

# SEP Report

## 1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Law
Host University	Durham University
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 Full Year

## 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 at Durham were conducted in a lecture/seminar and tutorial system. Each lecture/ tutorial/ seminar was about an hour long. For modules with larger groups, there would be a weekly lecture and a tutorial every 2-3 weeks. Lectures are conducted by various lecturers according to topic, while tutors remain unchanged. For modules with smaller sizes, classes consist of a weekly seminar (generally more interactive than a lecture) and a tutorial every 2-3 weeks, and the seminar lecturer would be the tutor. One major difference between the studying culture at Durham and NUS is that all/most modules in Durham span the entire academic year (divided into three terms), with the bulk of the grade dependent of final year exams/papers. The stress is therefore mainly during the last term, which frees up the first two terms to participate in lots of university/college related activities. But that is not to say that there isn't much work to be done in the first two terms. Each module would have at least one compulsory and one optional formative assignment to be handed in sometime in the first half of the year. Formatives do not contribute to final mark, but are opportunities to receive feedback for work.

There are three aspects which I liked. First, tutorial sizes are quite small (mine were between 6-8 students), allowing for greater interaction with both my classmates and tutor. Second, every lecturer and tutor has set office hours during the week during which any student can knock on their office doors to discuss or clarify any issues they may have during the course (appointments may also be made outside of these office hours). The office hour system was helpful in lowering the barriers to entry (mainly psychological) to meeting profs to ask questions and clear doubts. Third, we were given feedback for all work submitted for grading, including the final year exams.

One area which I didn't enjoy was that my final written exams were closed-book exams. Trying to memorise a whole year's worth of modules was probably the most stressful time of the year.

Although module registration commences before the academic year starts, I think students are still permitted to change modules within the first week of term. Registration for my modules was quite an administrative nightmare as although I had submitted my module choices to Durham promptly, I only discovered when at Durham that the module credits were different from what was stated on the website and therefore had insufficient credits. Moreover, exchange students had to personally go to each department to confirm modules registered even after submitting them online. When I reached the law department, they refused to confirm my modules on the system because one of my modules was from another department (theology), and I had to go to the theology department to ask them to confirm my module first before heading to the law department again to confirm my law modules. I am not sure

# SEP Report

why module registration system is as such, but I thought having to personally go to each department to confirm modules after having submitted them online was quite unnecessary. And because of the delay in my registration, my Durham University Online account was blocked off because they only allow access till a certain date by which you must have completed registration in order to continue access. I was blocked from access to Wi-Fi, module pages and the library until I finished registration (which was only completed after lessons began).

**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
Law 1081	The Individual and The State	20			
LAW 2131	Public International Law	20			
LAW 2111	Employment Law	20			
LAW 2241	Commercial Law	20			
LAW 3241	International Criminal Law	20			
THEO 1161	New Testament Greek	20			

## 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?**

Durham has a collegiate system and is a rather small university town. This means that the colleges, university buildings/facilities and even private accommodation are generally quite 'on-campus' and within a reasonable distance from each other.

I was given the opportunity to join University College (aka Castle College) and stayed in Castle accommodation. There are two accommodation types one can choose from – either to stay within the Castle walls, or outside the Castle walls. Apart from the obvious difference between the two (that you get to live in a Castle), another consideration is that the former option requires one to share a room with another fresher, while the latter is a single room. I chose the latter, and I eventually lived at an accommodation called Moatside, which is basically just around the Castle and a short 1-2 minute's walk from the Castle gate. Living at Moatside was extremely convenient, as it is located within the town centre. Grocery stores, restaurants/cafes, shops and the market square was a 3-5 minute's walk, and my classes were at most a 15 minute's walk away. During term time, all meals are fully catered. During the holiday period, there are kitchen facilities open for use.

I would highly recommend my college accommodation to future outgoing students, but there is no certainty of being allocated to any particular college. Some are very modern and have more extensive facilities; others (like mine) have less facilities but offer other traditional experiences, such as

# SEP Report

formal/gowned dinners and chapel services. Some colleges are fully catered, some completely self-catered, and some in-between which allow an option. But notwithstanding the uncertainty of which college one might be allocated to, each college experience is uniquely rewarding and I would definitely recommend trying it out for yourself!

## 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?**

I participated in a number of college and university-wide activities, such as basketball, lacrosse and Wing Chun, all of which I would recommend. There are also numerous other clubs, societies, arts and sports groups which one can join, and more information about each can be found during the Durham University Students Union fair at the start of the year, or at your own college's clubs and societies' fair. A number of my friends participated in activities run by the Hillwalking society and really loved it, so I think I would suggest that as well! There are full-day walks every weekend to areas such as the Lake District and Whitby, for a small fee which includes transport to and fro.

## 4. Cost of Living

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

**Please list travel expenses separately.**

Admin:

Immigration Health Surcharge: \$331.13

Visa: \$732.24

Plane ticket: \$826.20 (and about £430 back)

**Total for visa and return plane tickets: ~\$2700**

Expenses during the year:

Household items: ~£170

Food: ~£660

Accommodation and term time catering: £6975

Uni/College activities: ~£150

Phone: £20

**Total for household, food, accommodation, and other misc expenses: ~£7975**

Travelling:

Germany (8 days, 6 cities) - Transport from Durham to Germany and back+accommodation+food: ~£500

Netherlands (4 days) – Transport from Durham to Amsterdam and back+accommodation+food: ~£300

Greece (8 days, 4 islands+Athens) – Transport from Durham to Athens and back+ferries around islands+accommodation+food: ~£450

Scotland (3 days)+Iceland (6 days) – Transport+car rental+accommodation+food: ~£900

Around the UK (multiple cities and towns) - Transport: ~£200

**Total travelling expenses: ~£2350**

# SEP Report

## 5. Challenges

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

There were a number of issues which cropped up from time to time such, ranging from admin issues (module registration delays, delays in opening up a bank account) to day-to-day ones (living with noisy/inconsiderate neighbors, laundry machines gobbling up my money without starting on multiple occasions and the college failing to give compensation/look into complaints). A significant challenge was learning to be independent in another country. But none of the challenges were too serious or crippling - with sufficient patience, a good dose of humor, encouragement from friends, and constant reminders to myself to be thankful I have the opportunity to experience university life overseas despite its ups and downs, these challenges did not morph into crises.

## 6. Overall SEP Experience

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

My year in Durham opened my eyes not only to various cultures, traditions and beliefs, but more so, facilitated a large degree of introspection on my part. Living alone molded me into a more independent person; living as a foreigner in a foreign country made me more perceptive of discrimination, racism and privilege; getting to know people of diverse nationalities and cultures helped me to be more open-minded, and at times, revealed some degree of ignorance and judgmentalism on my part; telling people that I am from Singapore (and that no, it is neither China nor India) and trying to describe it to them reminded me of what I love about my home. But more importantly, above all the perks of exchange (such as experiencing a different university system/culture or being able to travel around Europe more easily), what I treasure the most is the lasting friendships I have formed with peers from both the UK and all around the world.

## 7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

**Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.**

- Step out of your comfort zone and be open to getting to know people of various cultures, backgrounds and beliefs (i.e. do not only hang out with other Singaporeans, though it may be tempting to).
- Bring enough cash just in case you cannot set up your bank account according to your ideal timeframe.
- If you are planning to travel, plan ahead and book early (even if it is just a train ticket to London) to stretch your pound. Buses are a cheaper alternative, if you are alright with travelling in longer and less comfortable manner – I got an overnight bus from London to Germany (Cologne) for 30 pounds!