Macquarie University – Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Exchange Report – Spring 2012 Semester (Feb-June 2012)

After figuring what I wanted to do after my undergrad I decided that I want to continue university for a master’s degree. At the same time though I realized that I will be in school for a lot longer and because of that I also decided to change things up a bit by going on exchange.

I had many countries that I wanted to go to but I ended up picking Sydney, Australia. I had the best experience of my life because I met many students from around the world (Spain, Germany, USA, Italy, UK, Switzerland, Pakistan, Indonesia, Norway, Mexico, Russia, China and India); I met many domestic Aussie students, went traveling and experienced a slightly new culture.

**Macquarie University - Classes**

Macquarie University is located in between the suburbs of Marsfield and Macquarie Park, which is in a residential area that is far from the city/harbor area. The university is quite small compared to SFU but everything you need is in one central area. It is considered to be a very prestigious university in Sydney that specializes in Business/Economics and the arts/social sciences. In terms of class structure it is the same as SFU. You have your lectures (2 hours)/tutorials (1 hour) or seminars (3 hours). Most classes offer a standard
breakdown of assignments, presentation, papers, midterms and finals but the finals are usually the biggest portion of the entire grade. They now use a new academic system called ilearn which is equivalent to webct. The grading scheme consists of High Distinction (HD), Distinction (D), Credit (CR), Pass (P) and Fail (F).

**Macquarie University - Internship Program**

Macquarie University offers internship programs so students can work for a company to gain academic credits. This is a great opportunity for students to gain volunteer experience and get a reference letter.

I applied for this and ended up volunteering with a charity organization called The Smith Family. The Smith Family is a national independent children’s charity that helps disadvantaged children get access to an education. I was a National Events Assistant and my job was to help promote the charity around Sydney to gain donations and sponsors.

This definitely added to the experience while on exchange.


**Sydney, New South Wales (NSW)**

Firstly, Australian culture is very similar to ours but way more relaxed which means that culture shock may not be an issue. Sydney as of right now is one of the most spectacular cities I have ever seen. The city has has many attractions such as the harbor (Sydney Harbor Bridge, the Opera house and Darling Harbor), awesome bars (i.e. Cargo bar), nightclubs (Kings Cross), museums, beaches and walkways. Sydney I would say is equivalent to Vancouver because it is the most developed city within Australia and it is also the most expensive.

Something to highlight though is the city rail system. Their city rail system is similar to our sky train system but their system can take you everywhere around the entire city to places like Wollongong (further south), Newcastle (further north), the Blue Mountains (north-west), etc. It is also set up to tell you exactly when the train is going to come by the minute and you can purchase a return ticket that last the entire day. It is expensive but exchange students do get a concession card that is similar to our Upass.

When it comes to an exchange, choosing the university is only half the battle because choosing the right city is just as important. If you choose Sydney you will not be disappointed at all.
Weather – If you decide to go during the spring semester, school will start at the end of February which is the end of their summer. The summer is very hot during the months of January/February, the fall happens from March to June which is still sunny but June is when winter starts. Beware though when it rains it POURS but then it usually clears up the next day. Overall the weather is GREAT but very unpredictable.
**Preparation for Exchange**

**Student Visa**

After you get your acceptance into Macquarie University you will be given your confirmation of enrollment document (COE) which is what you need when you apply for your student visa.

Applying for your student visa is done through an online application through the Australian government website. There are many visas to choose from but your advisor from Macquarie University would tell you which visa to apply for as well as the exact link to the website. The application is very straightforward just as long as you have your passport and COE ready. In terms of getting your visa it can take up to 1-2 months but for most Canadians they usually get approved within 24 hours. When you get your visa approved it is electronically linked to your passport.

A good way to break down the entire application process of going on an exchange to Australia is.....

1. Getting Nominated by SFU to go on the exchange
2. Get Accepted into the host university (i.e. Macquarie)
3. Apply for your student visa
4. Get accepted into a residence/accommodation
5. Book your flight

**Expenses**

Before going into detail when you go on exchange to Sydney (or anywhere really) you must have the mindset that you will have to spend the majority (if not all) of the money that you save or borrow. Sydney is a very expensive city so be prepared to **SPEND IT ALL**.

**The top five categories of expenses for me were.....**

1. Food/Transportation/alcohol (groceries, restaurants, trains, planes, cabs, bars, nightclubs)
2. Macquarie University Village Accommodation
3. Traveling (Melbourne, Cairns – great barrier reef, Brisbane, Fraser Island and the Blue Mountains)
4. Souvenirs (myself, family and friends)
5. The exchange rate

**Breakdown of Expenses**

1. Food - $800-$1200 per month (really depends if you eat out a lot)
2. Transportation - $4.20 return ticket to the city from the university
3. Macquarie University Village - $6,500.00 (excluding the exchange rate)
4. Traveling - $3000
5. Tuition and Books - $2000
6. Direct Flights to Sydney/Vancouver - $2000
7. Souvenirs - $1000
8. Alcohol, Bars, Nightclubs - $200 per month
9. Student Visa - $565

Keep in mind that I decided to go out and do things almost every day and I decided to travel around Australia. Expenses really depend on how much you do and how much you are willing to see. Best advice though is to **SAVE MONEY EARLY** during the application process.

