

2013-2014

University Attended: Singapore Management University

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

During the first week SMU held lots of events such as a bus tour and food trail around the city to help us get our bearings of the city and meet other exchange students. This week ended with a slightly more serious talk teaching us more about how to apply for courses, an introduction by the global office and some activities to break the ice, finishing with the first of many free lunches in the administration building. However even before the orientation program it was easy to make friends through the SMU Exchange Facebook page where a community of exchangers developed coordinating nights out a couple of weeks prior.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

I really enjoyed the teaching style at SMU compared to Manchester. Great emphasis is placed upon making a contribution to class discussions and debating issues with your peers. Classes are taught in a seminar format of around 40 people and around 20% of the class grade is made up from your attendance, quantity and quality of comments you make. This may seem daunting for some but picking up the majority of 20% is easy and gives you a comfort blanket for any other work. There is also more emphasis on group projects and presentations allowing you to gain more experience and confidence. A laptop is essential everyday during class to follow lectures and emails.

Course registration is split into two components but information is provided well in advance so as long as you keep up to date there nothing to worry about;

- Initially, a first come first serve round that requires some preparation to research what courses you are interested in on the SMU system and be fast on the computer with the best courses going within minutes.
- Secondly, later on the BOSS system that gives you \$100 E dollars to strategically bid on courses that you were too slow to pick up in the first come first serve.

By the end of both rounds the majority of people had the courses they wanted, it's a complex system obviously thought off by an academic with too much time on their hands and everyone complains but somehow everything just falls into place.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

The MBS team were always really active in informing me of any opportunities available to go to Alumni events and be taken out for dinner by MBS staff who were coming to Singapore. Near the end of the exchange they invited us to an event at the British High Commissioner's house for an Alumni event, where me and 5 of the other exchange students from SMU and NUS got to network with leaders of industry, from companies such as PWC, Rolls Royce and Citi Bank.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

The second Year meeting at MBS highlighted all of the things we needed to consider about the year abroad to prepare us. It was also helpful speaking to students who had attended SMU in previous years to get any tips.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

I didn't need too much contact with the Host international office but when I did they were helpful. I visited them to sign off my course choice form to send back for acceptance and they organised some social events to bring the exchangers together.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

SMU have a health practice on campus that you become an automatic member of where you can walk in and be quickly seen by a doctor for any issues you have. When I damaged my hand playing for the school rugby team they gave me documents for free scans and a consultation in one of the top hospitals the same day so they are really effective. The University of Manchester Policy is also good.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

Everything was paid for by SMU and I got the impression they had a big budget especially for sports where they provided free customised kit, transport and food during all of our fixtures.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on offer from the university has the advantage of being considerably cheaper than private accommodation. However it is far away from the university and many of the people who chose to live there moved out into private accommodation upon arrival when they saw what was on offer and forfeit their deposits. It was also true that generally more introverted individuals wanted the security of having a confirmed place before coming to Singapore whilst the more outgoing people were willing to meet new people and visit places with estate agents, that can be found online, after forming groups.

On arrival I stayed at Five Stones Hostel where an exchanger from Amsterdam had coordinated a special rate for 40 of us so we had an instant social group and began to form groups of people who had similar interests. I followed developments on the SMU exchanger Facebook group and it would be a good idea to keep up to date on where a lot of exchangers are staying early to ensure you book a place. Another popular Hostel was Sleepy Sam's. This process involved going out every night off the week and was the equivalent of a two week fresher's at Manchester so don't be afraid to arrive early everyone is in the same boat.

The best place to stay in my opinion is City Square Residence, the complex has a 50 metre swimming pool, gym, tennis courts, bowling alley and barbecue pits being the dream location 20 minutes from school. The price tag was around \$1000 a month per person with a shared room (most exchange students shared rooms to split the cost) and it was where most of the exchange student stayed with a community of around 80 students. I couldn't recommend it more highly.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

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

The transport system (MRT) is really reliable, cheap and easy to get the hang of but it stops at 12pm. There are also lots of taxis which are cheaper than in the UK and not likely to rip you off. Once in school it's a hive of activity with many different sports clubs promoting themselves in the first weeks at different competitive levels. I joined the rugby team who trained 3 times a week and it was great to have 40 familiar faces on campus. Being part of the team also meant I got invited to lots of social events, got to travel to all the other universities and went on an unofficial trip to Malaysia one evening, so join up and get involved.

