

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Mechanical Engineering
Host University	University of Arizona
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 in a lecture and office hours format. The lecturer would explain and teach the course content during lectures. The office hours are separate time periods where his/her office would be open to students to come in to ask questions. There are no tutorials, unlike in NUS. Instead, homework assignments are uploaded onto the learning management system and these are submitted and graded. Quizzes and mid-term exams are conducted during lecture sessions too.

The best thing about academics over there is the sheer diversity of majors offered. There are many kinds of engineering there and it definitely allows people who are interested in a specific field to pursue their interests. The teachers are very helpful and friendly and will do their best to answer your questions. Besides, the performance of students is not graded on a curve for most classes. This means that students have less stress because they do not have to compete with fellow classmates. Even so, I felt that the portion of the grade for homework is too large. For homework, students are graded even though they are still new to the concepts taught and are still practicing and learning how to solve problems. The grades of students inevitably suffer because mistakes are often made when learning how to solve problems through homework. Also, exchange students are given bottom priority when it comes to module registration. This often means that there are always classes that are not offered to you because they are full. This makes things difficult for exchange students, who already have to deal with different module offerings compared to NUS, at their host university.

Module planning and mapping should be done as early as possible. Multiple module plans should be made so that if one fails to get a particular module, there is a backup that can be put in place. It was difficult to get the modules I wanted because exchange students are not enrolled into the university's registration system and so have lower priority in getting modules compared to other students. Engineering students tend to have a harder time getting the modules they want because the curriculum in NUS is very structured and limited to certain semesters and it is difficult to plan and shift modules around the 4 years. So, plan early and at least there is time to react and re-plan if things do not go as intended.

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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	Module credit
AME432	Heat Transfer	3	ME3122	Heat Transfer	4
AME446	Fuel Cell Fundamentals & Design	3	ME3662	Technical Elective	4
AME302	Numerical Methods	3	ME3662	Technical Elective	4
AME324A	Mechanical Behaviour of Engineering Materials	3	ME3662	Technical Elective	4
PTY5170A1	Evolution of A Habitable World	3	PC1991	Unrestricted Elective Module	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 an On Campus Dormitory.

Yes I would recommend this to future students. The main 2 advantages are ease of meeting new friends and easy access to school facilities without having to commute. The drawback is higher rent compared to outside accommodation. But depending on the situation in each location, the money and time saved on commuting might be worth the higher rent.

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?

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The orientation is compulsory and rightly so because the university staff has an entire programme in place to process the necessary admin work. The orientation also encompasses the university facilities, and even a food day where free samples of on-campus food are given to students. Because it is organised by staff, the orientation programme is professionally done and it was a great experience.

The dormitory staff and student leaders also plan many small activities. These activities include study sessions, events to raise awareness of issues. Most of the activities last for only a short time but they can help residents get to know each other. I got to know a few of my dormitory mates through those activities. The added benefit is that most of the events have free food.

There are international student organisations which help the international student community to get to know each other, and help ease the transition into life and work at a new place.

4. Cost of Living

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

Please list travel expenses separately.

Normal expenses: 10,600USD

Travel expenses: 1800USD

5. Challenges

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

The first issue I faced was with the different slangs and accents of English spoken by the different communities in the US. Understanding what they were saying was difficult at times. After a few weeks of interacting with them I eventually learned to understand their speech better.

Another issue is that my American friends could not grasp my spoken English well, because of my accent and incorrect pronunciation. I had to make the effort to change my way of pronouncing certain words and this took time and practice. Eventually, after 1 to 2 months, I could interact with them properly and even convey hidden meanings in my speech.

Academics were another issue I had to contend with. The grading system of classes in my host university places a lot of focus on homework assignments and quizzes. This meant that I had to

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continuously keep up with the lecture material in order to do sufficiently well in classes. It also forced me to rethink and adjust the allocation of my efforts to the various components of my grade. Juggling this with the mindset to enjoy myself and make full use of my exchange duration was challenging. Eventually I barely struck a balance between work and life, and I am glad I achieved the minimum grades required and thoroughly made full use of my time during my exchange.

6. Overall SEP Experience

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

Going for an exchange programme pushed me to new heights. I learnt to be independent and decisive through planning my solo travels. I also learnt to interact with people from different cultures. It has also changed me to become more outgoing and friendly. Learning about the US has made less afraid of moving from one country to another, and travelling alone. Sharing my culture with friends is also enjoyable and fulfilling for both parties. I told my friends a lot about Singapore, its food and its history. Likewise, they also told me a lot about their diverse backgrounds, because like Singapore, the US is a country of immigrants. The flaws of both Singapore and the US became more apparent to me after these 5 months, and it will shape my decision on whether to continue staying in Singapore or move to another country. Most of all, it gave me a chance to witness the wonder of natural beauty through all my trekking trips in the various parts of Arizona, and California.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Don't be afraid of going to a country alone. You will be surprised at how many friends you can make just by being helpful and kind and willing to share.

To engineering students, do not overload on the number of modules you are taking at the host university. You will regret the lack of time for travelling around. A lot of engineering classes do not have the flexibility to allow you to earn extra points for your grade, or reschedule your exam. Taking too many modules will hinder your ability to travel around during term time.

Don't be afraid to try new things. You might discover something you really like. Even if you don't like it, it will serve as an experience too.

If you are going to Western countries, be sure to open up and talk to people, even strangers. It helps both parties learn about each other's' countries and also themselves.

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