

SEP Report

1. Student Information

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| | |
| Faculty/Major | Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences / Psychology |
| Host University | The George Washington University |
| NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1) | AY 15/16 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 a lot smaller at GWU. The average class size was around 15 (the largest class I had had about 25 students). The smaller class size made it easier for professors to teach and address each student's questions and difficulties. This resulted in a highly individualized learning process that made for better efficiency in learning. Students were also highly encouraged to partake in discussions (although one may argue that the US students naturally have a higher tendency to speak up and engage in quality discussions). The professors managed the class very well and I always looked forward to class each day. The professors also provide a written copy of the class curriculum/syllabus at the start of the semester and actually walk students through the outline of the class, what to expect, what is required of them, what the graded components are etc. I felt that this information was highly useful to students, who are generally overwhelmed with the immense amount of information that they need to acquire and be familiar with at the start of each semester. NUS could definitely have a similar system – the current one only provides a syllabus outline in IVLE, which is often recycled and outdated, or does not contain the necessary information. It also helps to know that the professor has a clear idea of how to conduct the class and manage students.

There is a significantly reduced emphasis on results and an increased emphasis on learning outcomes. Rote learning is rarely the case in most of the classes (unless it involves basic knowledge/foundations). Over at GWU, I experienced a cooperative classroom culture that I have never seen at NUS. My classmates actually collaborate to create study guides to help each other excel in tests. They freely share their knowledge of the class and help each other out if necessary. This development of events is highly shocking to me, someone who hails from a highly competitive education system. It provides a chance for the stronger students to teach and revise their knowledge, and for the weaker students to realize their weaknesses and improve. It is not just the professor who conducts the teaching, but the students as well (on a voluntary basis – which is different from “student teaching” in NUS). A basic level of competition still exists as students strive for individual excellence, but not in a cut-throat environment. Finally, each student is assigned an academic advisor whom he/she can refer to when he/she encounters academic problems and enquiries. I've seen my classmates go to their advisors for major recommendations, class recommendations, internship opportunities, work-study schedules, financial aid, and general student life problems. In NUS, I'm never sure who to look for and I have to google to find out which department/office is likely to handle my enquiries, and then email multiple correspondents to be sure. And I never get to speak to any staff.

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Class (or module) registration and mapping should be a smooth process. The classes offered at GWU are of similar difficulty to modules offered at NUS. However, it must be noted that the class workload is at least 2 times heavier (on average) than NUS. This involves a lot additional readings, essay homework, presentation preparation and even community service. The upside is that the graded components are divided into small, manageable parts (as long as you keep up with the work!). Don't worry, there will still be plenty of time for fun. For GWU in particular, exchange students should take note of WIP (writing intensive program) and graduate classes which are sometimes open to undergraduate students. The difficulty and workload of these classes are remarkably higher. It should also be noted that most local students only take 2 (sometimes 3) classes in their major per semester, perhaps 1 class in their minor and fill up the rest with less exhausting, fun classes. Therefore, an exchange student who takes 5 classes in their major will experience an abnormally high workload. NUS might wish to consider increasing the transferrable modular credits of classes in GWU.

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 3173 | Community Psychology | 3 | PL37XX | | 4 |
| CNSL 2376 | Introduction to Rehabilitation Counseling | 3 | PL37XX | | 4 |
| PSYC 3112 | Psychology of Adolescence | 3 | PL3244 | Adolescent Psychology | 4 |
| PSYC 3125 | Cross-Cultural Psychology | 3 | PL37XX | | 4 |
| PSYC 3121 | Memory and Cognition | 3 | PL37XX | | 4 |

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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?

On campus student residence hall – 1959 E St.

I would recommend this accommodation to future students if they are interested in experiencing student life at GWU. Close proximity to the daily classes allows students to immerse themselves within the culture of the school, and take part in numerous student organizations and school activities (of which there are plenty). The area is also highly safe (if not the safest) as it is regularly patrolled by the campus police, city police and US secret service. 1959 E St is also barely 3 blocks away from the White House (hence the secret service patrol), and about 5-10 minutes walk away from the National Mall. Taking a jog at the National Mall or hitting the gym is a regular activity amongst the residents. The building is newly renovated and spacious (relative to other student accommodations), and has a fully-functioning kitchen in each room. Unfortunately, the prime location and facilities do translate to a hefty price tag (about USD6000 for my semester).

