INTRODUCTION

I spent my Spring 2012 semester as an exchange student in National Taiwan University in Taipei. I am a 4th-year SFU Beedie School of Business student. I decided to study in Taiwan in order to improve my Mandarin. I have previously completed all of the Chinese courses available in SFU and my Chinese teacher supported my idea of participating in the exchange program.

TRAVEL & VISAS

Since I was only doing a semester of exchange in Taiwan, obtaining a visitor visa is sufficient for the duration. On the other hand, if one plans to do two semesters, he/she needs to apply for the student visa. Applying for the visa is simple as it only takes one to two business days. However, make sure that you have all of the required documents, such as the host university’s acceptance letter, passport, flight information, etc. For the visitor visa, it costs around $50CDN. During my stay in Taiwan, I had to renew my visa every 2 months.

FINANCIAL DETAILS

I lived in NTU Chang-Hsin dorm with one roommate and the rent cost around $130CDN/month. The dorm seems cleaner and newer in comparison to other dorms. The food, especially those inside or near the campus, is very cheap. It usually costs around $3 to $5 per meal. Taking the MRT or public generally costs around $0.50 one-way, depending on the destination. Furthermore, entertainment and trip travel expenses are the two biggest expenses for me. For
instance, going to KTV would cost me an average of $15 each time. I also travelled to different parts of Taiwan whenever I got the chance. In total, I would say I spend an average of $500CDN per month.

ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

Thankfully, NTU has a really good system in place for assisting all of their exchange students. Firstly, each exchange student would be paired with a local “buddy” to help you, especially on your first days. When arrived in the airport, there will be volunteer students from NTU to pick up the exchange students. In the first week, there is an orientation giving us detailed information about the different buildings on the campus and other necessary information. During the orientation, I met other exchange students from all over the world!

ACCOMODATION & LIVING

As a business-preferred exchange student, I was selected to live at the Chang-Hsin Prince House BOT dorm by default. However, you are free to choose a different dorm once you have arrived in Taiwan. In Price House BOT dorm, the rent would cost $130/month for a shared room with one roommate, or $235/month for a single room. The dorm is located just across from the campus, but the campus is so large it is still better to have a bike. Near Chang-Hsin, there is a coffee shop, 7-11, and a few restaurants. Please also note that the monthly rent does not include the electricity bill.
ACADEMIC DETAILS

The course selection of business courses taught in English is very limited, so you would be much better off to know Mandarin. During my semester, I took three business courses and one Chinese course. I paid $26,000NT to enroll in the intensive Chinese course level 2. NTU only offers the beginner level, once a week Chinese class for free. The three business courses taught in English that I took are: Futures and Options, Investments, and Operations Management. I would have to say that the professors’ English level is usually fairly poor. I know a number of exchange students who complained due to being unable to understand what the professors were talking about when giving lectures.

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Taipei’s weather is very unpredictable. It is very common to see the bright sky in the morning, and all of the sudden the grey clouds came and started raining. This is why the locals always bring umbrella whenever they go. The summer can be very hot and humid as well. Mosquitos can be very annoying as well. Fortunately, your dorm will have air conditioner.

Should not be a surprise, the locals here speak Mandarin. While students from NTU are able to speak English fairly well, other Taiwanese may speak very little to no English at all! It can be good when your goal is to learn Mandarin as it forces you to practice your Mandarin.

There is a lot of food variety in Taipei. I like to go to the night markets every so often, because there you can different types of Taiwanese snacks. There are also a lot of Japanese and Western restaurants near the campus, in case you are bored of Taiwanese food.
Travelling is a must when you are in Taiwan. Taipei might not have it all, but Taiwan does! There are tons of things to do, such as surfing, scuba diving, etc. I would also recommend visiting the two other big cities in Taiwan, Kaohsiung and Taichung. Other places to visit: Green Island, Hualien, Kenting, and Cijin Island.

SOCIAL AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Just like in SFU, there are a lot of clubs to choose from in NTU. I was fairly active in three clubs while I was there, these are: NTU Language Exchange Club, NTU Foreign Student Association, and NTUISIS. Whatever your hobby is, most likely there is already a club for you to join.

REFLECTION AFTER EXCHANGE

Overall, I am satisfied with the exchange experience as I have been able to improve my Mandarin, make a lot of friends, and understand the Taiwanese culture. However, I still believe that there are two opportunity costs to consider. One is that in SFU there are three semesters every year, whereas NTU only have two semesters per year. Doing a semester of exchange program would actually cost two SFU semesters! Lastly, people here use traditional Chinese characters instead of the simplified version. As of now, only Taiwan and Hong Kong still use the traditional Chinese. Even the Mandarin courses taught in SFU are using simplified. When I came
to Taiwan, I had no other choice but to learn the traditional characters. Sometimes I was shocked as of how different the same words are written in traditional and simplified Chinese.