Introduction:

My name is Jessica and I am a fourth year Education student. In the Spring of 2017, I attended the University of Bath in England.

Preparing for Exchange:

Before studying abroad, there are several things you can prepare for to make your exchange go as smoothly as possible. Firstly, do your research! Moving to a new country can be intimidating and overwhelming so make sure you collect as much information as possible before choosing your destination. Bath is a smaller city than Vancouver, meaning that you may experience some culture shock.

Secondly, if you plan on travelling around Europe, it would be a good idea to buy a UK sim card. I recommend buying a pay as you go sim card from the phone company, Three, once you arrive. Having this phone card makes travelling a lot more convenient because there are no fees for roaming. In addition to this, buying a young person’s coach card from the National Express coach company is great for travelling around the UK. The card costs 10 pounds and helps you save 1/3 on all of your trips. It is also the most affordable way to get from London to Bath. In terms of packing, Bath’s weather is quite similar to Vancouver’s. For the Spring semester, it is ideal to pack a mixture of clothing. Thick jackets and a scarf are essentials for the Winter, as well as some shorts for the warmer Spring weather. Although it is tempting to stuff your entire closet into your suitcase, it is really unnecessary. I didn’t end up wearing half of my clothes and I can say that I have gained extra muscle from dragging around all of my luggage. I find that Europe is windier than
Vancouver so be sure to layer up when you are travelling!

My favourite independent coffee shop in Bath
Opening a bank account here is quite challenging. Most banks will require that you show proof of a yearlong program to be eligible. You will also need a letter from the school showing your student status. Therefore, converting money at home before arriving is the most convenient. Furthermore, the cost of living here is higher than in Vancouver. It is a good idea to create a budget prior to your trip.

**During Exchange:**

There are several airports that you can fly to in order to reach Bath. Bristol Airport is the closest but flights from Vancouver tend to be more costly. The two main international airports in London are Heathrow and Gatwick. Personally I think that Heathrow is more convenient because it provides a direct coach to Bath through the National Express coach company. However, because my flight was delayed, I just missed the coach and had to take the train instead. I recommend
waiting for the coach even if it is a longer wait because taking the train is expensive and requires transfers. If you are staying in university accommodation, you will be expected to pick up the keys to your room in the city. The office is kept open until around 9pm on move-in day.

The university hosts a mandatory orientation session for all exchange students. It is important to attend because there is a lot of crucial information and it is a good opportunity to meet all the other exchange students. The orientation also includes a campus tour, lunch and a department meeting for business students. Take advantage of the opportunity to mingle with other students!

There are two main accommodation options for exchange students: Thornbank Gardens and Pulteney Court. Both are shared with post-graduate students and fill up quite quickly. It is a good idea to apply for accommodation right away in order to secure the one that you want. Accommodation is reserved through online payment before you go on exchange. Thornbank Gardens offers en-suite rooms while Pulteney Court does not. Although I initially wanted a bathroom to myself, I chose Pulteney Court in the end because it is the more affordable option and has recently been refurbished. It is also closer to the city and the university.

The academic structure here is similar to SFU’s. There are lectures, tutorials and seminars. The main difference is the grading scale. Instead of using letter grades, classifications such as first, second and third are given for grade performance. Most faculties have a passing grade of 40% and 70% is the equivalent of a first or an A. Another big difference is the university’s course registration process. Rather than enrolling in courses online, you are expected to attend a
department meeting with members of your faculty to choose your courses. They build your schedule according to the courses that you chose in your application unless there is a timetable conflict. This means that you will not have the chance to see when other courses are offered if you do not do your own research. The university’s course catalogue only shows the time courses are offered once the semester has started.

Studying abroad in Bath is great because you have many opportunities to travel. Bristol and London make great day trips for getting to know your new friends, while there are also cities such as Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds that have plenty to offer. In addition to this, being one and a half hours away from Bristol Airport by bus, flying around Europe is affordable and convenient. However, don't forget to check out some of Bath's local attractions. The Royal
Crescent and the Roman Baths are very popular. Many shops and activities close quite early in comparison to Vancouver so it is a good idea to also take advantage of events held on campus. At the beginning of the semester, the International Student Association organizes many activities for all students. They are great for socializing and meeting both local and international students.

Pulteney Bridge

**Reflection After Exchange:**

Studying abroad was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences I have ever had. I travelled and lived by myself for the first time, which presented situations that I had never been faced with. From opening a bank account alone to navigating a menu entirely in French, I had many moments of doubt. However, the greatest thing that I learned from exchange is how capable I am. I never imagined that I would be able to travel to foreign places and experience so many new things.
One of the things that I wish I knew was how lonely it could feel sometimes. Without your family and friends back home surrounding you, there will be times that you feel lost, both figuratively and literally. In these times, you will learn more about yourself than you could imagine. My advice would be to try as many new things as possible, especially if it scares you.