Deciding to apply for the exchange program at SFU was one of the most unforgettable decisions that I have ever made. I went on an exchange for a semester in Spring 2019 from January to June. The partner host university that I went to was called University of Nottingham (UoN). In the UK, University of Nottingham is one of the top universities. Although my major in SFU is Health Science BA, but I also minor with an Education Instructions and Curriculum. Thus, I enrolled into education courses in the School of Education at UoN. Researching what courses to take at first was very confusing and complicated. As I am unfamiliar with the hosts’ universities website, it took awhile to figure out how to properly work with the website to research on the course modules.

Going on the exchange was a way of conquering my fears of living alone. This was my very first time booking my own flight, traveling to a country that I’ve never been before. Before I start my exchange journey, I feared traveling alone as I did not know anyone in UK. Going to a place that you’re completely unfamiliar with can be worrisome. To reduce my fears, I researched as much as I can about what I need to be cautious about, what I need to bring, and tried to get to know the country more. Throughout planning my exchange, I received a lot of information from my friends and relatives who have been to UK. It is useful to do your research beforehand about what to bring to your host country. For example, one of the most valuable information that I’ve found was the power outlets are shaped differently compared to what we have in Canada. Thus, I had to prepare numerous power outlet charger heads beforehand. It is very important to do your own research before you travel, especially going to a country that you have never been to before.

Unless you are traveling to a country that is in a rural area, urban cities mainly have what one need. I did not pack much for my exchange because I knew that I could purchase most of my daily essentials in the UK. However, I packed some of my favourite snacks to eat just in case I cannot buy them while I was on my exchange.

Transportation is essential to book beforehand. Since traveling from Canada to UK is a 9 hours journey, the earlier you book the flight, the cheaper the ticket is. As my exchange began in late January, I booked my flight around October since it was cheaper. Additionally, I booked a coach bus from the airport to my host university. I had to research the routes a bit to look at which way is more convenient for me to get to my host university. Thus, in the end, I decided to take a non-stop coach bus that was a five-hours’ drive from the airport to the university. There were faster ways to get to campus, but they all require two or three transfers. Since I had two luggage’s with me, transferring isn’t much ideal, thus, I chose the longer route without any transfers.

Living in the UK was expensive. Everything seems to be doubled the price compared to living in Vancouver. However, just like Vancouver, whether cash, credit or debit cards were very convenient and gave better access in the society. Furthermore, in urban areas, there were plenty different bank companies that offer student debit or credit cards as well. Usually students can receive the cards within 5 business days.

When I arrived at my host university, it was a day before the Spring semester begun. Unfortunately, I did not attend the orientation as the orientation at the host institution only happens during the first week of every Fall semester. During my exchange period, I lived on-campus in the dormitory. I got to choose my own type of accommodation room. I chose an en-suite. I lived by myself with no roommates and I had my own bathroom, single bed, and a desk. The dormitory was very clean, but the neighbours were noisy at night often disrupted my sleep.
Classes begun on the second day after my arrival to the host institution. In total, I took three Education courses. The lecture formats were very similar to SFU, how professors would prepare PowerPoint slides for students to download beforehand. However, each class were only two hours, instead of three. One of the big differences between my host institution and SFU was how the classes were very small. Every class were held in small classrooms, like tutorial rooms in SFU. The schedule of each course was usually split into two days per week. Furthermore, the grading system were different. In my host institution, a passing grade was 40%, whereas SFU is 50%. As I only took Education courses, most of my courses were projects and assignment based rather than having a cumulative standardized test. The grading scheme differs on the course, some courses grades were only based on one final paper, which was very intense. If you fail the paper, then you fail the course as you only have one assessment through the whole course. Furthermore, attendance was mandatory for each class. The professors would pass down a sheet for students to sign in their names at the beginning or the end of class.

In UK, the weather is very unstable; as a matter of fact, it is similar to the weather in Vancouver. Sometimes it would hail, then turns into rain, snow, then becomes sunny as if you are experiencing four seasons in a day. UK’s and Vancouver are actually very alike; the culture, the food, and the people. However, the environment in UK is very different as it is a historical country. I lived in Nottingham, located in the center heart of UK, was the home of Robin Hood, thus there were very historical statues of Robin Hood and a Nottingham castle located in the city center. Additionally, within the UK, there were many enormous churches that are very well-known and stunning as well. Since Nottingham is located in the heart of England, traveling to either North or South of the country was roughly about the same time.

There were many social and extra-curricular activities offered in the host institution. I joined the Taiwanese Association Union. Through this union, I met a lot of friends and represented as a pride of Taiwanese and SFU ambassador. I got to share with the team about SFU and my experiences studying and living in Vancouver. Other than this union, there were also sports, dance, writing clubs, and etc. available for anyone who’s interested to join.

As my exchange period came to an end, I had mixed feelings. Spending a semester in the UK was not a long time, but not that short as well. Going on this exchange began a new chapter of my life. My exchange was not perfect. At first when I arrived at my host institution, everything was very slow paced, and I tend to get frustrated easily. I have experienced obstacles and challenges through the journey, however, the challenges allowed myself to gain more patience, and adjust to the lifestyles in UK. I have learned how to overcome my fears towards handling everything on my own, being independent, having no reliance on others. Also, I have learned how to spend time with myself and got to know myself even more.

For students who are planning or are going on an exchange, the most important thing for them is to be well prepared and research before they leave for their exchange. Research information such as the weather, what to be cautious for, what are some of the stuff that you’d need that they don’t have or sell in your exchange host country. Overall, have fun and enjoy this amazing experience of the exchange!
Photos:

A picture of my dormitory.

Jubilee campus: the right building is a library.
Chinese New Year Event: Draw Prize

Wollaton Park (A park near my campus)
City Center of Nottingham.