Study Abroad Post-Exchange Report

Country: Australia
University: Monash
Semester: Spring 2016 (February-June)

Introduction:
After what seems like endless applications, hours of research, countless steps, and restless waiting, you will soon come to the speedy realization that exchange is just weeks away. This report is a little snapshot of my exchange experience as a second year-going onto third year student studying Criminology and minoring in Counselling and Human Development. My main purpose for embarking on an exchange semester was to grow myself as an individual by living alone in a new city and country half a world away. The benefits reaped from this experience are endless, but a few include internationalizing your resume, expanding on your academic specialty, and increasing your network through meeting people from all over the world.

Preparation for Exchange:
So you’ve been nominated by SFU, you’ve been accepted by Monash, and after sorting through several important emails with orientation information, course information, and student login steps, where do you start? The first thing I would recommend you do is figure out where you want to live. If you are one of those people who like to be spontaneous, don’t be when it comes to picking your residency because it will shape your exchange experience profoundly. I lived on residency at Monash Clayton Campus and would not have done it any other way.
Residency:

There is a big debate of living in “Old Halls” vs. “New Halls.” Let’s settle that first.

**Old Halls (Clayton Residential Village):** Deakin Hall, Farrer Hall, Howitt Hall, Normanby House, Richardson Hall, and Roberts Hall.

The perks of living in old halls is that it is a little bit cheaper than living in the newly built residencies at Monash. That being said, these halls are OLD. People claim that you make stronger friendships through living at old halls, however I would disagree. The walk from old halls to campus is also around 10-15 minutes.

**New Halls (Clayton Urban Community):** Campbell Hall, Holman Hall, Turner Hall, Logan Hall.

Definitely on the pricier side of things, so if you are indeed on a VERY tight budget, old halls may be the best option, or off-campus housing. That being said, in the new halls you get your own private bathroom with toilet, sink, mirror, storage space, and shower. There are no ways to explain how helpful and nice this is if you need to get ready for a night out or aren’t feeling well. The amenities such as wing lounges, common room, and laundry spaces are also much more tidy and sanitary. You also get your own full-sized fridge and kitchen with a sink, small stove, microwave oven and endless storage space. You get a huge desk with lots of space and a king single bed. Campbell Hall on Clayton Campus is closest to campus centre and to the main lecture buildings. I rolled out of bed at 9:50am for a 10:00am class as the walk was not even two minutes.

I personally met all of my close friends in my “New Hall” and made ever-lasting friendships, just as you would in “Old Halls,” so don’t let the social aspect of things hinder you from choosing the newer buildings. You most likely will only do exchange once, and if you’re going to do it once, do it right and spend the little bit of extra money, because this hands down made my experience all the better.

Here is a link to the Monash Residency Website for options:
http://www.monash.edu/accommodation/accommodation/on-campus-options

Here is a link to the Monash Residency Website’s pricing:
http://www.monash.edu/accommodation/accommodation/pricing

You can find pricing approximates and full descriptions of the rooms, they look something like the chart below.
This will give you a good idea of the cost of Residential Village vs. Urban Community. It is important to note that Old Halls move in on February 13th, whereas New Halls move in on January 25th. You don’t HAVE to move in on these dates, but you do start paying when your contract begins, whether you occupy the room or not. So new halls begin paying earlier, this isn’t necessarily a bad thing because you can start exchange nearly a month before school starts and move in with plenty of time to settle in and travel.

The difference of $46.55 per week is up to you, but for extra privacy, space, and convenience, the extra money was **definitely** worth it.

