

2012-2013

University Attended: University of Southern California

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

There was an induction meeting in a lecture theatre at the Marshall Business school curated by exchange coordinator Sean O'Connell. Mainly it was filled with ice-breakers so that everyone in the exchange programme would be more approachable, later that night also there was a party arranged by the International Exchange Program (IEP) board which was useful in getting to know our hosts and our fellow exchangers.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

The Faculty at USC are unmatched, whilst here I had the opportunity to take courses in an eclectic variety of schools, including the world's best cinema school, America's best entrepreneurship faculty, Physical education and of course Marshall School of Business. Finding the right courses is very straight forward and as an exchange student we get priority in registration, the school is very flexible also, allowing students to change their courses within the first 2 weeks of class so that every student can find the right course for them. I found this useful as an exchange student because it has made my academic experience seem very malleable to my own tastes. We are assessed on our contribution in class, namely how we can encourage debate and attendance is a big factor here as well as group projects, mid-terms and finals. The professors at USC have always gone beyond their boundaries to help their students, especially at classes in the entrepreneurship program. Each class is small, around 25 people, there are no large lecture halls with 300 students and 1 professor, so the teaching style is very intimate and engaging. Each professor I've had has been very proficient in the professional world and the alumni roster is unmatched, I get the impression people don't teach here for the money but purely because they are passionate about the school and its students.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Susan Fidalgo and Andrew Walker have always expressed how easy it is for us to get in touch with them, whether it be to call them or email them with any questions that we might have. While at the same time allowing us to be autonomous and find our way in our year abroad which I really appreciated, and they were always quick and diligent with their responses. As a student at USC, the school hosts an international case competition in which the University of Manchester participates. I had the pleasure of meeting the Manchester team and the vice-dean Paul Cousins and it was good to see that MBS wanted to take the opportunity to check-in on their students abroad and see how we fared amongst some of the world's best business schools.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

In LA you pretty much need a car, so applying for a host is advised. I would have liked more information on UK driver's license and how it was compatible in the States also, because there was some confusion about whether I needed an international license or not, but I found that I could rent a car easily with my British License.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Sean O'Connell and the rest of the international team have been very helpful and courteous to its exchange students. I would have appreciated more info on health insurance options as it was an ordeal getting it waived in the beginning for a lot of the exchange students at USC. I would advise delegates who are going to exchange at USC to make a facebook group as I found that we all connected well online before getting to LA.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

There was an option to purchase USC health insurance, but I opted for a cheaper cover from a private company, ISO health cover. I saved about 300 dollars this way and fortunately didn't have to use it. Although some exchange participants made trips to the health centre we found that certain treatments aren't covered and you will still be charged if not at a subsidised rate. University of Manchester's health cover does not comply with USC standards so it cannot be waived

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

USC charges you up to £250 on fees which go towards social events on campus, which include welcome week concerts and springfest which hosts world renowned Djs. The money also supports USC's philanthropic efforts towards the peripheral community.

ACCOMMODATION

I personally found a place on Craigslist and have been lucky enough to find a cheap place off campus which allowed me to have my own room, however many of the exchange participants shared rooms with other exchanges in USC housing. Most popular choices are Annenberg and founders halls situated very close to fraternity row. The advantages of this is that there is more of a social aspect to living in halls, however I found that the exchange group becomes very close in general so there is a high chance you can make a lot of friends easily.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

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

Public transport in Los Angeles needs a lot of work so I highly advise getting a bike so that commuting in and around campus is easy, and also most metro buses have bike racks in the front so you can easily take it to Venice Beach and Hollywood. I'd advise you to get a car, but there's always risks with used cars and I found that most exchange students who bought cars had trouble. There are a lot of groups on campus so it is very easy to find people with the same interests, hobbies and backgrounds. I would advise students to get involved in the case competitions held at USC as well as other business functions to meet a diverse group of people and to build your network. As mentioned USC has a very active and impressive alumni base which is why there is always an event going on, every day. You get what you put in and I found that the more I engaged with the school, the more I thoroughly enjoyed it.

