Exchange Report for American University of Sharjah

Introduction
My name is James and I am now a fourth year student at SFU studying Business Administration. As I love to travel and see the world, I knew an exchange would happen sometime during my degree. I recently returned from my semester abroad at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates. For me, choosing my destination was not a hard choice at all. AUS is situated very close to Dubai, which is a city that I have dreamed of going to because it has so much to offer on its own. Also, I had never experienced a Middle Eastern culture before my exchange and I believed that going somewhere other than Europe or Australia would set me apart from my career-searching peers. But, there is an endless amount of reasons as to why AUS would be a good choice.

Preparation for Exchange
As far as prep went for exchange, it was pretty smooth sailing. The International Exchange Office (IXO) at AUS was extremely helpful. They were always a short email away with multiple staff members to answer any questions you may have. They also had multiple documents prepared, which they sent out to student that covered the basics and helped them understand what to look forward to, however, there are certain things that must be kept in mind when travelling to AUS.

AUS is located in a desert, so, as a result, it is extremely hot, especially into the spring months. February to mid-March was not bad as it generally stayed between 20-30 degrees during the day. But getting closer to summer it gradually got hotter and hotter. The last month I was there, the temperature was typically in the high 30’s and low 40’s; much hotter than Canada for sure. The sun is always out as it rarely rains, but when it does, it floods because of lack of street drainage systems. So, pack accordingly, however, you must also keep in mind the culture and what they consider appropriate clothing. In Dubai, it is very open and you can really wear anything that you can back home; for example, a bikini, tank top, or shorts above the knees. However, in Sharjah, where the University is located, it is a law that men and women must have their knees and shoulders covered at all times and women can not show any cleavage. With that being said, it is not that strict on campus, but if security does feel that you are not modest enough, they will send you to your dorm to change. So, just pack cautiously.

In the UAE, they accept all major credit cards and most ATMs work with our debit cards, but be aware of your daily withdrawal limit. To pay my fees on campus I wanted to pay with cash to avoid the large service charge of paying with credit card, so I had to take out my max withdrawal amount for a few days straight just so I had enough cash to pay. So, I would recommend going to your bank and ordering UAE Dirhams from them in advance so that you have enough cash to cover all the charges you have for the first couple weeks. While budgeting for your exchange, I strongly encourage that you keep travelling in mind. Dubai is central on the globe and its airport is a hub for many major airlines. So, it is pretty easy to find cheap flights to a lot of places. Sharjah also has an
international airport that has cheap flights and it is only a ten-minute drive from campus. Just to give you an idea, my flights to Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar were about $150, and my flights to Jordan and Egypt were about $300. It is so easy to travel, so cheap, and makes your study abroad experience that much more spectacular. Even if you don’t think you will travel, I would recommend budgeting for it anyway because once you get there you may change your mind and if you budget for it, you still have to option to do it.

**During Exchange**

**Arrival and Orientation:** AUS arranges a free airport pick-up for all incoming exchange students when they first arrive in the UAE. However, it is pre-arranged, so if your flight time changes, you should inform them prior to your arrival. My first connecting flight to Dubai was delayed, which caused me to miss my second flight, but I just sent an email to IXO and they arranged to have the shuttle at the airport for my new arrival. After that, it was off to the dorms to get settled into my new home. You find out your dorm prior to your arrival and when you arrive you just go to the office in your dorm where they will brief you and show you to your room. The next day after your arrival will be the first day of your orientation. IXO is amazing and they arrange a week long orientation that includes campus tours, campus meetings, a day tour of Sharjah where you can get to know and see the city you will be living in, a day tour of Dubai where you get to see things like Dubai Mall, Mall of the Emirates, Burj Khalifa, Burj Al Arab, Jumeirah Beach, Atlantis Hotel and so much more, as well as this gives you a great opportunity to meet other exchange students. It is so helpful in the way that it gets you familiar with your surroundings and to understand more about where you will be living. And you are always on the go, so it helps you get over your jetlag really fast.

**Accommodation and Living:** Exchange students are required to live in Dorms on campus, which is nice because you don’t need to go through the struggle of finding a place on your own. But, the dorms do have some rules that are different than at home, though they are a bit lenient for exchange students. For example, no girls are allowed in guys dorms and vice versa, and there is a curfew that students must check in for. Aside from that, dorms are great because you are right on campus and you can get to know more students. Exchange is all about meeting new people and dorms are the perfect way to do that.

**Classes:** Class schedules are arranged to have multiple short lectures per week for each given class. So, every class either runs on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday, or Monday and Wednesday. Keep in mind that Fridays and Saturdays are the weekends in Muslim Countries. I found the classes to be less intensive than SFU. The workload was much easier. Also, some SFU classes are graded on a curve, but that is not the case for AUS. All grades are given based on a grade range. For example, 95%-100% is an A, etc. However, with that being said, I found it much easier to get an A at AUS than at SFU. The classes are the perfect amount of work which allow you to learn a lot and to also be able to have free time to explore and experience the country you came to see.
Social-life and Extra-Curricular: AUS is so close to Dubai and Dubai has so much going on and so many things to see; the list is endless. You could easily go to Downtown Dubai on a weekday after class for dinner and to watch the fountain show. With Dubai as such a tourist hotspot, there is always something new and cool to check out. IXO also plans various trips throughout the year, such as going sand bashing in the desert and spending the night sleeping under the stars. Also, there is a lot of nightlife in Dubai and it is definitely a hot party destination. There are so many cool places to check out and each one has something different to offer. So, grab a group of friends and hit up as many places as you can. It is easy to make friends on campus since the campus is so small compared to SFU and everyone wants to meet the exchange students. For extra-curriculars, AUS has multiple sports teams that any student can sign-up for and tryout, as well as many clubs, like academic clubs, cultural clubs, or interest clubs, such as photography club. There is bound to be one club that appeals to your interests.

Reflection After Exchange

Overall, exchange is an unforgettable experience that I would truly recommend to anyone. I have made some life long friends from all around the world, I have seen so many incredible places, and I have learnt so much about my self, Middle Eastern cultures, and my area of study. AUS was an amazing host and I knew I had made the right choice about my exchange when AUS posted a quote on their Facebook Page: “If opportunity doesn’t knock, build a door.” It just so happens that I have that EXACT quote tattooed on my arm. It’s something that I will always live by, and I constantly urge and attempt to inspire others to do the same, which is why I highly encourage you to go on exchange. Whether you choose to go to AUS or not, I know you will a great experience either way. Studying Abroad is an opportunity that is already knocking and the door is wide open. So, go take complete advantage of it, I dare you!