

2012-2013

University Attended: Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

What did this involve, how long did it last, was it useful?

The orientation week, as it was called, lasted 5 days and was extremely helpful. During that short period the International Office organised a few Campus, Hong Kong City and Hong Kong Islands tours. All 500+ exchange students were also invited to a big formal dinner to help us meet everyone. It was all free of charge. The whole get-to-know each other process was further stimulated by the fact that we all had to spend the first 5 nights in 2 neighbouring halls of residence (After these first 5 days we had to move into our respective colleges.). There were also numerous college lunches, induction tours and lectures, survival Cantonese presentations, etc., to prepare us for the next few months. The orientation period ends with the start of the academic year, which means that during that time there are no local/full-time students on campus or in the halls, and we would only meet exchange students everywhere. What is more, knowing there are no lectures yet, we organised nights out together every single day during the orientation programme. It all feels very welcoming and quite organized: we were given countless schedules, programmes, manuals, campus maps, instructions etc., and were expected to ask questions. All in all, I would strongly recommend participation, as it is the only period in which your main task is to meet the other exchange students, and explore and get acquainted with the huge campus (incl. the initially quite confusing bus system).

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Style of teaching, courses, ease of access to courses, methods of assessment, teaching support

The academic side of CUHK is something quite different. The first thing you need to know is not to panic when you find out you did not get all of your pre-selected classes (you are asked to choose your classes 3 months before the start of the academic year.) It is possible, although not too easy, to get all of your chosen classes once you arrive there. However, you need to be quite quick and smart about it. The add/drop period lasts until quite late, but you need to have shown interest in a certain class in the first few days. This will give you bargaining power if you do not manage to sign up for it electronically. Their system looks almost like ours, but is nowhere near as efficient. It is highly possible that it crashes (they even tell you it will), therefore, I would recommend you go and speak to the lecturer/TA in person. More often than not, they would appreciate your enthusiasm and help you with the enrolment process, or even do it themselves.

The teaching style is also very different from what you will be used to. Of course it depends on the course department, the lecturer, the number of exchange students enrolled, etc. In my first semester I chose classes I would have chosen if still in MBS, which turned out to be my biggest mistake. Although it was all manageable, none of it was enjoyable. Do not expect lecturers to explain everything in a clear manner or be good presenters. What is more, Finance and Economics in general are highly competitive, and considering they use the Bell curve for their grade allocation, you could actually end up getting a D even after scoring 80%. My advice is, just do your research: ask local/full-time students (your roommate might be perfect for that), read carefully the class description, attend at least 2 lectures before deciding, etc. Also, make sure the professor does not have a failing quota: although most of them would not, there are still a few that use it. There is a lot of reading (if you want an A/B; if a C is all you are aiming for, lecture slides are enough), group work and presentations are the rule and workshops/tutorials are not very helpful (if available at all). I got very lucky with my second semester choices, however. In general, management classes could be quite "easy" and interesting. A tip: Development Economics is a no-go, and Global Entrepreneurship is very enjoyable and a guaranteed A/B if you do the compulsory work.

In addition, I would definitely recommend taking Cantonese/Mandarin classes. They are always a lot of fun, and everyone in the class would be exchange students. Although learning Chinese is a lot of work, and quite the challenge, if you follow the instructions, you will leave the classroom with a sense of personal satisfaction and pride. Plus, I was told no one ever fails those classes.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

I felt very comfortable asking questions, and do not think there was anything else they could have done to make the whole process easier. The level of support is more than adequate and all of my queries/requests were met with understanding and efficiency.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

My only complaint is that there was no one from the students that had attended CUHK present at the meetings. Therefore, all the information I received was from people that had done their exchange in HKU or HKUST.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Level of support, additional information that could be useful for future students

The Office of Academic Links (OAL) and the people in I-Office were extremely friendly and always ready to help. I had problems enrolling in some of my 2nd semester classes and they did everything possible to make it happen. Definitely go ask them for help with any class add/drop problems.

They are a bit slow, and not as efficient as the MBS international team, however, so never approach them with last-minute issues! Although I cannot speak from personal experience, I have seen more than a few people struggling to deal with something they left too late.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

Please include any information relating to the purchase of compulsory health insurance ie costs etc. or whether this was waived by having the University of Manchester Insurance Policy

Hong Kong is one of the destinations for which you should purchase a health/travel insurance, as the one provided by the University of Manchester does not cover it. This is not a problem at all, as prices are not that high and the different policies available on the market are quite extensive and flexible.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

This should be information on any extra fees that the University charged but should not include accommodation, books, transport, visa etc.

I cannot think of any additional/hidden costs.

ACCOMMODATION

As much information as possible on what accommodation is recommended or not recommended.