The weather is really hot so there's no need to bring any heavy duty clothes but inside they love air conditioning so it's very cold in classes and would be a good idea to bring a jacket for that purpose. The clubbing scene is the polar opposite to Manchester with the most popular clubs being on top of sky scrapers 50 floors high because of this the dress code is always smart casual being jeans or pants and a collared shirt with shoes so make sure you have enough. Some exchange students were caught out in the first week trying to get into bars and clubs in shorts and they didn't make the mistake again.

Singapore is the perfect central location to travel Asia and try and go to the Formula 1 if you have time. I travelled to China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangkok during the year. There is always a group travelling every weekend to suit your schedule. I went home to Manchester for Christmas but that is also a good chance to travel as well as reading week for longer trips. The Asian education system at SMU is the perfect paradox of work hard and play hard.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

A life changing experience that has allowed me to develop so much and make a network of friends so that I have a home in most countries around the world.

FEEDBACK 2

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

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

Orientation consisted of two talks by one of the representatives from the Office of Global Learning about what you should expect from life in Singapore in general as well as academic matters (number of modules to choose/ BOSS bidding process to choose the modules). I highly recommend attending the academic briefing as the BOSS bidding system is discussed in detail for those who had not already successfully obtained all 4 modules in the pre-application process. I think there was also a campus tour which I missed but SMU campus is small so it doesn't take long to know your way around!

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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

The teaching style at SMU is very interactive. The classes are small and you are expected to regularly participate, which you are graded on. Some professors put a greater weighting on class participation than others so it might be useful to consider this before choosing modules (assessment methods can be found in the course outlines). If you are happy to participate it can often be an easy way to pick up marks. Most professors insist on combining local and exchange students. Some local students may seem a little reluctant to work with you but don't be put off, it's usually because they have had some sort of bad experience with exchange students before and if you contribute your fair share towards the project they are normally quite accommodating in terms of travel plans etc. Assessment methods include mid-term tests, verbal examination, coursework, presentations, group-work and final written examinations.

SMU uses a blackboard system very similar to MBS so you will have no problems finding course materials. However if you're unlucky, enrolling on your desired modules can be a bit of a pain. It is on a first comes first served basis and is therefore highly competitive during the pre-application process. If the student has not successfully obtained 2 or three modules during the pre-application process and bids for popular modules during BOSS, the student may fail to obtain them as other students have a higher amount of e dollars available to bid for the same modules of interest. I had this issue with enrolling during my first semester, I couldn't enrol on a particular module due to a lack of e dollars. The other modules were all finance based with pre requisites which I wouldn't have been able to do but thankfully Sue at MBS helped me out by contacting the SMU office requesting that I take the module and eventually I was able to enrol. I seem to be in the minority though, most people were able to get either their first or second choices of modules. When choosing modules during the pre-application process pay attention to when the classes are and try to get all your classes on two or three consecutive days so you can travel for the rest of the week!

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

Thankfully I didn't need to contact MBS with any serious problems during my year abroad, except the aforementioned trouble with the BOSS bidding process which they were happy to correspond with the Office of

Global Learning at SMU to help me resolve it. We were also invited to a networking event at the British High Commissioner's residence in Singapore which was great!

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

There could have been more emphasis on the high cost of living in Singapore. There isn't a student scene as such in Singapore so drinks are expensive (especially for boys who can't get the drink offers on ladies' night!), and if you wanted to cook at home (as opposed to eating at a Hawkers' centre), food at the supermarket can be expensive. Other than that the meetings are very useful and not to be missed.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Nurazlin Lin was very helpful when we first arrived, especially with the accommodation.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I have personal health insurance myself but I'm not sure whether it's compulsory. There is a medical centre on campus that can provide medicine free of charge.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

Return your books on time!! I forgot on a few occasions and had some hefty fines. Alcohol is also ridiculously expensive, we just made sure we picked some up from the airport whenever we travelled and asked our friends to buy some when they visited.

ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation was perhaps the most difficult part of my year abroad. Be sure to make it clear to your agent that you only have a student pass of 9 months as most leases are 12 months and the landlord will not rent the apartment to you once your pass has expired. Most exchange students' stay in private apartments, the most common one is City Square in Little India and to reduce the rent most people share rooms with two or three people. I was lucky enough to be allocated SMU with a friend of mine from Manchester so we just shared but if you need to find roommates I recommend staying at a hostel when you first arrive in Singapore. I think Sleepy Sam's is popular amongst exchange students.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

I would recommend using the MRT as it is cheap, and very well connected. Taxis are also relatively cheap compared to the UK but the queues at the taxi rank are often very long, especially when it rains! Singapore is fantastic for travelling as it is so close to so many amazing places, it is easy to pop over to Malaysia or Thailand for a long weekend. Nightlife in Singapore is great, there are some amazing rooftop bars and clubs – Ku de Ta at the top of Marina Bay Sands is a must!

