

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	FASS/Political Science
Host University	Free University of Berlin
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY2014/2015 Semester 2

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

I did my exchange in Free University of Berlin in Berlin, Germany. Courses in the university which I enrolled in were conducted in English, however, there were very limited courses in English for my major (Political Science). Since there were limited courses, it was difficult to find courses/modules that were very interesting or different from what is offered in NUS. Additionally, these courses had clashing timetables, which further made it difficult to enroll in different classes and fulfill the minimum ECTS for credit transfer. Module registration was rather simple. I had to register for the class in the online system of the university and indicate my name on the attendance list passed around in class.

Module mapping was very difficult as the course catalog of the semester was only released a few weeks before the semester and the course catalog of the semester did not reflect all the courses and all the basic information of the course, such as the outline, credits received for the course and so on. This made it very difficult for module mapping and planning of modules and timetable. However, the registration system was rather lax as compared to NUS. And you were able to join some classes weeks after starting of the semester.

Classes which I enrolled in were mostly seminars. The classes in the university were conducted as seminars, where most classes were interactive and engaged the students in discussions. In these seminars, the professors encouraged students to speak up, to share examples of their home countries, their experiences and their views. Students enrolled in the university were vocal and keen on sharing, and were very interested in learning and the topic of the course. All the classes had a presentation component where students had to present on a certain topic related to the course, either individually or in a group.

Since education is free in Germany and it is not restricted, I was able to see students from different walks of life: students who were parents, had an occupation and were still studying. A lot of these students enrolled in the courses to study more about a particular topic which was in line with their occupation or what they were working on.

What I liked most was that there wasn't that much of stress in studying and that it genuinely made you interested in what you were studying. Also, studying political science there exposed me to politics of different regions of the world and things that were happening in parts of the world that

SEP Report

Singaporeans talk or hear less about. Additionally, I came to know about a lot of movement that was happening in Europe and understand the differences between the Asian and European system as well as their thoughts and views. It was a very insightful and interesting experience sitting in the classes and hearing the lecturer and students speak.

What I didn't really like about the academics in the university was that sometimes the professors did not have a clear structure of lessons and were very flexible with the lesson. At the end of the lesson, it felt like there wasn't a clear takeaway lesson on the topic but more like a class discussion and sharing.

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		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
PHILGE IST_S_1 6844_15 S	Rainbow Nation Germany: Transcultural Discourses	8	-	-	-
POLSO Z_H_28 732_15S	Comparative Political Communication	10	PS21CP	-	-
POLSO Z_H_15 240_15S	Comparative Social Movements	7	-	-	-
POLSO Z_P_15 154_15S	EU Foreign Policy	7	PS31IR	-	-

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?

In Berlin, the campuses do not have accommodation and accommodation is handled by a student agency run hostels. Hence you can either rent a room or apartment privately or you can stay in these student hostels. I stayed in a student hostel that was recommended by the school and which was near to the school (20mins bus and train ride to school, if you don't miss the bus). The hostel is situated in a suburban area, as the school is not in the city centre, but rather in a suburban area. Hence I lived far

SEP Report

away from the city centre, and the journey to the city centre was approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I would recommend the accommodation for anyone who enjoys nature (there're many lakes nearby) and who would want to come back to a quiet neighborhood at the end of the day. But if the student wants to experience more nightlife and partying, and wants to live near the city centre, then I would suggest not.

I really enjoyed staying in my accommodation as there was a good mix of international students whom I was able to interact with. In addition, the accommodation was comfortable and there were supermarkets right outside the hostel, which was very convenient.

One thing which I didn't get to do while staying in my student accommodation was to live next to and interact with many local Germans.

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?

Yes! In the my university, there's an international students club that organizes short day trips to nearby cities in Germany and international bar nights that brings together exchange students and allows students to mingle and find friends.

Before the semester started, the university also arranged for a boat trip in Berlin as a sightseeing tour for students (the students have to pay a sum) but it is fun and you get to see the city and make new friends.

The university also has a sports club that organizes a variety of classes for the students' health and fitness, and this runs through the semester.

4. Cost of Living

Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?

Please list travel expenses separately.

I spent approximately SGD\$10,000 to \$11,000 on my SEP.

Breakdown of Expenses	Cost (Euros) for 5 months
Rent	$360 * 5 = 1800$
Insurance	$80 * 5 = 400$
Food	$200 * 5 = 1000$

SEP Report

School Semester Ticket	300
Mobile Prepaid	80
Travel and Miscellaneous	3500
Total	780 Euros

5. Challenges

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

One challenge I faced in my SEP stint was my inability to German. I didn't learn German before embarking on my SEP and that was challenging as the Germans predominantly speak German, the signs are in German and hence it was a bit hard to navigate in the beginning. However, the Berliners do speak English and were very helpful. I learnt a few phrases of German to help me through.

Another thing that was challenging was the closure of shops on Sundays. Almost all shops are closed on Sundays, including supermarkets, which is unlike what we have in Singapore, and hence at first it was challenging as it needs getting used to.

6. Overall SEP Experience

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

I felt that my exchange experience was amazing, insightful and eye-opening. Exchange was the first time I travelled out of Asia and into Europe and I was nervous and excited. Going for exchange alone as there was no one else from NUS going to the same university and not knowing the language, I felt scared. And it was scary to me when I first arrived in Germany. Being in a foreign land that was very different from Singapore and with zero knowledge of their language, it was difficult getting around. But the people I met were very helpful and nice, helping me around.

After a while, I gained confidence in navigating the places, and I travelled around to different parts of Europe, sometimes with other Singaporeans, sometimes to visit my Singaporean friends in different parts of Europe and sometimes just backpacking on my own. It was a wonderful experience, traveling alone, understanding yourself, finding adventures and new experiences, making new friends and just learning to be independent. I thoroughly enjoyed the freedom, the excitement, the thrill of traveling around Europe. Plus it is really easy to travel in Europe as they have buses, trains and domestic flights that connected to so many different cities and places.

SEP Report

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

I would suggest future outgoing students to meet and talk to those who have been to that particular school and ask for advice as it can be overwhelming, daunting experience if the student is alone and not able to cope with the different system and environment. Also meeting and talking to an alumni of the SEP program to that particular country or university would give useful suggestions and advice on how to save money on exchange, traveling, what to look out for, what to be careful about and so on.