

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Science/Physics
Host University	York University
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY 16/17 Semester 1

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?
- What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?

Advice on module registration and module mapping

The way lessons in York University (YorkU) are conducted highly depends on your major and specialisation. Lessons are mostly seminar based for Humanities and Social Sciences, but lecture based for Science modules. Lecture notes are usually not uploaded online, so attendance during lectures is essential. Lecturers will also not cover the entire syllabus during lectures, and some self-studying to fill the gaps in content is expected of students. Textbooks are thus essential, as some preparation work before lectures is required. The pace at which lecturers cover academic content is fairly quick (comparable to NUS), as the semester is spread over 13 weeks with no recess or reading weeks. There is thus an academic culture where students learn independently and actively ask questions that they have prepared beforehand while reading up for the lecture.

There are no tutorials, and students are expected to go through the answers to problem sets outside of contact hours themselves. Lecturers are available for consultations during office hours though, and are extremely receptive and welcoming to students who require extra time to cope with the syllabus. Unlike NUS (where we have 1-3 mid-terms before the final examinations), YorkU focuses a lot on Continual Assessment (CAs) such as projects and assignments. This can be quite demanding given that we also have many other things like chores (and traveling!) to do outside of school. One piece of advice from me will be that as far as possible, do your CAs diligently, as the marks lost from not submitting assignments will quickly accumulate. The academic staff in YorkU (Professors and Lecturers) are also very particular about punctuality and deadlines, so do hand in your assignments on time (or be penalized)!

One of the things that stood out about YorkU was the University's commitment to 'Continuing Education'. The University makes provisions for mid-career professionals to enroll in classes, which means classes are made up of students of different ages and backgrounds. It is thus interesting (and even inspiring) to see how passionate the older students are about learning, and how Canadians in general value their education. Despite the fact that Canadian universities tend to focus more on breadth than depth. Canadian students exhibited deep understanding about their subject matter, and asked insightful questions that prompted many discussions.

Please list the courses that you took during SEP. *(Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)*

Host University	NUS Equivalent
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Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
MATH2001	Real Analysis I	3.00	MA2108	Mathematical Analysis I	4
MATH2030	Elementary Probability	3.00	MA2216	Probability	4
PHYS3030	Statistical and Thermal Physics	3.00	PC2230	Thermodynamics and Statistical Mechanics	4
PHYS3220	Experiments in Modern Physics	3.00	PC3193	Experimental Physics II	4

2. Accommodation

**What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?
Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?
Do you have any other suggestions?**

YorkU is situated in North York, a suburban area in Greater Toronto Area. I stayed at a rented apartment that was sourced by ourselves (and shared with a few other exchange students from NUS) at Festival Drive, 30 minutes away from school by bus. I think this is a good arrangement and would recommend it, as on-campus accommodation is expensive, and is not worth it if you only have a 2/3 day work week.

YorkU itself is also much further from the nearest train station (Finch) that can take you downtown and is quite inaccessible, but that situation may soon change with the completion of the York University train station along the Toronto-York Spadina Subway by end 2017. If you are due for exchange after the station is completed, you may want to re-evaluate the pros and cons of living on campus as a subway station is right at your doorstep. Living on Campus will also allow you to participate in more on-campus activities and student clubs.

Do note that transport to and from school is expensive (CAD\$3 per bus ride), but student passes are available for CAD\$120 per month. This will not be required if you live on campus or have less than a 4 day work week.

3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

If you are interested in participating in any on-campus co-curricular activities, York Fest is the event to look out for! It is similar to the annual 'Student Life Fair' that NUSU organizes, and is an event to expose students to the myriad of student clubs that YorkU has. There were many freebies at the fair as well, so it is worth your time.

A second event to look out for will be 'Frosh Week', which is held at the start of the Fall Semester every academic year. It is the equivalent of NUS's Orientation Week or 'O-Week', and aims to orientate Freshmen to the University environment and culture. Even though the event is targeted at Freshmen, exchange students were allowed to attend as well. However, you will have to check with the exchange coordinators on the procedures to sign up for 'Frosh Week'. Do note that there is a strong drinking culture in Canada, so there will be a lot of drinking during Frosh Week.