**Exchange rates** – I went to Australia during a time where their dollar was very high compared to the Canadian dollar. At one point it was close to $1.20 so every purchase that I made cost me a few dollars more. This changes from day to day but at the time that I went the Australian economy was booming.

**Australian Bank Account** – I decided to use my credit card to pay for 95% of expenses and at times I took money out of an ATM machine. If you decide to open a bank account you will avoid the fees from the bank/ATM but there is no escape from the exchange rate. Just choose the option that works best for you. The good banks in Australia are NAB, ANZ, Commonwealth or Suncorp.
Macquarie University Village Accommodation - Townhouse

The village is North West from the university and it takes 5-10 minutes to walk there. Here you will be living with four other people where you have a shared common room, dining room, kitchen and fridge. Each person has their own room and bathroom which was awesome. If you get room 1 it is slightly larger and it is on the first floor and all the other rooms are the second floor and are slightly smaller.

The village is the most expensive accommodation at Macquarie but it is worth it. This is where I met the majority of my friends because the majority of students that live there are all exchange/full degree international students. Beware though if you get a house that is on the east side of the village they are a lot older than the west side.

They do have laundry services in a large building on both sides of the village which will cost you a min of $5 to wash/dry. You will have to give a $1000 security deposit to the village which you will get back after you pass room and house inspections at the end the semester. Overall this is the accommodation to apply for.

Social Life and Attractions in Sydney

The Ranch – The ranch is a hotel that is very close to the university. The hotel dining area turns into a mini nightclub/bar every Wednesday night and most students that live in the accommodation around the university usually go there. They are the BEST nights.
UBAR – This is the university pub that has its pub nights every Thursday evening. It is good to go the Ubar parties at the beginning of the semester since it usually dies down as the semester goes on.

Darling Harbor - This is one of the best locations within the city because you have an array of bars, clubs, and restaurants right by the water. Every Saturday there is fireworks for everyone to enjoy. It is also the location of the Sydney wildlife center, Aquarium and IMAX Theater. You can’t miss this area of the city.

Cargo Bar – This was my favorite bar in the city which is in Darling Harbor.

Home Nightclub – This club is also located in Darling Harbor which puts on a great light show every Saturday evening.


Taronga Zoo – this is the best zoo I have ever seen. You have to take a ferry to get their but it is worth it. You will get to see many Koalas and Kangaroos there.

- Note that the National Australia Zoo is located north of Brisbane in Queensland
- Also if you want to hold a Koala you can only do it in the state of Queensland (Brisbane, Cairns and Gold Coast) because it is illegal to hold one in the state of New South Wales

Blue Mountains – this was my favorite scenic area within New South Wales. It is about three hours to get to by the city rail. It is a mountainous area of trees with great walkways and has a cableway that
takes goes up and down the mountains. The iconic spot is the three sister’s rock formation.

**Sydney Harbor Bridge Climb** – This is an event that attracts people globally. At a large expense you would get a chance to climb up to the top of the bridge and back down.

**Bondi/Manly Beach** – These are the two most popular beaches in Sydney. The water is colorful and clear.

**School Trips** – Macqaurie University puts on a lot of social activities for exchange students before the semester starts and during the mid-semester breaks (2 weeks long). Some of the trips I went on were to the south coast, blue mountains, Jenolan caves, Jamberro rainforest, port Stephens sand surfing, hunter valley winery to name a few. It also provides a cruise around the harbor in the evening time.

**Special Notes**

1. Buy a fan and a heater for your room if you stay at the village.
2. If you plan to stay late in the evening (does not matter which day) the city rail closes at 12:15am so you will need to take a bus back.
3. Avoid taking a cab anywhere it is too expensive.
4. Shops close early at around 5:00pm so you will need to adjust to that.
5. Australians love costume parties.
6. Beer is expensive but wine is very cheap.

**PLAN AHEAD AND SAVE EARLY.**

**ENJOY YOUR TIME IN ONE OF THE BEST CITIES IN THE WORLD.**
Here are some photos of cool places that I traveled to around Australia.

Surf Camp – Seven Mile Beach – Gerroa, New South Wales

Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary – Brisbane, Queensland

South Coast Trip – Kiama, New South Wales

The Great Barrier Reef – Cairns, Queensland