Preparations for Exchange:
I completed my exchange at the Universität Mannheim from February to June 2017. Mannheim
as a city is quite industrialized and is located in the South-Western area of Germany, just 100 km
south from Frankfurt. The city is also close to the French border and is the second largest city in
the state of Baden-Württemberg. In Mannheim, the most well-known monument is the
university’s main building, also known as the “Schloss,” which is the German translation for
palace. I was lucky to have studied in this same palace and also call it my university.

Courses
I found the university was very reputable and very organized. They have an academic calendar
similar to SFU’s which made my travel planning process a breeze. They also have their courses
listed on website well in advance which helped with the course planning component, although
this doesn’t become finalized until around mid semester after you arrive there. This is because at
Universität Mannheim you enroll yourself for exams as opposed to the actual course; this way
you get to audit a course without actually committing to writing the final exam. I took five
business courses including Service Operations, Investments and Asset Pricing, Social Media
Marketing, Marketing Management Decisions and Entrepreneurship and Innovation.

They also have German language courses for beginners for 4 weeks prior to the semester starting
called “Winter Academy”. This would mean I would have intensive German classes for all of
January for around 500 euros with other international students from around the world. I didn’t
choose to do this because I heard it wasn’t necessary and I used the extra month off from school
to work and save up a bit more for my trip. I did meet a lot of students who had participated in
the program and they enjoyed it very much. Ultimately, the decision to participate in the Winter
Academy (or Summer Academy) all comes down to your preferences, interests, budget and
schedule.

Accommodation
Although it still feels last-minute, Universität Mannheim sent out my housing application
email around November. The process is essentially like any university’s course enrollment,
except in German time.

The place that I booked is relatively close to the quadrate (which is what they call the city center
since it is laid out in apartment blocks instead of streets) and roughly a 10-15 min tram ride away
from the campus. The cost of Ulmenweg’s student housing is around 300 euros per month and is
typically where most of the international students stay and where I was recommended to go.
They have housing in the actual quadrate as well, but they are more expensive and have less of a
student community. I will have my own private room but will be sharing a floor with four other
international students.
What To Bring
At the bottom of this report I will included my exact packing checklist I made for myself before I left for Germany.

Arriving in Mannheim:
In case you didn’t register for the intensive language course, you should arrive in Mannheim a week before the start of semester or at the beginning of the month when your rent begins. I arrived February 1st and met with the Hausmeister during his business hours to collect my keys for the apartment. On the first week you need to take care of the bureaucracy, which in Germany’s case, was quite extensive. I have a small list of what I had to accomplish in my first week:

1. Registration at the International Office (L1,1). You will need your letter of acceptance and passport with you. I would advise doing this firstly and early in the morning as the place gets quite crowded later in the day and you usually need the documents from here for the next steps.

2. Registration at the city hall of Mannheim (at Bürgerdienst, K7). You will need your passport and application given at the International Office. This place too, tends to get a little crowded so to avoid excessive waiting on your first days try to hit this place as early as possible.

3. Opening a German bank account. For Canadian students, this was the only way we could pay for our student housing rent. I deposited my entire rents worth into my German account and only used it for that purpose. In Germany (and most of Europe) you will find that cash is king. I also
would highly recommend getting a Scotiabank Debit card as you can with draw from any Deutsche Bank in Germany with no foreign transaction fee and a great exchange spread.

4. Purchasing furniture etc. everyday stuff for the apartment and kitchen. I would recommend Woolworth (K1, 1). They have everything you can possibly imagine for very affordable prices. I was lucky to have arranged with a previous student to give me their things from their own exchange.

5. Health insurance (Mensa). You will have to bring proof of health insurance coverage from SFU or your own personal health care coverage to show the health officials. They will recommend buying German health insurance for 70 euros a month to cover anything that comes up when your on German soil. This is up to your discretion but I opted out of the German health insurance and stuck to my dad’s extended health benefits.

6. Meet with VISUM Buddy. When applying directly to the university you have an option to be assigned a buddy who is from Mannheim. I applied to this program and would recommend it to anyone who is planning to study at Mannheim. My buddy made his best effort to point out the affordable and good places to eat out, fun activities, and places to hang out. He also invited me to his apartment where I met a lot of his German friends and family which was a really cool and welcoming experience for my first week in Mannheim. VISUM also throws many events and excursions that I would also highly recommend taking advantage of. This is how I met almost all of my international friends!

7. Attend first day of classes. I would recommend doing a campus tour before school starts because the campus can be a bit confusing than what you are used to. The university campus spreads in random parts of the quadrat so it would be useful to know where your classes are ahead of time. I was lucky and managed to have classes once a week. The best part about the university is that it offers courses called “Intersession” classes. These courses condense a regular course into a few days but for longer hours. For example, I was able to finish my Social Media marketing course in four consecutive 9-5pm days!

