I participated in an international exchange term at Yonsei University in South Korea. I enrolled at Yonsei as a Business Administration student, and studied there from September to December of 2016.

Seoul is a relatively modern city where you can find many things you need. As such, there is no need to bring too much household necessities with you as you can buy them after you arrive. However, some items may be harder to find, or not quite the same in Korea as in North America. These include deodorant, toothpaste, and tampons for the ladies.

Other items can be found commonly in Seoul, and they are both cheaper and better there. Therefore, you may want to bring less of these so that you can buy more in Korea to bring home. Some examples include cute socks, trendy tops, and all cosmetics – from skincare to makeup to coloured contacts.

The outlets in Korea differ in shape and voltage from Canada. Thus, a converter is needed for your electronics. You can buy the converters here in Korea if you did not bring any. Yonsei’s bookstore sells them for 1000 won. These converters only work with plugs that have two equal prongs. If one of the prongs on your plug is larger than the other, it may not fit into the converter. This was the case with my hair-dryer that I brought from home, so I ended up buying another hair-dryer in Korea.

Public transportation around Seoul is convenient. There are many subway lines, but they are all clearly marked and all the stations have English names so foreigners would have no problems navigating through the system. Buses are frequently and there are little digital displays at each bus stop telling you when the next bus will arrive. On the bus, there are usually intercom announcements for the upcoming stop, and a bell will need to be pressed to signal to the driver want to get off.

To pay for transit, you can use a public transportation card called the T-Money card. Credit can be loaded into the card, and then you can use the card to pay for subways, buses, taxis, and even at some convenience stores. The Yonsei student ID card can act as a T-Money card, so there is no need to buy one separately.

Travelling around Korea is not difficult. To go to Jeju Island, I recommend booking flights early online. Sometimes, you can get return flights for as cheap as $50. To go to Busan or other cities around the country, I recommend taking the KTX. As a foreigner, you are eligible for discounts on day passes from the Korail website.
In South Korea, debit card is accepted almost everywhere, and credit card is accepted in most major stores. However, sometimes it is necessary to carry around cash, such for loading T-Money, splitting bills with friends, and paying for food or clothes from some street vendors.

I recommend bringing Canadian or American cash to Korea to exchange for Korean Won there. The exchange rate there is better than what you can find in Vancouver. USD can be exchanged for good rates at Myeongdong, and CAD can be exchanged for good rates at major banks, such as Woori Bank, the bank affiliated with Yonsei.

It is easy enough to sign up for a Woori bank account. After opening an account, you can make purchases with your check card (similar to a debit card) which is way more convenient than paying with cash. The Yonsei student ID card can also be used as a check card once it is linked to your Woori bank account.

I also obtained an Amazon.ca Visa card before going to Korea. This Visa card charges no transaction fees for currency exchanges and can be used around the Yonsei campus no problem. The card is sometimes rejected at restaurants and stores, but I always have my check card and cash with me as well.

When first arriving in Korea, I followed the instructions on Yonsei’s website and took the Airport Limousine bus from Incheon airport all the way to the campus. It was helpful to find blogs online that showed me how to walk to the dorms after getting off at the bus stop.

Yonsei offered an orientation for incoming exchange students one week before classes started. We first received a package containing our student ID card, some booklets, and some documents. We then sat down and listened to presentations about Yonsei’s facilities, student clubs, helpful resources, and guidance on how to apply for the Alien Registration Card which is mandatory for all students staying in Korea for more than three months.

If you want to live in one of Yonsei’s international dorms, I recommend applying as soon as the application period is open, as it is quite competitive to get in. I stayed in a double-room at SK Global House, which includes a private bathroom with shower. There is Wi-Fi reception in the rooms so there is no need to bring your own router. However, for faster internet, you can connect your laptop to the network via an Ethernet cable.
Facilities that SK Global House provides include a shared kitchen, a laundry room, a fitness center, study rooms on each floor, and lounges with TV, sink, microwave, and water-filling station on each floor. There is a convenience store, cafes, and restaurants just next to the dorms, and SK Global House is also connected to the building where KLI (Korean Language Institute) classes are held.

As for academic classes, I found the lecture format to be similar with SFU. In the three business courses I took, the course loads seem to be approximately the same or slightly lighter than SFU. Unlike Beedie courses, professors may use absolute rather than relative grading for certain business courses taught in English.

I did not receive any big culture shocks when I went to Korea. Although Koreans have some customs that are different from western cultures, they tend to be more understanding towards foreigners who do not understand their traditions. The weather was also not too different from Vancouver’s. Overall, I found it quite easy to adapt.

There are many fun places to visit around Seoul. The area right next to Yonsei, called Sinchon, is great for hanging out with friends after class. There are many restaurants, coffee shops, karaoke places, cosmetic stores, and even street performers when it gets later in the day. Bowling, batting cages, billiards, and arcades are also available here.

Next to Sinchon is the Ewha area, which is great for shopping for clothes and shoes, eating, and getting your hair done. Also close by is the Hongdae area, which is full of street performers, night clubs, and restaurants. There is also a trick-eye museum here.

Additionally, I recommend going to Gangnam for people-watching, Hangang river for a cruise, and Namsan Tower for a cable-car ride. The VisitSeoul and VisitKorea website offers great information on places worth seeing and festivals worth attending. It also frequently provides discounts for foreigners and sometimes information on free K-pop concerts.

From this exchange experience, I learned how to be independent and manage my own time and finances. I learned that most people will respond positively if you initiate the conversation with them. The biggest challenge I faced was the language barrier at first, but that got better with time as I learned Korean at Yonsei.

Overall, I would definitely recommend going to Yonsei for exchange. It was well worth the effort, as I made some really good friends and got to explore Korea.
Orientation
Myeongdong
Bowling
Seafood meal