Exchange Report: University of Oslo
Fall 2013

This past semester, Fall 2013, I was lucky enough to go on exchange to Norway. I got nominated with a good friend of mine and we both got into the University of Oslo in Oslo, Norway. We left midway through August and returned five days before Christmas. I believe the exact dates of the term were August 12th until December 20th (however most exams were finished earlier). I took three psychology courses at the university to satisfy credits for my minor. It was an amazing experience and I would encourage anyone reading this to consider Oslo as an exchange destination.

In preparation for going on exchange I would encourage you to ensure you have the funds to satisfy your time in Oslo. As Norway is one of the most expensive countries in the world it is definitely important to come with a healthy budget. The good thing about going on exchange to Oslo in fall term is that you get to experience all the seasons. We arrived in August so we had some beautiful sunny weather, a beautiful fall and only a little bit of winter. I would definitely encourage those going to pack a lot of sweaters. Even if it is sunny in fall, it is still quite cold so layering will be key. You are not required to get a student visa before leaving, however you are required to get a residence permit and the process does take a few months to process so just make sure you leave a lot of time. Norway accepts all major credit cards so I would encourage those going to use credit. You can also pay all things towards the university online and it is quite straightforward to do. Make sure you learn the conversion rates so you know how much you are paying for things!

Due to our work schedule my friend and I arrived one day before orientation. Orientation was on August 12th. We were pre-assigned our buddy groups before hand. On the day all orientation groups were gathered on a grassy area at the university. All groups ran differently
from giving you a tour of the university to running get to know each other games. I would definitely encourage those going on exchange to attend orientation at their host university because it is a great way to meet new people. There are a variety of residences available to exchange students all over the city of Oslo. As an exchange student coming from outside Europe I believe you are guaranteed residence. The best student residences to request are Kringsjå and Sogn. Those are the two residences where most exchange students live. I lived in Kringsjå and loved it. Friends always surrounded me and it was a fun environment.

In terms of the school system in Oslo it is very different than what you have come to expect in Canada. All classes run from different times. For example, I had one class that ran from mid August until the beginning of October, while another class I took started at the beginning of September and ended at the start of November. It just depends on what classes you are planning on taking. Lectures are varied; some are three-hour lectures while others are twice a week for an hour and half. The biggest difference is in terms of the grading system. There are no mandatory assignments during the term; instead all exams at the end are worth 100% of your grade. It is very different than what we experience at Simon Fraser. I had one class where we had weekly mandatory assignments however you just had to pass them in order to qualify for the final. So the grades you got on the assignment did not go towards your final mark. This system takes some getting used to.

There is a lot to see and do in Oslo. The harbour is one of the biggest highlights of Oslo. We spent many days just strolling up and down the wharf of the harbour. Definitely go during the fall/winter and you will see some amazing sunsets. Another highlight is taking the ferries out to the islands in the summer. It is always a fun way to spend a day. It is worth taking a stroll on the main shopping street, Karl Johans Gate. You will not miss the Opera house when in Oslo, it
is an interesting landmark to see and you get a great view over the city. Another benefit from living in Kringsjå is that you are a five-minute walk from Sognsvann Lake, which is so beautiful even covered in snow. If you are going on exchange to Norway, take a weekend trip to Preikestolen or Trolltunga. Both are amazing hikes that lead to looking over the fjords. You will make it your own depending on the friends you meet on exchange. With our friends we had a lot of family dinners where everyone would bring food (because it is very expensive to eat out). We also did a lot of exploring around the different neighbourhoods in Oslo, like Grünerløkka. The orientation team will give you access to a variety of events to participate in which are always fun, for example we did a “scavenger” hunt of sorts around the city where we had to complete tasks or find landmarks. If you like going out I would definitely suggest going out on Thursdays because that is student night at most bars and clubs so you can get in for free!

Going on exchange was by far the best decision of my life. I never realized what a great impact it would have on my life. You learn so much about yourself and grow as a person. It gives you a new level of independence that you won’t get from other experiences. Also, you get the chance to do so much extra traveling and you are exposed to so many different cultures. There will definitely be times where you miss your friends and family and the comforts of home, but if you are lucky you will make amazing friends on exchange that become your exchange family. I don’t really know if there is anything I wish I knew before I left because I think just going into it with an open mind is what made it such an amazing experience. I guess that would be my advice, just be open to new experiences and meeting new people and you are guaranteed to have an amazing time!