This exchange was an experience that I will not soon forget, and would recommend to anyone who is able. Although anywhere around the world would be amazing to visit, I chose to go to Lund University in Lund, near the southern tip of Sweden. I went on this exchange term more with the intent to try out a variety of different classes and experience a culture, rather than advance my degree a great deal. And whatever your goals for this exchange, it will still offer many new experiences.

One particular thing that I found with my preparations, is that the university does not do things well in advance. I was departing for Sweden in January and needed my acceptance letter to apply for a visa, which they recommend applying for 3 months ahead. The letter did not even arrive until mid November, but the thing is that there is not much to worry about. I found Sweden incredible efficient and documents processed quickly so there is no need to panic. Also almost everything in Sweden is conducted through card, so make sure you have a credit card or two and some places don’t even take cash.

Packing can be a difficult thing because Sweden can get bitterly cold in the winter, with snows lasting well into April. However, on the other hand once the sun comes out it can be very hot. The biggest thing to say about Lund’s weather is the wind, it is very, and I mean very, strong. In the warm weather this is great but can be seriously difficult to deal with in the snow and rain of colder months, so make sure to have a good jacket. A good pair of gloves is also important as even when the weather gets better hands can get very cold while riding your bike. And yes bike is the main form of transportation around Lund. There are usually a bunch for sale, don’t be afraid to ask your neighbors as they may be selling them as they head home, that is how I got mine. There is also a great bus system and with a Jojo card you can get almost anywhere.

For flying into Lund I came through Iceland on Iceland Air into Copenhagen, from there it's very easy to catch a train. A word of warning is that it you are flying in for the spring term, Iceland can get very windy and cause flight delays so be prepared. I was there for arrival day so there are people from the university at Copenhagen airport to great you and help you figure out how to get to Lund. There is also a shuttle service to take you to the arrival day building. That is where you can get your keys as well as a Swedish SIM card that can be filled up at the local corner store. The shuttle service will also take you to your residence. Residence is something you have to be sure to apply for as soon as possible as it is very difficult to get something in Lund if it is not through the University. I was in Ostra Torn, which was on the edge of town, but Lund is quite small and everything is very close so it was not a big deal. Following arrival day there is about two weeks worth of activities for new students to experience. If you have signed up for SUSA, the introductory Swedish course, this will take place then as well. I would highly recommend SUSA, more to meet people than to really learn Swedish since learning the language is not really needed as almost everyone in Sweden can speak English. Try to go to lots events and don’t worry if you don’t know anyone since everyone is in the same boat.
After orientation week classes start and from what I could tell they all followed a similar format. The class sizes are very small, normally 30-50 from what I could tell, and they often seem smaller as mandatory attendance is usually reserved for a few select seminars. While there may be some smaller group projects or class discussion days the majority of your grade will be based around a final paper or take home exam. Grading is also kind of hard to judge, as you do not receive the results of your assignments, simply the final grade for the full course. I found the grades I did receive fair but have heard that teachers can be a bit tougher marking wise. Where you take your classes can vary as the school buildings stretch across the entire town, with some of the buildings being a couple centuries old. I would also recommend bringing a sweater to class, as the buildings can be quite cold in the wintertime.

When you are not in class I recommend trying to travel as much as possible. The classes I took tended to have big enough gaps between them that I could take 5-day trips without missing anything or miss only 1-2 classes for a longer trip. With Copenhagen airport nearby it works as a great jumping off point for Scandinavia as well as Eastern Europe. If you are there in the winter I recommend taking the ESN Lapland trip in Finland. It is a bit pricey but it is an amazing experience to visit northern Finland and Norway with the chance to see the Northern lights and try things from a whole new culture. I also recommend visiting Stockholm, which is about a five-hour train ride north, and Copenhagen, which is only an hour west by train.

Lund itself is also a charming town with lots of amazing little cafes and coffee shops. Don’t just go to Subway, try the different foods of Sweden and also be open to having a variety of international foods from the other students there. I got lucky with amazing neighbors and it was a great experience to get together for dinner and eat things from their countries. The Nations, which work kind of like fraternities, but without all the trouble, also put on dinners and events that open lots more opportunities to try stuff.

Looking back on the exchange there are some things I wish I had done differently. In this report I talked about all the events and things to do in Lund but I didn’t actually go to nearly as many as I wish I had. I let my shy nature get the best of me and missed out which is why you shouldn’t let your nerves get the best of you. But at the same time don’t be afraid to strike out on your own. I did all my traveling alone and while I wish I could have had a friend it also allowed me the opportunity to do what I wanted and really be independent. This exchange was really my first time being completely on my own, living on my own and having complete control of my life. It gave me confidence in myself and I hope that anyone else who is maybe isn’t sure about going because they’ve never been on their own learns from this that an exchange term, no matter where it is, is going to be scary but in a good way. Change is scary, but without change there is no adventure.