The photos below are of my room at Campbell Hall. Notably, the room does not come with appliances/sheets. You will need to make a trip to Kmart for a toaster/sheets/utensils, etc. I wouldn’t recommend buying the linen pack from the university as very little comes with it and it is pricey. You’re better off making a trip to Kmart. If you want to decorate your room, avoid Ikea because half the things you buy, you won’t bring back with you unless they are light. Don’t get carried away with your room, make it yours, but shop SMART!
My Studio Apartment

Room 323 Campbell Hall Spring 2016
**Things to Bring & Clothes/Weather:**

When you arrive in February, the weather is going to be very warm. Pack summer clothes and beach clothes, but not too many. Enough to last you for a few weeks as summer turns into fall fairly quickly (remember the seasons are opposite)! If you’re a sports junkie like I am, bring a pair of ball shoes or court shoes as Monash Sport has lots of drop-ins available and recreational leagues to partake in. Not to mention the Halls have intramural games against each other so if that’s something you’re interested in, bring those gym shoes! Bring a casual outfit for fancy dinners and also something that is appropriate for nightlife. Night time in Melbourne can get stormy and cold within minutes (just like Vancouver) so bring a hoodie (or jumper as the Australians say) or a cardigan to throw on top of your outfit and you’ll be good.

There are a few things that you should bring with you to Australia from home. You are going to school, so bring your laptop, calculator, a backpack, and pencils and pens with you. Australia’s outlets are also different than North America’s so if you can, leave your hair dryer/straightener at home and buy a cheap one from a local store. Bring an adapter or two with you, this will be more than enough to get you by. Make sure the voltages all match up too so that you don’t find your laptop chargers or other appliances to be over-heating.

**Documentation:**

There are a few important things you need to have done before you come to Australia. One of those things is applying for a subclass 575 Visa online. You’ll get more information about this in an email from Monash, but essentially you apply for your visa online and you receive it within minutes electronically. Use a reliable email source, your SFU email is great for this! Have a printout copy of this with you at ALL TIMES during your travel just in case border security or immigration asks. Additionally, have your confirmation of enrollment sheet printed out too! Personally, because I have the new Canadian Passport with the e-reader, and a nexus pass, I did not talk to a single border officer on my way to Australia; however, if
you travel to other places during your exchange adventure, which you most likely will, then this is important to have. The cost for the visa was around $600, and you make a payment online for it through the immi-account you create for the Australian government.

In addition to this, have some health insurance papers with you and the basic OSHC paperwork handy. Believe it or not, my friend broke her arm just weeks before leaving for home and so it’s super important to have some coverage.

It’s not a bad idea to bring an OFFICIAL SFU transcript with you. I brought one with me just in case, as during course registration, Monash may need to review it to make adjustments to your time table and pre-approved courses. They have a similar thing to our SIS, it is called WES (web enrollment system). And their Moodle is our Canvas (you will get used to these terms, trust me)!

Of course, bring your passport and maybe a driver’s license. **Fair warning**, many places for your nightlife experience in Australia will only accept your passport as I.D. There are ways to get a certified photocopy, but it is a little costly and time consuming, so you’re best bet is to be responsible and take good care of it when you go out!

**Phone:**

There are many phone companies to browse through in Australia. I chose to go with Optus, and many people do. They have EXCELLENT deals and setting up your phone is easy. Do yourself a favour and UNLOCK your phone, or bring an unlocked phone with you to Australia. Once this is done, buy a sim card from any local retailer like Coles or Kmart, activate your phone, and load it monthly.


I chose to go with the $30 Optus Prepaid Plan and would recharge monthly. You can either recharge online, or you can buy prepaid vouchers from Coles (a supermarket like our Safeway) and put in the voucher code onto your phone and it would recharge for you.

Blow is a chart with some of the Optus Options, and I encourage you to do more research to suit your own telephone needs!
Banking:

Perhaps one of the most daunting tasks in the exchange process is trying to set up a bank account in Australia. Luckily, the Commonwealth bank is very student-friendly and you can even open your account and transfer money to it before you get to Australia! I signed up for the student smart-access account. This account has no fees because it is a student account and you get a Debit MasterCard in approximately 1-2 weeks after your arrival in Melbourne and after you get identified at the bank with your passport. Until then, have some cash with you for the first week or so, or feel free to use your own bank cards, just be mindful of international service fees! There is also a Commonwealth Bank on Campus and an ATM so that makes dealing with any issues a lot easier (although I found banking with them an absolute breeze and never had any problems)!