Living on campus is definitely a must. This is the only way to stay informed about everything and anything that is happening with or is planned for the international/exchange students, meet everyone on the programme, and in general, stay in the loop. A few exchange students spent 1st semester on campus and moved out to live on Hong Kong Island in the 2nd, and told me they regretted that decision until the very end, as they did not meet pretty much anyone new from the IASP programme during that period. This point becomes even more important in the beginning of the 2nd semester when around 75-80% of the 1st semester exchange students go home and new ones arrive. Staying on-campus also means that you will be a part of the college system and its culture, values, college specific events, sports tournaments, etc.

I stayed in I-House, which was my first choice. However, do not be fooled by the name! If you are lucky, the ratio of exchange to local students would be 30:70. What is more, you WILL share a room with a local(s)/mainlander (This rule applies for all dormitories!). This is mostly a good thing and helps you learn more and quickly about local and Chinese culture. The thing I liked the most about I-House was the apartment system, which gives you at least some kind of privacy (well, you know who you are sharing the bathroom/fridge with), might allow you to get closer with your flatmates, and makes it easier to break some of the rules (e.g. not having guests after 11pm). The biggest drawback is its location. It would not be such a problem if buses were not so few and walking to the Central Campus did not involve that much climbing uphill. It also means that getting anywhere off-campus would take 25/30mins longer (incl. the trip to the MTR station). You would start thinking about time in terms of bus schedules and distance, but it is not that difficult to get used to it. Staying here, however, you still get allocated to a college. All in all, I loved my time in I-House and (because of) the people I met here.

In my honest opinion, the best halls to stay in are S. H. Ho, Pentecostal Mission Hall, or Morningside. All three are perfectly located, Morningside being the newest and richest one. (Yes, how rich a hostel/college is matters, as it determines the perks/privileges you get, staying there.) Both the MTR station and Central Campus are within walking distance (5-10mins), and if you do not feel like it, buses run every 5mins (or less). The CUHK gym, central tennis courts and running tracks are right next to them. In addition, the view from their balconies and canteens is absolutely breath-taking.

Hostel fees are insignificant when choosing, as the fees are pretty much the same for all. The difference between the cheapest and the most expensive is around 150 euro (£120). Finally, the biggest advantage of staying on campus is the overall price. The amount you would have to pay for the whole year is around 1000 euro (£860), which is what you would end up paying for 2 months off campus (if you are extremely lucky!).

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Transport, travel, social life, integration with local students, student activity groups

Commuting and public transport in Hong Kong is unbelievably cheap and highly efficient. The one thing you would have to get used to is the long time it takes to get to Hong Kong Central, for example (more than an hour, especially living in I-House). Taking a taxi home after a night out is also very affordable and the most convenient choice.

The list of things Hong Kong has to offer for you to do or see is endless: The wild and crazy cheap (or crazy expensive, if you are willing to pay for it) nightlife, the numerous temples and monasteries, the theme parks, the Peak, the skyline, the rooftop parties, the horse races (and the outrageous networking going hand in hand with them), the beaches, the markets, the museums I can go on forever – Hong Kong is the most amazing and dynamic place to be “stuck” in. And if you get too bored (unlikely, but it happens), a day (or 2) trip to Macau and/or Shenzhen for some gambling, sightseeing, or spa, is always an option.

What I absolutely loved about Hong Kong is how much of a hub it is. From here the whole of Asia is easily accessible. Try and book your trips in advance and nothing will be too expensive. Also, look for hotel packages and promotions and you could stay in 5-star hotels at hostel prices. If you do all your university work on time, there should be no problem in balancing academic life and travelling. My advice is, try and travel as much as possible, but do not do it just to get another stamp in your passport. Some people travelled throughout the semester, but my choice was to do two major trips at the end of both semesters with the (more than just a few) occasional trips to Macau and China during the 2 semesters. There is not one right way to do it – it all depends on your class schedule and extra curriculum activities (I was involved in a project called Teaching in China, which I would definitely recommend participating in.). The only issue is money: travelling could be very expensive. At one point you might face the “going out – booking a trip” trade-off. My recommendation is, always choose the second one! A final point here is: Make sure you do not need a visa for the countries you intend to visit, and if you do – do not leave it too late. I have seen many a trip falling through because of negligence.

Student activity groups and societies are extremely active and important in CUHK, mainly for full-time students that is. I definitely could not say they are fully open to exchange students. In theory, everyone is free to apply and

participate, however, with Cantonese being the main means of communication and the unwillingness of locals to change that, it is practically impossible for non-Cantonese speaking students to integrate. This is also the main problem when trying to get more involved and familiar with the local and/or Chinese culture. The key to success in this area is to keep trying until they feel more comfortable with their English. In my experience, it is more than worth it and you can end up making friends for life. What is more, exploring Hong Kong (and maybe even China) and its secrets gets a lot easier when you have someone local as your guide.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

I embarked on a quest to uncover the secrets of an unknown and exotic world, little did I know the side-effect would be finding myself.