

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) / Psychology
Host University	Bilkent University
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY 15/16 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

Depending on the professor or the module coordinator, most Psychology modules taught in Bilkent University involve individual assignments, one group project as well as Continual Assessments (CAs) held once about every 4 to 5 weeks. Most modules would have a Final examination as well. Hence to do well, one has to make considerable effort to revise consistently and keep track of approaching datelines. Bilkent University also has an online system similar to IVLE, called Moodle, in which students can download lecture content, get updated by their professors, submit assignments and post questions and answers on forums. Hence in terms of how modules are structured administratively and in terms of the available learning resources, I feel that Bilkent University uses a similar approach to NUS.

Despite the above similarities to NUS, classes are conducted differently in that there is no dichotomy of lecture vs tutorials. Every week, each module will have classes of 2h and 1h in duration (hence total 3h), whereby the professor lectures in a seminar-style to about 20 to 40 students in a tutorial room. Students are free to raise their hands and ask questions at any point, and some professors also attempt to promote active learning by directing questions to their students. This seminar-based approach makes class less mundane and more interactive, which is what I like most about the academic culture in Bilkent University. The professors will also give a good 10-min break after every hour for students to rest their minds or grab a quick drink before resuming the class. This way, learning becomes less stressful and overwhelming and students can maintain their focus better.

However, one area Bilkent University can definitely improve on is the nature of their examinations. At least for Psychology modules, most examinations (including CAs) involve purely rote-learning, that is the success of the student will depend mostly on his/her memory of the content that is taught. That being said, there are a few professors who try to make their exams less memory-dependent and more application-based by giving scenario-based questions. Bilkent University, has to some degree try to prevent pure regurgitation of content in their exams by prohibiting the setting of Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs) but I feel that such an approach is insufficient. Firstly, not all MCQs are necessarily regurgitative – some MCQs can be set in a way such that an understanding and application of key concepts are required. Secondly, essay-based and short-answer questions set by instructors are mostly 'direct' questions that invite answers that can be 'copied-and-pasted' from the lecture slides alone. In this respect, I feel that NUS has an academic rigour that is substantially more challenging than Bilkent.

As I had taken all five Psychology modules throughout my exchange in Bilkent University, I think the following module registration and mapping advice may be more relevant for those who are taking

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Psychology:

1. For module-mapping, it is possible to map Psychology modules as your Psychology elective modules. However, please ensure before leaving that the modules you choose can be approved by checking with your department coordinator in NUS.
2. It is also safer to choose more than five modules to map and receive approval for all of those. This is because some modules may be cancelled due to unpopularity (or other reasons) despite being listed in the Bilkent STARS portal initially for the semester.
3. You can view the list of modules Bilkent offers on its STARS portal here: https://stars.bilkent.edu.tr/homepage/plain_offerings . There may not be listings yet for the actual semester you are going for, but you can refer to the semesters from previous years as most likely, it will be similar. However, please make sure to select the correct semester (fall or spring).

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
PSYC 360	Individual Differences and Personality	6	PL3241	Personality and Individual Differences	4
PSYC 430	Clinical Psychology	6	PL3257	Introduction to Clinical Psychology	4
PSYC 320	Cognitive Neuroscience	6	PL37XX	Dummy Code Psychology Elective	4
PSYC 340	Learning, Remembering and Thinking	6	PL37XX	Dummy Code Psychology Elective	4
PSYC 350	Cognitive and Social Development	6	PL37XX	Dummy Code Psychology Elective	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?

I stayed in Bilkent University's Dormitory 77 for free. I am really fortunate that Bilkent University offers its exchange students free accommodation for double rooms (and lower e.g. triple) in its dormitories. If you need a single room or a suite, you can top-up with a reasonable rate as well. However, I would advise to take up a double room because of several benefits:

1. You might get a Turkish roommate who may be of huge help to you. Most people in Turkey, apart from university students, cannot really speak English and language barrier can be huge. A Turkish roommate will indeed be very valuable to ease your first few months in Turkey by

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guiding you on how to navigate the Turkish way of life.

2. The double rooms are very decent and provide ample space and facilities for sleep and studying. As it is free, it was very worth-it.
3. If you intend to travel throughout your exchange semester and have a budget, taking up a free accommodation by the university will save you a lot for more travelling opportunities.
4. Staying in school is really the most convenient and safe way. Ankara has been encountering several bomb attacks recently, but Bilkent is an area that is safer from the common targets around city-centres. Also, classes are just a walk away and you do not have to depend on hectic public transportation to get to class on time.