USC has a visions and voices program which gives free tickets to see Broadway shows, plays etc paid for by the USC student government body. It's great because we not only get to go for free but they also invite the producers, actors and directors of the event to have a Q&A with USC students. I got to go to see Book of Mormon Broadway show, Symphony at the Walt Disney concert hall in LA and evenings with many poets, so it's great to know ahead of time because students sign up pretty quickly for tickets

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

CONSUME!

FEEDBACK 2

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

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

The orientation – from what I remember – lasted around 2-3 hours. It was entertaining in the beginning as we got to know the other exchange students and somehow useful as we found out about different experiences people had at USC. Towards the end nobody was paying attention any more because everyone was too excited to be in LA and people didn't seem to care that much about what Sean had to say (Sorry Sean!).

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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

All courses are really interactive as all classes have around 30-40 students so students should expect their Professors to know their names and attend classes. With regard to assessment – all classes have one midterm and

one final making up around 40-50% of the grade. The rest of the grade is based on either individual assignments or group projects/presentations.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

MBS should provide students with clear information about insurance – some of the options might not be waived by USC and students might not be aware of that. *(MBS comment: MBS provides students with a Student Travel Insurance Policy and it is the responsibility of the students to find out whether this is acceptable or can be waived. At USC this is not possible and it is the responsibility of the students to ensure that they purchase a policy that is acceptable by USC. This is not something MBS can advise on.)*

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

I decided to purchase the USC Health Insurance as I was almost sure there were going to be problems with the other – cheaper – insurance. However, the USC insurance was quite expensive - \$516 for Fall Semester and \$772 for Spring Semester. In addition, students are required to pay a Student Health Center fee of \$253 per semester – not sure why because I had to go there when I had an awful migraine and I paid around \$70 afterwards for the IV they administered.

Eventually, the other insurance was waived by USC but it was still a big question mark whether they were going to cover the pre-existent conditions of your medical condition. Let's say that if you were to have problems with your liver for instance and that caused you migraines etc. and you ended up in the hospital – the cheaper insurance that some student decided to purchase was not going to cover their hospital expense or ambulance.

I don't believe that USC can waive the University of Manchester Insurance – to be honest I didn't even think of it as an option.

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.

Student Health Center fee - \$253 per semester.

Various small admin charges for Student Aid Fund and Service Fee.

ACCOMMODATION

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

Everything that USC has to offer is shared accommodation. There are other options that are off campus – 10-15 min bike ride away from campus – that offer private bedrooms for a lower price.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

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

Public transportation should not even be considered in LA – it takes 1.5 hours by bus to get from USC to Beverly Hills. Buying a car is not a smart option either as most students had to pay for repairs as the car broke down several times and there's also the hassle of finding someone to sell it to when you leave. Best option is either to make friends who have cars (ideally) or find a group of people to rent a car for longer periods when you decide to travel longer – spring break for instance etc.

Social life is revolving around 9-0 (901 Bar and Grill) the only bar within walking distance from campus that actually matters. And of course, frat parties. I would recommend rushing for a fraternity/sorority if you have time to spare. If you are a guy, you should rush for a fraternity as this is the only way you can make it into frat parties.

American students are really friendly and open to international people since USC is quite an international hub.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

A year I shall always remember.

FEEDBACK 3

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

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

The induction run by Sean O'Connell included a lot of useful information about the year and gave a great chance to meet some of the other international students. Be sure to attend all the sessions and welcome week events as it was much easier for me to settle in once I had met more people.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

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

The style of teaching is different from Manchester in that the final grade is split between things like attendance, mid term exams, participation and homework rather than the majority of it being based on the final exam like in Manchester. There is also a lot of group work and presentations.

In terms of the courses I would recommend taking 'Leading Organisations' (BUAD 304) with Dr Bresnahan and 'Consumer Behaviour' (MKT 450) with Pr. Del Vecchio. Once you are signing up for courses these numbers will make more sense.

