

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Arts & Social Sciences
Host University	University of Konstanz
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY2016/17 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

For me I took a variety of courses ranging from humanities, social sciences, biology and language, so classes were held in a mixture of seminars, lectures and tutorials accordingly. At my host university, most of the courses in humanities are taught in seminars. This allowed me to interact with other students more often, as opposed to being in a lecture setting. It gave me the opportunity to experience a highly diversified culture in the classroom, as most of my classmates came from all over the world. In particular, European universities are developing a strong institution for exchange studies under the ERASMUS Program, thus propagating a multitude of European cultures at my host university.

This also meant that the international office at my host university was well-equipped and experienced in dealing with exchange students, and this was crucial. Going to a different university in a foreign land meant that I essentially had to adapt to and navigate an entirely new system of tertiary education, ranging from the syllabus, learning requirements and registrations. The format of the semester was also radical to me. For example, some courses only ran for a week, yet was highly intensive. Further compounding this was the foreign language at times, as the translation services and my German were not always up to par. However, with the immense help of the international office, everyone was satisfied with the courses that they took. Concerning the mapping of courses, I would highly recommend going on exchange with flexible studies requirements, as it gives a lot more room to breathe at the course selection stage. This would greatly reduce the anxiety related to not getting particular courses for graduation requirements, as often the accurate semester courses and syllabus are released only at the start of the semester. Failing this, schools offer some flexibility for exchange students, for example slotting them in for a course that runs later in the semester.

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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
LIT-51980-2017	Film in Film: Reflective Cinema	6.0	EN3703	EN Level 3000 Band A Module	4.0
BIO-14250-2017	Animal Behavior	3.0	LSM1303	Animal Behavior	4.0
POL-18990-2017	Introduction to Comparative Politics	6.0	PS2234	Intro to Comparative Politics	4.0
POL-20670	Globalization and its Effects on Domestic Politics	7.0	GL4751	Department Exchange Module	5.0
INT-10015020162	Intensive Course German A2/2	6.0	LAG3202	German 4	4.0
SLI-12725	Sprechfertigkeit B1/Oral Proficiency B1	4.0	LAG4201	German 5	5.0
SLI-15570	Grammatik B1/Grammar B1	4.0	LAG4201	German 5	5.0
SLI-15990	Lesen, Sprechen, Schreiben:Landeskunde B1/Reading, Speaking, Writing: Area Studies B1	4.0	LAG4741	Department Exchange Module	4.0

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?

I stayed at a student residence off campus, about 15-20 minutes away from the university by foot. As is common in Germany, I stayed in a shared mixed-gender student residence with 6 other students, half of whom came from other parts of Germany. The other half were exchange students. It was a lived-in complex, and showed its time. It was also the most serene and quiet place I could have gotten. I lived on the corner of the complex on the ground floor, where my room opens up to a balcony. Beyond lies a field that stretches out to the nearby farm. In the late winter, it is the best time to see the stars, as the sky is cloudless. In summer nights, we had grill parties out on the lawn. If one was lucky, there is a week in summer that the glow worms and fireflies come out in the dark.

And it gets really dark. Living on the outskirts of the city, my area had little traffic, and as such, little

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need for light at night. Initially, I was afraid of the dark, accustomed as I was to the orange streetlights in Singapore. Over time though, it became a memorable experience, standing out in the middle of the field staring at the stars, swallowed in the dark.

Of course, other issues do crop up when I was living on the outskirts. Reception was sketchy; mobile data is a luxury. Getting into the city is always tough. Also, I lived furthest away from the city center, and I always had to send my friends back first before making the long journey home alone. Some might like the tranquility and peace, others find it boring and annoying.

So while my personal experience was lovely, I hesitate to recommend it 100%. Much of the experience was due to the fact that my housemates were really friendly and kind, substituting many times for my family back home. We would get together to redecorate the house, plan birthday surprises, visit and stay with one another in their hometown. This is not the norm. I just happened to get really lucky to bond with my housemates. Shared living is not easy, and it is very different. Not everyone would like it, which is why I would hesitate to recommend it wholesale.

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?

The international office in Konstanz was astonishingly well ran and thought out. They planned many excursions in the city as well as to neighboring cities, such as Freiburg, Zurich, Milan and Bregenz. These were cities in Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Austria. These are all enjoyable tours ranging from going to an opera play, walking the streets and sightseeing and even going to the Europa Park. Local tours are also held by the international office for water activities on the Lake of Konstanz. I would highly recommend students take up these events and tours as they are usually really cheap, interesting and allows for interaction between exchange students from all over the world. Finally, as in Germany, there are numerous pub crawls and drinking sessions held by the international office to encourage bonding amongst the student exchange community.

4. Cost of Living

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

Please list travel expenses separately.

Over the course of my entire exchange, I had about 6,500 Euros, out of which I have 2,200 remaining. That sums up to about 4,300 Euros spent over the course of 5 months on rent, insurance, travel expenses, entertainment and basic necessities. My rent cost about 240 Euros, while monthly insurance takes up 90 Euros. It is difficult for me to split up the travel expenses, as some of the trips are taken with the school, and others where I do not budget for the trips. In my rough estimation, I spent about 900-1,200 Euros on traveling.

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5. Challenges

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

One of the biggest hurdles during my SEP stint was the language barrier. While it is popular convention that countries in Europe, especially Germany, has many English-speaking populations, it is not widely acknowledged that this distribution spreads out when looking at urban, suburbans and even rural regions. Big cities may have many English speakers, but that applies unevenly in other areas. While it is entirely possible to go through the entire SEP without picking up the local language and get by, it is a pity. Over time, I simply got used to the basic social norms, sufficient enough to understand the basics of buying groceries and asking for clarification. One does get used to it after a while

6. Overall SEP Experience

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

My entire exchange experience was built upon the ideas of home. I found three homes within the time that I was in Germany. One was the home I left behind, and the various things I found I missed about Singapore. The convenience, the food, friends and family are all things that stuck with me when it was gone.

In Konstanz, I also found a different home, with my Singaporean friends and some Asian friends who bonded over the strangeness and alienation of European social norms and conventions. We missed Asian food and interactions, preferring to stick with ourselves and break out in Singlish whenever we get excited.

Finally, I found a home in my residence, living as I was with 6 others in a quiet and serene place. It had no semblance of the busy urban living of Singapore, nor of its predictable hot and humid weather. There was genuine friendliness and smiles in the household, something that I discovered is not common in Germany. We had fun and bonded over our differences, finding similarities in our ways of life as well. I learned a lot from them about experiencing life at a drastically slowed pace, absorbing and appreciating nature, stargazing on the rooftops.

I did not travel a lot during my time in Germany, as people usually do when they go on exchange. Nor did I really get to know the locals or other exchange students in depth, divorced as I was from their norms and unwilling to integrate. But I never regretted going on exchange, as I really felt the meaning of home three times over. And this was enough for me

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7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Be yourself, there is no need to be any more or less of who you are. Embrace your personality, your home culture and country, even your language and accent. There is no rush to connect with people, and things will only turn out better when you get to know other people, and maybe in the process, learn about yourself as well.