Make sure you apply for Bilkent's free accommodation as soon as it becomes available. Some dormitories and rooms are indeed more popular and spots can be taken up quickly. I made sure I applied on the very day registration for accommodation is opened, and I got the type of room I wanted successfully.

For those who are interested, Dormitories 77 and 78 are the better dormitories with newer refurbishing and better Internet connection, so you may want to place these dormitories among your first few choices when you register for accommodation.

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?

Bilkent University has an excellent Erasmus Student Network (ESN) with helpful and friendly students who plan fun and interesting activities for all exchange students. The ESN for example, organizes trips to other parts of Turkey for discounted cost. I was able to take part in their organised trips to Capadocia, Samsun and Antalya. Such trips usually involve visiting breathtaking landscapes such as canyons renowned in the area and can include exhilarating activities such as paragliding, water rafting and taking a hot air balloon during the spring and summer period. Boat trips around the coastal parts of Turkey are also common.

Besides trips, ESN also organizes other meaningful activities such as the Social Erasmus Project whereby exchange students can engage in spending a day interacting with underprivileged local communities such as mentally handicapped children. Other projects also include food and clothes collecting and donation to Syrian refugee groups, and you would receive a chance to visit and interact with these groups as well to understand and empathise the challenges such groups go in their daily lives.

4. Cost of Living

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

Please list travel expenses separately.

Food/Drinks: 1500 TL
School Materials: 150 TL

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Personal Items: 1000TL
Accommodation: 0TL (I had free accommodation offered by Bilkent University's dormitories)
Transport: 200 TL
Phone: 210 TL (90TL for SIM Card and 1st month and later 30TL for 4 subsequent months for 2GB data plan)
Travelling (within Turkey) expenses: 1800 TL
Leisure activities (e.g. movies, paragliding, etc.): 700 TL
Others: 500 TL
Total: 6060 TL

5. Challenges

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

The most challenging issue for me has to be the initial language barrier. Unlike locals in other parts of Europe, the ordinary Turkish do not speak English at all – even the non-teaching school staff in campus such as dormitory managers and cleaners, and despite Ankara being an urban city in Turkey. Day-to-day routines and errands such as purchasing items, requesting for cleaning, ordering at restaurants usually involve having to communicate with them, which can pose a big challenge. Nevertheless, always have an open mind and be assured that most Turkish locals are friendly even if you do not speak their language. You may look for others who can speak English and mediate the language for you – e.g. I ask my Turkish roommate or another local Turkish student to help me communicate with the dormitory manager when I have to. Outside campus, however, it may be harder to get someone with sufficient knowledge of English to become your temporary translator, so it helps to know certain key words such as “Tamam” for “okay”, “Evet” for “yes”, “Hayir” for “no” and etc., and use them in combination with gestures if you are ever stuck in such a situation.

For me, although such challenge posed a huge culture shock at first and had put me in plenty of sticky situations, I am very glad to have experienced it. Through that hardship, I was both forced and inspired to learn and take up Basic Turkish (I overloaded my semester by taking an extra language module) and I came out being able to understand and identify with the Turkish and their culture better through the language they speak. Through such challenges, my goals for signing up for the SEP experience are met. At the end of it all, I feel that such challenges are crucial to grow me into the host culture, shape me to proceed with kindness, tolerance and respect for others as well as to become the number one reason for why I left a piece of my heart in Turkey.

6. Overall SEP Experience

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

My SEP experience has been nothing short of both an emotional and enlightening roller-coaster, and also one that has allowed me to reflect on the values I carry with me as well as concerns for the larger

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humanity. Through interacting with local Turkish students, their privileged and underprivileged groups and breathing the same Turkish space and air, I encountered thoughts and feelings that both conflict and concur with the knowledge and values I endorse as a person - but that also grew me to become the more appreciative and tolerant person I am today. Beyond Turkish culture, I had learnt to open up and forge meaningful relationships with other exchange students from a variety of different nationalities, trusting the kindness of strangers and in turn, to always proceed with kindness. If there is one thing I learnt, it is that the world is operated by vast differences in systems (culturally, politically, academically), but such differences can coexist if we all embody love for the humanity. And that love is kind and patient – both towards yourself and others.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Seeking some advice from seniors who had gone to the same places or university can be extremely helpful, so do reach out to them if you can. Nevertheless, different students will encounter different experiences while they are abroad, unique to their own time, space and interactions. Always know that unexpected challenges can crop up during your SEP stint. If you have an exchange student body or network in your school, keep those contacts close. For example, add the members up on facebook or have their phone numbers stored in your phone/diary, such that you can always reach them to help you should you encounter any challenging situation. Also, always have someone in the know on your whereabouts be it within school or when you are travelling.