Also you should be aware that when you are choosing your courses you can see the times and days of the classes so it is possible to get one or two days off, I would recommend, arranging your classes to have Friday off because there are often day parties at the fraternities and sororities during the day on Friday. (But obviously don't let this get in the way of any courses you want to take!)

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

The MBS International Team is helpful and very prompt to reply to emails if you have any problems or issues.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

These were helpful in preparing me for the year abroad.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

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

The International Office staff at USC and particularly Sean O'Connell are helpful, Sean does send very long emails but all the stuff is important so make sure you go through them thoroughly because there is a lot of important stuff about the visa etc.

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

Health Insurance is a very big expense which I wasn't quite prepared for myself. The USC Insurance is very expensive and information can be found on the USC Health Care website. Some of the exchange students found another company, ISO insurance who offered cover for a lot cheaper, however the university were very unhelpful in waiving this, they kept on finding problems with it so I just used the USC Insurance for the first semester but ISO has now configured their policy so it is accepted by the university.

In terms of coverage I haven't had to go to the health centre at all but I believe that if you use the ISO policy then the coverage is not as extensive and you may have to pay added fees if you go to the health centre or need any prescriptions.

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.

Extra fees are ridiculous at USC, whatever insurance you buy you have to pay the USC Health Centre fee which is around \$250. There are other fees like 'student programming' which was around \$50. I can't remember any of the other fees and can't access any of my old bills but be prepared to deal with these sorts of things.

Accommodation is around \$3200 but the utility bills are covered in this so are reasonable. It is also important to pay these asap because USC charges very high late fees.

ACCOMMODATION

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

In the first semester I stayed in Sierra Apartments, other exchange students stayed in Founders and Annenberg. These places were mainly quiet and not very lively, with older students living here. Unfortunately, the accommodations that are similar to Owens Park and Oak House are on campus residences and we were not allowed to apply for these. If this has changed then I would recommend applying for New North. Other exchange students have found places to live outside of USC Housing which are often cheaper alternatives but be careful to stay close to campus because certain areas around USC are not very safe and there is a lot of crime. If you need to know more then ask Sean O'Connell or myself and I will try to help if I can.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

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

Public Transport around LA is not the best and it is difficult to get around without a car. Fortunately a few of my friends had cars so it wasn't too much of an issue. There is also a car rental service called zip car which is very convenient and you can rent cars by the hour if you are going on a daytrip.

There are obviously many sights to see around LA, there are loads of things to do in Hollywood, Santa Monica beach and Venice Beach are also good to visit. I managed to do a lot of travelling around California. I went to the weekender, which is where USC played a football game away in San Francisco where a lot of USC students travel up and spend the weekend there. This is usually early in the first semester and I would definitely recommend it. I also went to Vegas a few times which is good fun and a place you have to visit, however they are quite strict on IDs there so keep this in mind. San Diego is also a good place to visit and very easy to get to if you use the Amtrak train. I also went to Cabo in Mexico for Spring Break which is a really fun time and there was a huge contingent of USC students there.

The social life at USC is dominated by the 'Greek' scene which is the fraternities and sororities. Apart from bars Downtown there is only one bar around USC so most of the nightlife available is fraternity parties. Girls are

allowed into these for free but guys have to know someone in the fraternity. I joined a fraternity once I got here and would definitely recommend it, I've made some great friends and it allows you to really get the full 'college experience'. It is hard to fully integrate socially as so many events revolve around the Greek life. I moved into the fraternity house in the second semester and it has been the most fun I've had in my life. It is also the best way to really integrate with the American students, this is important because most of the exchange students are only on exchange for one semester so it is important that you still know people who will be around for the second semester. Either way it is not too hard to meet people, everyone loves the English accent and will want to stop and talk to you and introduce you to their friends, so I would recommend playing on it and being vocal in class and anywhere you go!

If you have any questions about anything else then feel free to email me at: rory.brennan92@gmail.com.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

The best year of my life.