I attended Yonsei University for the semester of Fall 2016. In preparation for my exchange, I did quite a bit of research beforehand on things that may be relevant before and during the exchange. This included applying for a student visa and looking for a place to stay, although I settled for the dormitory available at Yonsei University as it was convenient for attending classes. As I was going from September to December to South Korea, I knew that it would be warm for the first month or so and get colder as time went by. So I packed accordingly with enough t-shirts for the hotter times and enough sweaters and jackets for the winter. Winter in Seoul can get quite cold, nearing \(0^\circ C\), so pack accordingly. I had one large luggage and a backpack, which was on the little end of what to bring compared to what I saw everyone else brought. This was partially because I was prepared to buy things during my stay, so I packed on the lighter side. For the money side of things, I had with me cash in USD as the exchange rate from USD to KRW was better than CAD to KRW. Of course, I had a small amount already transferred for the short duration where you aren’t available to go to the bank to convert your money. Using a credit card for purchases is okay too, but make sure you search up any extra fees when you are paying overseas, otherwise you may end up paying more than you intended.

I arrived at Incheon Airport, which is the larger one of the two (compared to Gimpo Airport). From there, it was only a single bus ride to a stop near Yonsei University. From there, I had to walk about 10-15 minutes to the building where my dorm was located (SK Global House). There is a small uphill portion, which can be quite difficult to go up if you are hauling heavy luggage. The dorm itself was quite small but typical of what a dorm room would look like. I had a roommate that thankfully was a friend from Vancouver as well, so settling in was not as awkward to begin with as it usual is with strangers. Orientation was quite boring, but it was a
good opportunity to meet new students that are also on exchange. They went over some information such as adjusting to the campus life and facilities that were available such as the library or gym. At the end, there was a portion where they went over clubs that were geared towards international students. I didn’t join any, but I heard some good things about them from people that did. The campus itself was quite large so walking from one end to the other would take some time. Overall, the buildings were quite modern and the environment was very nice, especially the main walkway down the middle of campus. The courses I took were all economic ones as that is my major and they were all taught in English. I was skeptical on the English proficiency of the professors there, but all of them spoke quite well. All of the classes had a mix of international and local Korean students so it was quite diverse. The only problem I had was that professors didn’t mind Korean students asking questions in Korean in which they responded in Korean, so for those who don’t know Korean, you were out of the loop and didn’t know what was being discussed. Overall, the classes were not too much different than what it was like back at SFU.

For things outside the academic viewpoint of exchange, there were so many things available. Yonsei University was near the small community of Sinchon, which had almost everything ranging from restaurants to clothing stores to department malls. If you needed something, all you had to do was walk down to Sinchon, granted that was almost a 20 min walk, which was refreshing during the warmer part of the exchange. If you wanted to go anywhere else in Seoul, the metro station was very easy to use and would get you pretty much anywhere you wanted. If not,
the bus lines were also available but you better research the right stops to get off of. The most outstanding thing during the exchange I must say was the food. I would almost guarantee that everyone would be completely satisfied with the food in Seoul. Whether you like spicy food or not, there will be something available for you, but be warned when a sign says spicy because it usually is very, very spicy. Another great thing is the close proximity to a lot of Asian countries where you can also travel to if you just want a break from South Korea. Not only that, but there are also places within South Korea where you can travel to enjoy the local activities or sights. The one place I went to was Jeju Island, which is a small island south of South Korea. There are a lot of sight seeing you can do here and also the infamous black pork, which is delicious when you are eating barbeque. If you have an international license, it is a lot easier to get around when you rent a car. A group of us also flew to Hong Kong for a weekend during the colder part of the semester to avoid the weather since Hong Kong was still warm.

Looking back after coming home to Vancouver, I realized that one major thing I missed out on was the experience of meeting local people. Although I had friends that were Korean, we didn’t really do much in terms of activities specific to Korean culture (though perhaps drinking at every meal may count). For some of the weekends during my exchange, I did just stay in dorms as I couldn’t really find anything to do, which I regret also. Plan something for every week to do if you can so as to maximize your experience in South Korea.