4. Cost of Living

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**Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?
Please list travel expenses separately.**

The expenses listed below will be in either in Singapore Dollars (S\$), American Dollars (USD\$), or Canadian Dollars (CAD\$). As a gauge, the exchange rate is CAD\$1 to S\$1.07 and USD\$1 to S\$1.44 during my exchange.

Health & Travel Insurance: S\$0 (NUS travel insurance coverage)

Air Tickets (two one-way tickets): S\$2000

Student Visa: \$0 (not required if exchange is for one semester, but do check with your exchange coordinator)

Accommodation: CAD\$650/month

Utilities + Internet: CAD\$0 (covered under rent)

Phone Bills: CAD\$15/month (Subscribed to Fido's data-only phone plan)

Food: CAD\$250/month (There were five of us in the apartment, and we took turns cooking; and we cooked a lot by ourselves)

Transport: \$100/month

Travel + Trips: CAD\$750 for Ottawa + Montreal + Quebec City , USD\$500 for New York, CAD\$3000 for Canadian Rockies + Alaska + Vancouver Island + Seattle, USD\$2000 for US West Coast + Florida.

5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

One difficulty I faced when I was before and during my SEP stint was that it took quite long for Canadian authorities (be it customs officials, or YorkU staff) to respond to e-mail requests and queries. This could be a consequence of their shorter working hours and slower pace of life, and does get in the way when there are urgent matters that require their attention (E.g. course registration). One way to minimize the inconvenience caused by long response times will be to start going through administrative processes that are required early and promptly, so that there will be buffer time when an administrative bottleneck occurs. Being pro-active and following up on e-mails promptly helps a lot too; but try not to be too pushy about it.

It has also been challenging to manage our time well, especially since we had have to juggle between studying and doing our own chores. Taking turns with your housemates to help do household chores and to cook does help relieve the workload, and having other people as company does help relieve the loneliness (and homesickness) that I sometimes feel.

A third challenge I faced was how difficult it was to make friends with the locals (and in YorkU) as cultural differences between Canada and Singapore which has made it difficult to find common topic to talk about. This was further exacerbated by the fact that most people already knew each other since the Physics and Math cohort in YorkU is small. It was thus difficult to break into the various cliques. I did make some friends by talking to individuals who sat alone during lectures, which is a 'strategy' I would recommend! Of course, lectures may not be the best place to make friends, given that people are there to learn. Clubs provide a good place for people to socialize, so you could check them out!

6. Overall SEP Experience

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Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

Exchange has definitely been the highlight of my university life! Besides being immersed in a different culture and academic environment, I had the chance to see so many sights as well! From the glaciers in Alaska to the sand dunes at Death Valley and skydiving in Florida; I would never have imagined doing so much while in university. The biggest takeaway from it all, however, was becoming more confident of my abilities, learning how to take care of myself and others, learning how to react and adapt to new environment and circumstances, and realizing that there is a bigger world out there. SEP has also made me realise that we cannot have both an efficient country and a slow pace of life, and made me appreciate Singapore more. I am really thankful for the opportunity, and without NUS, as well as numerous others who have helped me along the way, my SEP journey would not have been possible.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Setting up essential services such as a bank account and a mobile phone line was difficult for me as there were too many service providers to choose from. I would thus recommend that you set up your bank account with Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) and your mobile phone line with Fido, as they were extremely reliable and helpful. Do note that even though RBC may not have ATMs in other provinces such as in Montreal. I would still recommend them as they will help you set up both chequeing and savings account, and allocate one account for US Dollars and the other for Canadian Dollars. This is a service that not many banks provide. Closing my bank account when I left Toronto was fuss-free as well, and RBC is definitely a good bank that you may want to consider if you are going to Toronto for SEP.

Do remember to pack a multi-plug, some local delights, and your i-banking tokens (for any internet banking transaction you may need to make) in your luggage! Do make sure you have proper winterwear as well! That includes waterproof boots, as shoes will get wet when the snow melts at the start of the day. Waterproof boots also prevent you from falling, and is a worthy investment! If your boots are not waterproof, there are gels that can be bought in shoe and boots shops that can help waterproof them!