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Undoubtedly the best year of my life, wish I could do it all over again!

FEEDBACK 3

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

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

There was not much with regards to induction at SMU, however there is an introductory 'lecture' where you are told all about what was required from you, the bidding system (explained later), and all information you need to know about being a student at SMU. There is the chance to sign up to a number of events such as a tour around the city; lunches etc. which is a good way to meet fellow exchange students, but some of them you do have to pay for.

The university as a whole could do more to induct the exchange students, as it can be a bit daunting if you are by yourself, however most people are in similar situations so you aren't alone.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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

The style of teaching at SMU is different to Manchester in that lectures are made up of much smaller groups – about 20-30 (max) students – so quite similar to seminars at Manchester. The lecturers are really helpful and normally very willing to help you – particularly being an exchange student! The methods of assessment are also quite different in that you get assessed on your level of participation in lectures – don't let this worry you though as you as it is relatively easy marks which then give you a base of about 15% within the course! Group work is very common at SMU too – you will likely have two or so group projects per course. The locals are very friendly and always willing to help – they love to know where you have been/ are going travelling! Lectures are three hours long which takes some time to get used!!

Getting your courses is a slightly stressful experience as it is a bidding process where you get assigned a certain number of e-dollars. Planning which courses you want is a good idea so you can be quick off the mark when you need to bid – you should also try and organise modules on similar days as this can free up your time to travel!! Don't let this stress you though as all will be explained by SMU.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

Something I would say is quite important to note is that emphasis is placed on needing 60% in order to go to Australia. (*MBS comment: This is 55% and is highlighted throughout the talks and documentation*). I do think a certain level of knowledge should be given to students with regards to Singapore as despite it still being pass or fail, the bell curve marking does make it slightly more challenging and if you are not careful with module choices, some modules can be incredibly challenging!

Also the cost of living in Singapore can be quite expensive – always buy alcohol at the airport! There are Hawker Centres, which sell cheap, very tasty local food, but if you are looking to cook yourself sometimes the supermarkets can be quite expensive.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

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

The international office are very willing to help you, and will try their best to rid of any problems you have. I didn't have any problems within my stay so didn't have to come in contact with them

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I was lucky enough to not need to use my insurance so I am not sure as to how it works or would have worked if I had needed it. I do have family insurance too which I was covered by but again was lucky enough to not have to use.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation can be stressful as Singapore are very strict on their student pass so often finding accommodation that has a 9 month lease can be a pain as they either like 3 months or 12 months plus. SMU do not offer student accommodation so it is down to you to find somewhere to live. Living costs are high so what most exchange students tend to do is join with other students – using the SMU exchange page of Facebook and share 2-3 people in a room in a condominium in order to reduce living costs. The condos are normally very nice so sharing a room is not a problem - City Square is a very popular choice.

Other options include Commonwealth (leased by SMU), which again is a popular choice for exchange students, and a great way to meet other exchange –it is also a cheaper alternative to the condos.

Singapore is an expensive place to live – so do be aware of living costs before going.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Transport in Singapore is very good – the MRT is efficient and cheap and can get you almost anywhere. Taxis are also cheaper than England but can be temperamental particularly when it rains - all taxis tend to disappear as soon as the rain starts!

Singapore is central for travelling which is unbeatable. Thailand is an hour and a half flight away and deals are always on where you can get really cheap flights. Bali is close by too and obviously a must see if you have the chance!! Like I say there are always flight deals on the local airlines (tigerair, airasia, Bangkok airways etc.) so you are always able to visit these places on a budget! All I can say is definitely plan, as there are so many places and your time just flies!! Definitely try and save up before going to Singapore as it is difficult to get a job (students are restricted to 16 hours a week) and travelling is a must!! Malaysia.

Local students are very dedicated to their work so don't tend to go out much. They are incredibly kind and generous people though and would rather go out for breakfast, lunch or dinner than go out drinking! Food is central to the Singapore culture!!

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Absolutely incredible – would return tomorrow in a heartbeat!