Reflection:
I went into studying abroad knowing I would be homesick. After all, that’s what everyone told me I would feel – and it made sense. Knowing that this would be a temporary chapter in my life, and not a permanent change helped me prepare my heart. Before coming to Germany, I genuinely believed that I was going to be crying every night in my room for the first month due to homesickness. However, to my surprise, I found myself feeling the complete opposite of homesick. Quite frankly, I didn’t even find myself missing family, friends, my home, my city etc. upon moving to Germany, and didn’t for a long while either. Studying abroad made me realize that I don’t cry in the face of change; but that I conquer it.

During my first month of living in Germany, I was 100% excitement. As more months passed by I constantly kept myself distracted with either weekend getaways, international student events, assignments, planning my summer travel itinerary, hanging out with friends, or discovering new hikes and trails etc. With about a month left here in Germany, I can say that I am definitely excited to return home to my friends and family, yet at the same time, I am also holding onto
every last moment I spend here. Looking back, I am so grateful that I was able to have this study abroad experience, because it has truly helped me prove to myself that I am capable of learning, adapting and growing thousands of kilometers away from home.

But don’t get me wrong, everyone is different in this way. Homesickness is inevitable and it comes in waves for many people. Acknowledging it and not bottling it up is very important. You are not less of a person for longing for the comforts of home even when you are doing amazing things. It’s okay to have breakdowns, second thoughts and to spend nights alone in your dorm room. There is no “right” way to deal with it. When you find yourself missing friends, family and even significant others don’t let it affect your experience. Over the course of your study abroad, you will discover who makes time to stay in contact with you back home and who does not. And that is also okay. You are experiencing new things and so are they. Even if you don’t talk to people back home, true friends and family will pick up with you right where you left off.

I adore the friends I have made here in Mannheim. They have been there to celebrate my birthday, been great travel buddies, attended social events together and gave me a sense of family. I can’t imagine my experience here in Mannheim without them. So instead of moping around, go spend time with the hundreds of other international students who are in the exact same boat as you. Compare embarrassing high school stories, swap cultural differences, talk about Trump – just go and put yourself out there!

And just because I didn’t instantly miss my friends and family back home does not mean I could go on and live life without them. I just knew that I would only be living here for a short period of time. Exchange is just a chapter in our books, not the bookshelf. My bookshelf is my support system back home made up of my friends and family. And no amount of beautiful cathedrals, clear blue waters, vibrant markets with new tastes and smells, and towering castles could ever take their place.

If I can give one piece of advice to anyone in university is I would say that if you are able to study abroad or work abroad, do it. You will be nervous and anxious and excited and it may take a while to get comfortable in a new country but you will never regret it. I would also say to take everyone else’s experience with a grain of salt. People told me I would be homesick, people told me making friends would be hard, people told me I would experience racism; but luckily for myself, I wasn’t able to experience any of those things. Everyone’s experience is different and no exchange is every the same. Either way, studying abroad was by far the best decision I have made in my life so far and I will hold the experience close to me forever.
Packing List:

**Carry on:**
- Laptop & charger
- Phone & charger
- Headphones
- Passport
- Travel wallet (credit, debit, license, school ID, cash)
- Copy of documents in folder (include birth certificate, passport)
- Light jacket
- Spare outfit
- Neck pillow
- Reusable water bottle
- Mini lotion and hand sanitizer

**Clothes:**
- Runners - 1
- Flats - 1
- Sandals - 1
- Flip flops - 1
- Boots - 1
- Bathing suit
- Underwear
- Socks
- Jeans - 2
- Smart casual outfits - 3
- Long sleeve shirt - 3
- Short sleeve shirt - 3
- Tank tops - 3
- Sweaters - 2
- Pajamas
- Workout gear 1-2
- Jackets - 2
- Skirts - 1
- Poncho
- Leggings - 2
- Scarves - 1
- Shorts - 2
- Accessories: Belt, Jewelry, Watch, Gloves, Hair ties/brush, Bobby Pins, Nail Polish

**School stuff:**
- Planner
- Notebook
- Travel journal
- Pens & pencils
• Calculator
• Highlighter

Hygienic:
• Face wash
• Makeup
• Moisturizer
• Toothbrush/toothpaste
• Shampoo bar and soap
• Razors
• Hairbrush
• Tweezers

Electronics:
• USBs
• Adapters/converters
• Portable charger
• Camera
• Straightener
• Selfie stick

Miscellaneous:
• Weekender bag
• Nail clippers
• Umbrella
• Cards
• Ziploc bags
• Reusable shopping bags
• Combination lock
• Bandaids
• Beedie bandana
• Pain killers
• Vitamins
• Polysporin
• Mini sewing kit