Living off campus is a viable option if you are able to link up with other Singaporean students (or foreign students, if you know any). There are limited apartments within walking distance that offer year-long rental (i.e. at least 2 semesters) that will still be cheaper, but comes without furniture. Available accommodations further away from GWU comes at the cost of travelling time, but I've known several students who purchased a bicycle for the purpose of travelling (the metro cost adds up quickly). Nevertheless, they have remarked that living far off campus is a hassle and the savings are not worth it.

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?

For the fall semester:

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- International exchange student orientation: It may be tempting to skip the orientation (which is said to be mandatory, by the way), but it provides extremely helpful information on helping students to adapt to the US and college life e.g. visa information, financial information, campus orientation, getting to know other exchange students (very important)
- Student organizations fair: provides an opportunity for students to learn about and join student organizations. Highly recommended for those who want an immersive US college experience.
- Fallfest: probably the first major college event that features a lot of freebies and a concert. Recommended to attend with a group of friends.
- Greek life: this one is debatable. One semester is not enough for exchange students to fully experience greek culture (the first semester is mainly initiation), but it offers a unique American college experience that is unavailable anywhere else in the world. Also, a lot of hard work and fun.
- Pumpkin picking: prepare for Halloween by going to pumpkin farms to buy a pumpkin (or not), and carve the pumpkin to your liking. Along the way, definitely pick up some apple cider from the farms.
- Halloween Embassy trick-or-treating: Go with a bunch of friends to embassy row to trick-or-treat at various embassies.
- American sports: two options here. Either attend the free college sports games (GWU unfortunately does not have a football team) or purchase tickets to professional games. MLB, MLS, NFL, NHL, NBA games are highly recommended for students who have never experienced a sports game outside of Singapore.
- Midnight breakfast: this is an event held on the last day of school to help students relax before the finals. Free food, a lot of entertainment (e.g. dances, film screenings, workshops), lots of freebies. Event starts at about 10pm til 2am.
- Concerts: definitely should go attend a concert by a touring act with a group of friends.
- Food festivals: D.C. is always hosting some kind of food festival every other week. Go to as many of them to try out foods from different cultures.
- Movie screenings: There are free movie screenings from time to time, on the University yard. Bring a picnic mat/blanket, bug repellent (if there are still mosquitoes), food and drinks.
- Black Friday sales: be prepared to spend a lot.

4. Cost of Living

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

Flight: USD1200
Accommodation: USD6000
Food: USD2000
Shopping: USD2000
Misc: USD1000

Travelling around the US: USD3000

5. Challenges

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

The US culture will be a shock to Singaporean students who are very accustomed to Singapore's culture. Be prepared to engage in small talk all the time (even to strangers who happen to be queuing in line with you) and participate a lot in class discussions. Students should be comfortable with speaking at length on irrelevant subjects and frequenting social events. I overcame my fear of socializing by forcing myself to begin conversations with others, which helps to dissolve the awkwardness and fear. It doesn't have to be a spectacular opener – just a simple "hi" or "how are you" will do. It will be rough at the beginning for those who are not used to this degree of socializing, but it gets better from there everything you practice socializing with others.

6. Overall SEP Experience

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

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My exchange program took me on a journey to find a new family, half a world away. It took me on a journey to try new and unique experiences because I didn't have a reason to say no. And amidst all the small talk and superficial laughs, I found my calling in my fraternity, Delta Epsilon Mu (DEM). As the class bonded together over various challenges and obstacles, we forged a sense of camaraderie as a family. I will never forget the time spent with my brothers and sisters of DEM, from the little jokes to the big sacrifices. DEM gave me a family in a place where I had none.

Being introduced through a miraculous chain of friendships, I met another wonderful group of friends in the Philippines Cultural Society (PCS). PCS helped me pull through the arduous journey of acclimatizing to a foreign culture, just as their members previously had. They also provided me with an opportunity to embrace my interest in dance, by allowing me to take part in their semi-formal dance event. Here, I found a feeling of home in the US. Looking back at the start of this journey, I am no longer the same person who first stepped onto US soil. I have graduated from being a fish in a small fishbowl to the limitless ocean. This journey has broadened my perspectives and views of the world.

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7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Dear outgoing students,

Let's make it clear here. You have made a conscious decision to go on an exchange program. In addition

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to your primary purpose of doing it, you are going to a different place to experience a different culture. You may feel afraid, reluctant, or resistant to the new, but you need to embrace it. You are your biggest obstacle in overcoming challenges that you face abroad. You only have 4 months, so cherish every day that you have. Do not make excuses to avoid trying out new experiences, because you'll be missing out on so much. Make as many friends as possible, do as many things as you can, visit as many places as you can, eat as much as you can, and have as much fun as you can.