I am a Communications major at SFU, and I went to Japan to study at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo for the Spring 2015 term.

**Preparation for exchange:**

Upon preparing for exchange, the one thing I didn't have that would've been useful is a more detailed description of the course selection at MGU, as well as information on the SFU courses correspondent to the ones at MGU.

When packing for my trip, the only things I really needed were the basics such as clothing, laptop, and other personal necessities. I say that because much of the everyday items are easily obtainable locally for low costs. However I would suggest that you pack a bath towel with you, because it is not available at the dorm, neither was it easy to find at the local stores. You would eventually be able to find one but I assume you would want to take a shower on your arrival date.

As for my transportation to the dorm, I was at Japan prior to the move-in date so I made my own way there from Nagoya by train. The train system was confusing at first, but I made it to the local Midorigaoka station. From the station to the dorm is only a 7-8 minute walk, however Japanese streets aren't exactly simple, so it was not easy to figure out.

Japan is for the most part, a cash based society so it is suggested to have a decent amount of cash prepared beforehand. If not, the Seven-Eleven convenience stores have international ATMs, where withdrawals are possible with most major banks world-wide (given that there are handling fees). Regulations have made it harder for foreigners to create bank accounts, so the option of opening a Japanese bank account is only available to those staying for 2 semesters.

**During Exchange:**

After I arrived at the dorm, the caretakers briefly walked me through the facility. The individual rooms were rather spacious and comfortable, and were all furnished with a desk and a comfortable bed. Wifi was only available in the common room downstairs, but each room had an Ethernet cable. There were washrooms available on each floor, and shower rooms separate for men and women were located on the bottom floor along with several washing machines and dryers in each. Also located in the bottom floor is the common room and the communal kitchen. The kitchen is equipped with the most basic cooking ware, such as rice cookers, pots, pans, utensils, etc. Each student also gets their own space in the fridge, enough for 1 person. As described above, I was quite content with the accommodation we were provided with at the dorm. The dorm itself is located in a quiet residential area of Tokyo called Okusawa, close to higher end districts such as Jiyuugaoka, and Den-en-chofu.
We had several convenience stores close by, and the neighbourhood shopping areas were about 10 minutes away on foot.

A couple of days after arrival, we attended the orientations that MGU has prepared for us. First was the “Survival Japanese Orientation”, where the school’s Japanese language teachers walked us through the steps we should take in the case of emergencies such as earthquakes, as well as teaching us the basic Japanese needed for other emergency cases. The second orientation we had was held at school, where we were given packages and instructions on course selection, and other document work that were to be completed. The package included a $200 bursary for our transit passes from the dorm to the campus. This was also the day we were introduced to our buddies, through their buddy system where they assign 2-3 Japanese buddies who support us through the semester to each exchange student.

It is mandatory for all MGU exchange students to be enrolled in a Japanese language class, divided in to several levels depending on prior knowledge and skills. There are also several other elective courses that are taught in English, however what takes up the most time in studying is the Japanese language course. One thing to keep in mind is that although the international program courses are said to be taught in English, not all the instructors are proficient in their English skills, therefore there is a good chance that it may be difficult without any Japanese skills. My suggestion is to study as much Japanese as possible prior to the exchange period to get the best out of your experience.

Tokyo, the metropolitan center of Japan, is capable of keeping you entertained at all times. They have several great tourist spots, such as the Harajuku shopping streets, which is internationally known for its own subculture; the Harajuku fashion. Aside from popular tourist spots like such, Tokyo has countless numbers of karaokees, game centres, late-night restaurants and bars which keeps the city bright through the night. However millions of people are attracted to and live in this prosperous city, which results in ridiculous amounts of people cluttering throughout the city. So this will be a huge culture shock for those like myself who come from a rather quiet city like Vancouver. Another factor that differentiates Tokyo from Vancouver is the weather. Aside from the month long rainy season that starts approximately around mid-June, Tokyo does not experience heavy precipitation very often as we do here in Vancouver. However it becomes extremely humid in the summer so that should definitely be kept in mind.

**Reflection After Exchange:**

As far as I believe, the greatest challenge for most exchange students would probably be language. I personally believe that the best way to make the best out of your experience at Japan is to make friends with Japanese people and to communicate with them more. However it is understandable that some students may have less confidence in their
Japanese, hence have difficulties stepping outside of the dorm’s English speaking environment. Based on my experience though, the greatest experience can only be cultivated when one steps outside of their own comfort zone. I am not discouraging students to spend time with other dorm mates. I simply would like to make a strong advice to find your place outside of the dorm as well. After all, it’s all the different people you meet that makes your experience better than it could ever be. Which is why I can proudly say that the past 6 months was the prime time of my life so far, and all the wonderful people I have met changed my perspectives on the world.
Individual rooms at the dormitory
A busy weekend at Harajuku main street

View of the Okusawa neighbourhood
Above: A local tonkatsu restaurant 2 minutes from the dorm.