Preparation for Exchange

My preparation for exchange was probably easier than others who were planning to go to South Korea. The reason being is because I used to be a Korean Citizenship before I attained my Canadian Citizenship and I knew about the country. For my visa and other annoying paper works that you have to prepare all I had to do was take my Canadian citizenship document and register for an alien registration card at the foreign embassy in Korea and I was set for my visas. Hearing from other students that I met abroad, some of them had a real hard time applying for their visas, but it was not anything undoable.

I left to Korea a little bit earlier than everyone else, partially because I have family there and also because I wanted to travel around the country. I left Canada in early June, whereas the semester started in early September. When I was packing I was really inconsiderate and only packed summer clothes. When you pack, especially if you are going for the fall semester, you should consider that winter in Korea gets extremely cold. Make sure you pack a nice, warm jacket for the winter. The summer gets really hot too. It reaches almost up to 40 degrees Celsius and it is really humid, so be prepared for that as well.

South Korea has amazing places to go and visit. Through my research I figured out that the transit system in Korea is really affective and you can get pretty much anywhere through public transportation.

Financially I had no big worries because I had family there. I took 500$ worth of Won and a visa card for back up. Compared to Vancouver everything is generally cheaper, especially the food. You would find yourself eating out most of the time. My favorite part of Korea, dining wise, was the unlimited Korean BBQ places that you can find very easily almost anywhere around the campus. I spent about $700 Canadian dollars monthly while I was there, but it really depends on your spending, and if you wish to travel around a lot you might want to consider extra budget. A lot of exchange students also travel to nearby countries such as Japan, Vietnam, Philippines and etc.

During Exchange

Since I got there earlier than everyone else, I had time for myself to travel around and spend time with my family who lives in Korea. My experience would probably be a little different from most of the other exchange students who left Canada near September. Before school started, there was an orientation for all the exchange students and through the orientation I met a lot of people from different parts of the world. I even met some people from UBC but unfortunately
non from SFU. Don’t be nervous for your exchange experience because at the orientation they will tell you a lot of things you need to know about Korea, so you can make a smoother transition. There was an after-party after the orientation and I had a good time socializing with other exchange students.

Accommodation and living was not something that I worried much about because I had family there who lives there and I commuted whereas all the other exchange students either lived dorm or found a room near the school. However, I recommend getting into the dormitory because commuting life kind of sucks.

The lecture format is similar to what you would expect at SFU. However enrollment system is kind of different. At Yonsei, you can only enroll on a specific date at a specific time and it applies to all the undergraduate students at the host institution. The one advantage that you would have as an exchange student is that if you are not able to enroll into the course you want to get in, then you can fill out a form and submit it at the international office and they will manually enroll you in to the course regardless of the course capacity.

As mentioned earlier, Korea has amazing places to visit. Some of the places that I visited while I was there were, Jeju Island, seol-ak san, Dae-jeon and more. Korea has lots of mountains, so if you enjoy hiking it will be great for you. Also, if you go on the fall semester they have an annual school event called Yon-ko Games, which is a sport competition with the Korea University which is their main rival. They compete in five different sport categories: hockey, rugby, soccer, basketball, and baseball. Culturally it is also quite different but I had no major problems adapting because I am a Korean ethnicity. It is probably better to experience the culture yourself rather than hearing it from someone else. It will be more appealing to you.

I wanted to make a lot of local friends while I was there but it wasn’t as easy. I was in a class where I was the only exchange student. It could have been just me, but I felt that a lot of them are a little afraid to speak English and they were generally very shy. Alternatively I joined clubs to make more friends. One of the clubs that I joined was called the “Mentors Club”, which is a club where you get matched with a mentor (local student) and they show you around and socialize. I recommend joining this club because it is a better way to make a smoother transition to the new environment, and the mentors are usually very helpful and they will be willing to answer any questions you have regards to Korea. The other club I tried to join was an intramural basketball club. I signed up for it but they never got back to me, which was kind of disappointing. They had lot more clubs and they hold club days just like SFU does so you should check it out once you are on your exchange to Yonsei.

Reflection After Exchange
For me, because it was my home country I faced very little challenges. Korea is a very efficient country and I really enjoyed my experience at Yonsei. What I wish I had knew before I left was the enrollment system. It was a hassle to figure out the system and to enroll in to the courses I wanted to take. The seats fill up real quick because all the students at Yonsei register on the same day and only allow you to enroll at a specific day, unlike SFU where you can make changes continuously until a certain date. You should make sure you have everything planned out before you enroll.

Honestly, Korea was much more than I had expected. I met a lot of new people, met great friends, and experienced a lot. My advice to anyone who are planning to go on exchange is to just really enjoy every moment of it. Enjoy the hardships you face and the good times you face. When you finish your exchange semester and look back to your experience, it will really be a memorable one which you will not regret.

Yonsei Campus
Je-ju Island

Seol-ak San
Shinchon
Yon-ko Games (soccer game)