

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	FASS, Economics
Host University	University of Helsinki
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 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**

Classes were conducted quite similarly with a lecture-style approach, although the professors welcomed questions from the students so there was an element of interaction between the lecturer and students to a greater degree than in NUS. For the modules that I took, there weren't any tutorials, and assessment methods differed – most had a written exam but there were presentations, lecture diaries, and book reviews as well.

One important difference I noticed between the studying/learning culture of UH and NUS is that things are a lot more laidback in UH in general. This was a welcome change from the fast-paced studying style in NUS. I liked that there is a system of “second chances” where students are given three attempts to sit for an exam for the module. Students are allowed to take the exam again at a later date (usually much later however, which might not be feasible for exchange students depending on when we leave) if they are unsatisfied with their grade, or are unable to make it for the first exam. Furthermore, there is plenty of time given for us to complete the exam and it is rare to have to rush through the paper, which was a welcome reprieve.

Module registration is relatively easy and straightforward, and you are allowed to take courses that have overlapping timings for lectures, but it would be good to let your professors know that you may have to miss some of their lessons. Most of them don't mind students missing out on class too much but it's polite to inform them anyway. Some lecturers are more strict about attendance so if possible email them or check with your assigned tutors (local students that are almost like a “counsellor” for the exchange students) if the professor is particular about attendance. I found module mapping a bit of a challenge. From personal experience, I had to submit my learning agreement three times, having had to change the modules I was taking since they updated the courses offered twice, both times affecting the choice of modules I had made which was pretty unlucky. This would affect those going on exchange in Sem 1 more though, since by Sem 2 the modules offered for the academic year would have pretty much been confirmed already.

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.)*

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Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
70324	TA5a International Economics	5ECTS	EC3342	International Trade	3.33MC
70606	Development Economics	6ECTS	EC3371	Development Economics I	4MC
790EUB 2	Economics and Politics of European Integration	5ECTS	EC3376	European Economic Integration	3.33MC
760050	Introduction to the Nordic Welfare State	5ECTS	EU Level 2000 Equivalent	Introduction to the Nordic Welfare State	3.33MC
405786	Finnish for Exchange Students, Basic Course	5ECTS	LAX174 1	Finnish for Exchange Students, Basic Course	3.33MC

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?

My campus was a city campus that is similar to SMU, so student housing was located in various parts of Helsinki. My roommate and myself were lucky enough to get a shared studio apartment under HOAS which was located in the city centre, right behind the HOAS building which made it easier to get the administrative matters sorted out. I would definitely recommend this accommodation as it is located very centrally. However, as HOAS does not allow us to choose the location of where we want to stay, it is entirely possible that students get allocated a place in neighbouring cities such as Espoo and Vantaa which are further away. Alternative housing can be found at Domus Academica which is a hostel also located in the Helsinki City Centre. It is important to get the housing early and make it one of your first priorities. I have friends who were unable to get housing and one of them even had to stay in a private room in an apartment he found on Airbnb and paid a rent of 800euros/month (compared with 300euros/month for HOAS that I had to pay).

3. Activities during SEP

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

There were many orientation activities such as amazing races organized, but those were mostly for the freshmen. Exchange students were allowed to take part of course, but I am not sure if there will be such an opportunity for those going for exchange in the spring semester. However, there is an abundance of other activities such as sistsits and school trips organized by the student unions there which are all great opportunities to meet other people. However, they can get quite pricey, especially for the school trips, so you would need to take your budget into consideration.

4. Cost of Living

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

I spent about 3000 euros for the four months that I was there, including rent (300euros/month) but excluding the costs of travelling.

Travelling out of Helsinki can be quite expensive as the main airport, Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, does not have budget flights. However, you will find that Norwegian Air and SAS are cheaper alternatives to the local Finnair. It is also quite pricey travelling in Nordic countries. As a result, my travel expenses easily amounted to approximately 6000euros. (Countries: Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, England, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania)

5. Challenges

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

One challenge I faced was trying to manage homesickness and having to live in a place so different and far away from home. It helped that I managed to find a fellow student from NUS who was also on exchange in Helsinki and we were fortunate enough to be roommates and we were each other's pillars of support over the months. We were also in contact with the other NUS students on exchange at nearby Aalto University and we often travelled together.

Another challenge was overcoming the cultural barriers between the East and West. In my tutor group (similar to OGs in NUS), the divide between the two was rather apparent and only served to perpetuate itself over the months. A lot of active and conscious effort was needed to overcome this cultural barrier as many of the students seemed quite content with maintaining the status quo, but they are actually quite friendly and someone just has to make the first move and start the conversation.

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.

My exchange experience was not all that different from what I had expected. There were the downsides, like the bouts of homesickness (remedied through cathartic watching of numerous romance movies in the first weeks), the complete lack of any culinary ability making homecooked meals a nightmare to prepare, and the most horrific one of all: suffering the first night without any internet in our hostel room. But as the days went on, I realized that Helsinki wasn't all that difficult a place to live in. Although all the signs are in Finnish and Swedish (Finland's two official languages), many of the locals speak English and, despite their blond-haired blue-eyed appearance giving them a very cold and aloof vibe, are actually very friendly and helpful. Many would even take the initiative to approach you to offer their help, especially when you look like a lost and confused tourist. As the land of a thousand lakes, it is the perfect place for nature-lovers to explore.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Cooking at home is highly recommended! Eating out can easily set you back by 15SGD or more, much like a typical dinner out in town. The Unicafe serves student meals which are much cheaper. For 2.60euros, you will enjoy a free flow of bread and salad, but to get the discounted price you need to sign up to be a member of the student union which cost around 52euros (if I remember correctly). Joining the student union (HYY) actually gives quite a few perks like student price for travelling (metro as well as regional/intercity trains), cheaper meals, and sometimes even extra discounts for a few selected shops.

If you are on a tight budget, I would recommend going to the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and Central Europe because the other Nordic countries (Norway and Iceland especially) are *very* expensive. I was in Krakow and Vilnius for 5D4N and probably only spent a third of the amount I did for 4D3N in Stockholm.

If you are staying in HOAS, I highly recommend that you bring a router as the room only has one functioning LAN point, or you can use your laptop as a router. Alternatively, there are data-only mobile plans by the telco companies there. I used Elisa, but Sonera and DNA are also options. Generally, free wifi spots are available in cafes and also at school so you don't have to worry about being totally cut off from the online world.