deer that roam freely as well as Wollaton Hall, which served as Wayne Manor in the Batman movies. This is one of my favourite places in Nottingham.

UoN also has an Easter break that lasts a whole month, which is great because it gives you time to travel, but also usually means you’re ineligible for Canadian student loans which is definitely a financial burden.

There is a clubs day early on in the semester, but a lot of the clubs have membership fees—don’t sign up for a bunch on that day, because you won’t have time to attend all the meetings. Instead, choose carefully and you can sign up for clubs online after. Nottingham’s city centre (downtown) has a lot of different shops, art galleries, playhouses—there is always something new to find there. If you can, try some of the
local restaurants, and go to the shop that only sells milkshakes, the cat café, or an independent café that serves amazing coffee, all of which are just off of Old Market Square. Old Market Square sometimes hosts farmers’ markets and similar events, so it’s a good place to go if you’re looking for something to do.

In terms of transportation, St. Peter’s Court has a free bus for its residents that will take you to campus, and to city centre. There are also public buses that have a one-pound (about $2) student rate fee. Nottingham also has a trolley system, but buses go to more places. There is also the Broadmarsh coach station, which has coaches that will take you around the U.K., and the Nottingham train station, which will also take you around the U.K. The coach tickets are almost always cheaper, but it takes longer to get to your destination. The train is often more fun.

The weather in the U.K. is very similar to Vancouver, in that there are sunny days but also a fair amount of rain. It is also colder, and a lot windier at times. English culture shares a lot with what you will find in Vancouver, but there are some differences that you will need to adapt to so don’t go in expecting it to be identical simply because they are also an English-speaking country.

Nottingham is located in the East Midlands, which is right in the middle of England. As a result, you’re well-situated to go on many weekend getaways and short trips, depending on your budget. You can take the train to Wales and Scotland, and you can take a plane to Ireland, sometimes for less than $150 round-trip. Flying is a lot cheaper in Europe than it is in Canada, so take advantage of it if you can. Don’t be afraid to go on spontaneous trips, because you’ll always end up having a great time.

I was able to travel to Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Portugal, and each time the trips were fairly affordable because the transportation costs were fairly inexpensive. It’s also important to take time to explore England itself—travelling to London is expensive so you probably don’t want to do it all the time, but there are plenty of small towns or nearby cities that are also worth exploring. The Peak District is near to Nottingham and is a beautiful place to go hiking—it’s probably one of the best places in the country.

Nottingham is home to Robin Hood and there are plenty of touristy things to go along with that, including the alleged oldest pub in the country, but the city has
a lot more to offer as well. The city museum, which is quite small, is a treasure trove of English history, and gives you a chance to explore some of the city’s many caves. Sherwood Forest is also an option, however it’s much further away than you would think. Newstead Abbey and Chatsworth House are great daytrips, and you can take a picnic and spend time exploring their vast grounds.

**Reflection After Exchange**

Before leaving for exchange, I was really nervous about going. I actually spent my first night in Nottingham worried that I wouldn’t meet anyone and would have a lonely six months (this was an irrational fear!) What exchange taught me is that wherever you go, you’re going to have the opportunity to meet new and wonderful people, and create new relationships that you will always value. Going to Nottingham gave me the confidence boost I needed to know that I can go anywhere and do anything, and that sometimes going with the flow is important in order to get the most out of your adventure. Being so far away from my friends and family was definitely a challenge, but that’s why it’s important to create a support network wherever you are, of people who can and will support you. Studying in a new academic environment is also an experience I hope many people can partake in, because I believe it provides you with a different perspective that is crucial in university studies.

My advice for other students is to not only apply to attend universities in the big-name cities. Nottingham is a top-ranked university and living in a smaller city was a really worthwhile experience. It gave me the opportunity to explore places that are not as well known, and because of that I think I was able to learn more about the country and its culture. Choosing to go on exchange was not an easy decision for me, but from the moment I arrived in Nottingham I’ve been nothing but grateful that I took the leap to do something different.