To start, I transferred $8000 Canadian to the account before arriving there and once I arrived there the money was in the account and ready to use once I got identified at the bank. Half way through my trip, I got my parents to transfer over $5000 more and that was all the money I used for the trip. Mind you, a majority of that money went to travel and rent. An exchange semester isn’t cheap, so start saving up early!
This link will give you more information on banking and how to set up an account:

**How to sign up for Student Options**

First open an Everyday Account Smart Access

Once you’ve opened your account using the button below you’ll be signed up to Student Options and will enjoy:

- $0 monthly account fees
- No withdrawal fees at CommBank and Bankwest ATMs
- Online shopping with a Debit MasterCard
- Tap & Pay with your mobile using the CommBank app
- Cardless Cash which lets you withdraw your cash without your card using the CommBank app

You’ll need to visit a branch within 12 months and show your current Student ID to continue to be eligible for this discount.

Before leaving Australia, be sure to close your account and withdraw/transfer your money from it to avoid accumulating fees in the future.

**My Travel Route:**

So, you’re almost all ready to go. How on earth do I get to Melbourne? I flew with two friends who were also going to Monash and we flew from YVR to LAX, had a layover of 4 hours (which was good as our first flight was delayed by 2 hours so this was excellent buffer time) and then a 15 hour flight from LAX to MEL. We flew with Air Canada and United Airlines on the way there and Air New Zealand on the way back. I recommend you book your return ticket while you book your departure ticket. You can check Monash’s timetable and see when the last day of exams are and also when your last day of residency is so you know when you have to depart by. The cost for the ticket was around $1600 round trip. There are other routes you can take through Asia, but I would recommend this route through the U.S. as it is easy and without many transfers.
**During Exchange:**

Upon arriving in Melbourne, Monash University has a free pick-up service which I highly recommend you use! I luckily had a friend in Melbourne who picked me up from the airport and took me to the University. Taking a taxi to the University will cost you near $100 so try to avoid that at all costs!

Once you get to campus, the residential support team (RST) leaders will help take you to your room and give you a quick tour. These leaders are super friendly and they get chosen for a reason! Don’t hesitate to ask the leaders questions, they are a great resource for help!

**School:**

Monash’s university format is similar to SFU’s. There are lectures and classroom sessions (tutorials). Surprisingly, some of my lectures were 1 hour with a 1 hour tutorial. Other lectures were the standard 2 hours. The grading scheme is also different in Australia. It looks a little something like this:

![Grading Scheme](image)

Monash has lots of clubs and societies to join, take the initiative to get involved and attend your orientation events! You will meet lots of cool people and learn about events and programs that you can get involved with.

Monash is an excellent exchange school option for Criminology majors. The courses they have available are interesting and specific and the lecturers are passionate and helpful. They offer courses not offered by Simon Fraser and they offer new perspectives to the discipline that you may not have the opportunity to explore here.
**Transportation:**

Getting around in Melbourne is fairly easy. It may seem overwhelming at first, but you will get used to it. You can download the PTV app onto your phone (Public Transit Victoria) and it is super helpful for mapping out routes/checking bus and train times. Unlike the train system in Vancouver, you have to check train departure times in Melbourne and plan accordingly, especially since Monash is located in Clayton, a suburb around 45 minutes from the city. You can think of this as SFU being in Burnaby and a little bit of a commute from the city.

You will need to have a MyKi card. This is like the Compass Card we have here. You can load them up at the bus loop on campus or any station. I HIGHLY recommend you apply for the half-year international student status so you pay a discounted rate. The process is not too difficult and will save you nearly half of the adult fare cost! You can find out more information about this from the school’s Connect office. They will give you a Request form and inform you of how to go about applying.

Melbourne also has UBER. Make an account and get your friends to make accounts so you can share discount codes and split costs coming home from the city. It is a much more affordable option than taking taxi’s and it is great if you have friends who will split the rides with you.

