

2012-2013

University Attended: University of Massachusetts (UMass)

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

The orientation programme lasts about a week, this being the week before the semester started so campus was very quiet with not many people back and no dining commons open at the time. All the international students are welcomed and throughout the week sit in various lectures about the basics of your time in UMass. Ranging from internet access and online libraries to immunization forms - the lectures are fairly useful for you to get your bearings. Other activities were planned during the week; BBQ's and trips to local towns or malls. Most trips are free and need to be signed up before you go - it's worth doing a few to meet other internationals and is something to do during the quiet week.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Lectures range from small classrooms to massive lecture theatres, likely to be on the smaller size with so many options available to choose from. The massive range of courses is a nice change from Manchester where we are somewhat limited in options, so UMass will have something for everyone in Business. Assessments in lectures are usually 3 smaller exams spaced throughout the semester as well as presentations or a one big project. On the whole, the work is a lot easier than Manchester and resembles high school rather than University in its difficulty. Choosing courses is on a first come first served basis but usually if you turn up or email the lecturer in charge they will be happy to enlist you. As Manchester requires you to take 75% business modules it leaves you with room for something completely different to try, the vast amount of courses means there is something for everyone's interests - I took Film History which was excellent. Also UMass is linked with 4 other nearby (Bus ride away) colleges and it is free to enlist in their courses if you are feeling ambitious.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

MBS team were great, very good at keeping you up to date and full of information regarding each potential choice of university. Any concerns or questions were quickly cleared up.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Meetings seemed sparsely placed but actually all the information you need is online and the meetings are very thorough and cover all you need to know. Maybe more students speaking who have done year abroad at different institutes would be helpful, it's hard to get a proper impression of some of the places without someone there to give a first-hand account.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

UMass were exceptional in the help they offered before and during my year. Before I left they answered all my questions and set up my online accounts as well as registering me in all my classes. The office is always available during the year to help you - I lost my J-1 visa form at the start and they quickly arranged a new one to be signed off and sorted it within the week. I heard some other Universities weren't as efficient so credit to UMass.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I can't remember too well about all the insurance matters, I think UMass has quite expensive health insurance but you will have to check this.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

I can't think of any extra costs bar the accommodation and compulsory orientation week etc.

ACCOMMODATION

The University is pretty big and so accommodation sprawls all over the campus University. People will say to live in South West which is populated with a majority of students and large tower blocks. This is where all the parties are meant to be but this isn't really true, its reputation precedes itself here- you won't be up all night because of loud noises and commotion. The freshman (first years) mainly live in South West who I found to be pretty

immature (think jocks and gossipy girls) and overwhelmed to be away from home for the first time so for those who are 21 will be a bit limited by them. Central and Orchid Hill are supposed to be nice and have an older crowd while Sylvan and North apartments are best avoided as they are miles away from central campus and generally have an awful reputation. I lived in South West which was fine but since everyone was 18-19 it would have been nicer to be somewhere with older people.

Rooms are almost all shared with two (sometimes 3) to a space. There are a few individual rooms but these are pretty costly, almost double to the standard sharing room I think. Sharing is a pain and seems ridiculous but has to be done, it's all luck of the draw who you share with unless you know someone then it's possible to choose your roommate. The international students all seemed to get corner rooms which are terrible as they are a box with no real privacy (I antisocially built a wall of desks between the middle of the room which actually turned out well for both of us), Z rooms are best and give you your own space so if possible ask for one of them. On a quick note the dining commons in South West are incredible.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Firstly transport is a bit rubbish, there is a bus service (which is actually pretty good for America) which can get you to local town Amherst, bigger nicer town Northampton and the mall over in Holyoke. Knowing when the buses are is helpful otherwise you could be in for a long wait. Having a car is paramount in America and making friends with someone who owns one would have been useful for me. For wider travel Peter Pan and Megabuses offer cheap rides to Boston, New York, Washington DC and beyond. Cheap flights can be found for further journeys, New York is almost always cheaper for internal flights than Boston. I personally found UMass to be pretty limited in its appeal and excitement value. For such a big campus there is surprisingly little happening with only one tiny bar on campus. The Basketball and Hockey team play on campus so that's well worth going to see for free. UMass' football team plays two hours away at the New England Patriots stadium which is a pain to get too (and they are terrible so not many people go). One of UMass' biggest problems is authority who seemed to be attempting to run a totalitarian regime. Residential advisors live on each floor and although some are fine many are intent on always telling people off and writing people up for parties, loud noises and any signs of alcohol. Off campus is not much better where parties are often shut down by 12pm by the police, if you can find one further out you have more luck but it's difficult to reach them without a taxi or car.

Bars in Amherst are the most fun and where I had the best time, finding themselves between a pub and club. There are about 10 bars in Amherst and all get busy on the weekends although fairly similar they are good fun and very cheap. The Spoke was personal favourite and was incredibly cheap. Don't forget to tip, at least at the start otherwise the bartenders get very stropy. The only drawback to the bars is that they close at about 1am which is pretty annoying so go out early, also you will need your passport as ID when you got out as Massachusetts is a strict state on drinking.

I didn't integrate too much, finding myself hanging out with the international students; English, Irish and Australian mainly which was actually nice to be with like-minded people. This was just my preference as I found a lot of Americans, immature, ignorant, naive and in your face (South West is probably the worst place for this crowd of people) but of course there are good ones out there too. Many of my gripes are probably more to do with America than UMass now that I think of it.

I have portrayed a somewhat negative image of UMass here but I had a great time and probably laughed more than I have ever have over the year. My fellow International students who I was friends with were a great crowd and I will definitely keep in contact with them. Also I had some good trips to Boston, New York, Washington DC, and Miami for spring break so I advise you to take any opportunity to travel and get away from UMass as it can feel very isolating at time. If you approach UMass with an open mind, enthusiasm and optimism (not my best traits) then I'm sure you will have a great time and integrate but thought I better warn perspective exchanges students with some of the potential issues they might face!

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Despite some of UMass' limitations I had a hilariously great year with fellow internationals, incredible fun.