Why Manchester?

I was planning to study abroad at The University of Manchester (UoM) from the very beginning. What attracts me the most is the fact that UoM is very different from SFU in many aspects. UoM has over hundred years of history and it is the largest single-site university in the UK, with the biggest student population; not to mention that UoM is close to the city centre with just 20-minute walk. Also, UoM is well-known for its enhanced reputation in teaching and innovation; many notable alumni were educated here, including one of my favourite actors, Benedict Cumberbatch.

The city, Manchester, is not only the birthplace of modern industrialism, but also famous for its two football clubs, nightlife, and music bands. Most importantly, Manchester is truly a diverse and energetic city where I got to meet all kinds of people who are from different backgrounds and bring their own stories to share.

There is so much to see and experience in Manchester, and I would never get bored of this city!

Photos (from top to bottom):

Piccadilly Gardens | Manchester Town Hall
Exchange Square | St Ann’s Square (the sea of flowers after Manchester bombing)
Street art in the Northern Quarter
Preparation for Exchange

What to Bring
Considering the windy and changeable weather in Manchester, I brought warm waterproof jackets and scarves with me. However, you may also want to pack some spring/summer clothes because Manchester can have hot weather in May and June. Also, remember to bring adapters for use in UK. I bought a pack of adapters for different countries at Dollarstore.

I tried to pack lightly because I would need space when I return in June. I bought most of my daily necessities in Manchester. I purchased my bedding pack on the UoM’s online store. The bedding pack was delivered to my room in advance.

Visa
As a Canadian citizen, I received my six-month short-term study visa upon my arrival at London Heathrow. I brought the original copy of my acceptance letter from the host institution, along with other important documents, including my hosting contract, bank statement and course enrolment information. However, I was only asked to provide the acceptance letter. In addition, I was not permitted to work in the UK because of the type of visa I got.

Whenever I travelled outside of the UK, I would always bring all the documents with me because once I re-entered the UK, I would get a new six-month short-term study visa.

Travel & Transportation
There is no direct flight from Vancouver to Manchester. I first flew to London Heathrow then to Manchester Airport. The Manchester Airport is 20 minutes away from the main campus by taxi, which costs around $25. You can also take the train from London to Manchester, which takes around 2 hours 45 minutes. The ticket can be bought online. When traveling within the UK, students can apply for a 16-25 Railcard which costs £30 and it'll save 1/3 on rail fares; a round trip ticket typically costs around $42. All information can be found on the National Rail website.

Financial Details
Before my departure I had asked several past exchange students regarding payment methods, many suggested me to bring a couple of hundreds of pounds and use the credit card (ex. VISA) for small or online purchases. Try to avoid using your debit card because transaction costs can add up.

In terms of finance, my parents bought the flight tickets for me, while I financed my tuition and living expenses. Other than the International Mobility Award (IMA), I applied for the Exchange Student Brusay via SIS. I also received several scholarships prior to my exchange term. All those external funds covered half of my total exchange expenses. Students may also apply for BC student loan while on exchange, but need to meet certain requirements.

Cost of Living
I found the cost of living in Manchester similar to Vancouver. There are many cheap grocery stores around the campus such as Tesco, Lidl and Sainsbury. However, eat out is a bit more expensive,
although many restaurants do not ask for tips. Also, since Manchester has a huge student population, many retail stores offer 10% student discount, so remember to ask!

**During Exchange**

**Arrival & Orientation**

There are many exchange students coming to UoM each semester, so the International Student Office offers a week-long orientation events, such as the Exchange Student Induction, campus tour, city tour, afternoon tea social and more! Most events are not compulsory but I highly recommend students to participate, as it is a great way to meet new friends and get familiar with the environment.

**Accommodation**

My accommodation is the Saint Gabriel’s Hall (Gabs), which is a part of the Victoria Park Campus. It takes 15-20 minutes to get to the main campus by walk from Gabs. Note that Gabs is the only female-only accommodation with around 100 undergraduate and graduate students. Gabs is a fully-catered hall as breakfast and dinner are served every weekday throughout the semester. Most rooms having shared facilities (gym, kitchen, TV room, library, laundry room). The building is quite old with its historical decorations, however the facilities are in good conditions. Gabs even provides fitness and yoga classes every Tuesday and Thursday.

Living with other students has been a fun and memorable experience. Gabs is a small and friendly community; the Organizing Committee regularly holds formal dinners and celebration parties in the hall, while a Spring Ball is jointly organized by several accommodations. I’m very glad that I was able to stay at Gabs, as I met most of my friends there.

Photos (from left to right): The Main Building of Gabs | Gab’s Library | The exchange students (including me) at Gab’s Valentine’s Day Dinner

*Photos: Main Campus | University’s Museum*
Academic Details

The universities in England usually have three-year undergraduate programs, meaning the course load can be quite heavy; most students would take 5-6 courses per semester in order to fulfill 50-60 credits. Initially I found the teaching style very similar to that at SFU with weekly lectures and tutorials. However, there were much less assignments but more readings at UoM. I was very panic at first when I saw the endless reading list for each of my classes, but I later realized that I was not required to read all of them. Also, the instructors would post all sources of reading materials online, and textbooks can be borrowed from the library (using older editions are generally permitted), so I had very little expenses on the course books.

Overall, the British-style education emphasizes heavily on independent study. Students are encouraged to do researches on specific topics that interest them the most, but not required to know all the course materials taught in the classes.

The format of examination is very different from that at SFU. All of my business management courses required students to write two formal essays on certain topics within 1.5 or 2 hours. Fortunately, all topics were given during the revision lectures; I only needed to pick two topics to prepare in advance. We had around one month to study for exams, but I still felt time constraints as I spent countless hours reading news articles, research papers and critics, especially when finals were worth a huge portion of my entire grades. Generally speaking, instructors expect students to include citations and references in their essays. I found my overall learning experience at UoM to be challenging yet rewarding.

In terms of the grading system, presentations tend to be less formal and easily graded, but it is extremely difficult to get a high First (A-range) on essays due to high expectations. All being said, do not be over-stressed about the course load! Although I took five courses at UoM, it was less intense compared to SFU.

If you are unsure of something, just go ask your instructors or teaching assistants for help; they would be very pleased to talk to exchange students!

Reflection After Exchange

It was my first time being away from home and I worried that I might experience cultural shocks. Surprisingly, I adapted very quickly to the new environment; I had never felt lonely or missed home during my exchange term. I completely immersed myself in Manchester and gained a better understanding of the British lifestyle.

Manchester is an amazing city, while the people there are even better. I enjoyed meeting individuals from around the world; I’ve made life-long friendships with students in Manchester. My perspective about the world has been bordened every day as I met people who have different views; I was able to connect with talented and euthanistic individuals who share the same passion as I do. I later realized that I was not only exploring a new place, but also experiencing a process of self-discovery.
If I have to give an advice to the future exchange students, I would encourage them to **always be open to new experiences** if they want to get the most out of this unique opportunity. As cliché as it may sound, studying abroad has definitely been the best decision I’ve ever made in my life!

**A List of Places to Visit in Manchester**

- The John Rylands Library (looks just like the Hogwarts)
- Manchester Town Hall
- MediaCityUK (BBC Tour, etc)
- Manchester Museum
- Manchester Museum of Science and Industry
- Old Trafford (if you’re a football/soccer fan!)
- Chetham’s Library
- Northern Quarter (street arts, coffee shops and vintage stores)

...**AND MORE!**

**Photos (from top to bottom):**

*Street art in the Northern Quarter*

*The John Rylands Library*

*Manchester Central Library*