Monash also has a weekly bus on Saturdays which will take you to Brandon Park, a local plaza with Coles (a supermarket), Kmart, a post office, bakeries, etc. The bus runs every hour from 9am-2pm and it is a FREE SERVICE. I used this nearly every week to second week with friends and it was a great convenience.

**Travel:**

During my abroad experience I travelled to Sydney, Alice Springs, and Bali. I also did the Great Ocean Road tour. During the first few weeks many tour packages like One Fish Two Fish and other big companies will pitch their programs to you. Some of these experiences are indeed priceless, but they DO come with a price. Do your research and figure out which ones are within your budget and worth the trip for the itinerary offered. Odds are you can plan your own trips with your own activities for a better cost. I had lots of family in Australia, so I took my break time to visit them. Other popular travel options include Gold Coast, Thailand, Fiji, Tasmania, and New Zealand.
Thank-Yous:

This is an aspect of exchange reports that I think is missing. **Do not forget** to thank the Monash Study Abroad team for the hard work they put in on their behalf for making your exchange experience possible. My friend and I wrote them a thank you card and they said we were the first ever from any school in Canada to do so. Going on exchange gets you super busy and occupied with many different things, but take 20 minutes out of your day to meet the people behind those emails and give them your thanks. A little appreciation will go a long way.

![Photo with Monash Study Abroad Officer Rebecca Lim](image)

**Reflection after Exchange:**

Sitting here, writing this report, is a surreal feeling. To know that I am now a study abroad alumni is incredible. There are countless benefits that I gained from participating in the study abroad program. I learned several skills through living alone in Melbourne, Australia, including budgeting money, cooking, effective time management, social skills, maintaining mental and physical health, improving my sense of direction, and building problem-solving skills. In addition to these skills, living alone provided me with the opportunity to be independent and create a routine and schedule on my own accord. Living alone puts a lot of responsibility upon yourself as an individual to be proactive and figure out how to sort through and solve any problems that you encounter.

During my study abroad semester, I also had the benefit of meeting and befriending other international students and networking with them. It was interesting to learn not only about Australian culture, but also about the culture of several other nations through the friendships I acquired. The friendships I made during this experience will no doubt be life-long friendships, as we are already discussing plans to visit one another in our home countries in the future. The connection and bond you make with new people here is indescribable, and the only way I would have made such meaningful, valuable friendships, is to have taken the
chance and studied abroad. The world is such a big place and if we only stay in one place forever, we may very well be missing out on amazing friendships or important paths we could have crossed. (No joke, these are life-long friends, I have been back from exchange nearly 2 months and we still skype from time to time to stay up to date)

Skype date with friends from Canada, The United Kingdom, and The Netherlands.

The crazy thing is, you’re going to come back home a whole different person with different skills, different outlooks, and different experiences; everything is going to be completely different for you, but the same for everyone else. Be calm, breathe, and do not get frustrated. Everyone will ask you how incredible your adventure was and you will not have a word or adequate way of explaining how profound this experience was. You will just have an overwhelming amount of feelings, and lots of memories. Spend your money on time and experiences, not on material things. You will thank yourself later for the pictures and moments you can look back on from travelling, not the t-shirts and souvenirs you bought. Remember that school is important, and when studying abroad you are representing Simon Fraser University, so study hard, but play hard too. You’re half way around the world and the classroom is not the only place you will learn during your abroad experience. A lot of your learning will come from experiences, problems, mistakes, and lessons learned. And if you love this experience as much as I did, think about giving back to the SFU study abroad program by becoming an ambassador, GPS Buddy, or just volunteering.

_Dear future exchange student, I am so excited for you. Be safe, be smart, and enjoy every single moment that this invaluable experience will bring you. Most importantly, don’t ever let YOUR story fade away, and ALWAYS say yes to adventures._
Hosier Lane Street Art – Melbourne

Flinders Street Station - Melbourne
Mardi Gras Parade 2016 – Sydney

My signed Australia flag (a great souvenir idea, get your friends to sign it!)