

# SEP Report

## 1. Student Information

<b>Faculty/Major</b>	FASS / Economics
<b>Host University</b>	University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC)
<b>NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)</b>	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**

The learning culture at UIUC is focused on emulating and promulgating a strong culture for interdisciplinary teaching and independent learning. Classes are primarily conducted on a lecture basis, held twice a week, with most classes not having any tutorial sessions. There is evidence of great voluntary class participation despite the lack of marks devoted in assessing students' involvement. While there are no tutorial sessions for most classes, lectures (especially for the smaller class sizes) are conducted on a basis of lively discourse. In terms of grading, there are typically two mid-terms for each course and continual assessments constitute a significant portion of the course grades.

The aspect I most favour is that many classes tend to supplement theoretical concepts with relevant real-world applications (*e.g.* using spatial density maps to identify Champaign's competition in food industry). In addition to that, most courses offer various extra credit opportunities for students to boost their grades.

However, I find that some courses tend to lack the academic rigour. For instance, some courses have tested very basic mathematical components in a bid to accommodate to the general mathematical grasp of the cohort. Some examinations are structured in a way such that content tested is almost identical to that of homework questions.

Given that UIUC offers many courses which are highly interesting yet different from the ones offered in NUS, it is important to start looking at the course catalogue at the soonest. Furthermore, it is a good idea to apply for courses once you have been offered the notice of admission as registration of courses are on a first-come-first-served basis. It is also imperative to be flexible and not to narrow yourself to a limited set of courses in the case module mapping is unsuccessful.

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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	Modular credit
ECON411	Public Sector Economics	3	EC3351	Public Finance	4
ECON420	International Economics	3	EC3342	International Trade	4
ECON440	Economics of Labour Markets	3	EC3361	Labour Economics IG	4
CMN230	Intro to Interpersonal Communication	3	-	-	4
GEOG205	Business Location Decisions	3	GE2202	Economy & Space	4
SOC270	Population Issues	3	SC2208	Population and Society	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 on campus in Sherman Hall during my exchange.

Given another chance, I would not stay in a student dormitory, but would have rented an apartment to live independently instead. The dormitory is limited by its size, requires sharing a bathroom with a suitemate and hence lacks privacy ( your neighbors could possibly enter your room through the bathroom). In contrast, the latter would have offered me the opportunity to have a larger space such as a living room and private bathroom, as well as the ability to prepare my homemade meals.

There are a couple of private apartments available for rent even on campus at very competitive rates (some which are even cheaper than dormitories), but one will have to negotiate for a half-year lease.

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## 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?**

UIUC offers a wide variety of activities, and the following are some recommended ones:-

- Homecoming Day
- Halloween Parties organised by Fraternities / Sororities
- Halloween carving parties (e.g. student union)
- Singapore Student Association – Chicago Trip and Mooncake Festival
- Cornfusion – Corn Maize in Reindeer Town, Rantoul
- Falling Illini club – Skydiving
- Curtis Orchard – Apple and Fresh Fruits Pickings

## 4. Cost of Living

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

**Please list travel expenses separately.**

The following expenses are in US dollars:

Air Tickets: \$1800

Groceries / Supplies: \$581

Housing: \$2600

Food:\$1330

Textbook: \$64.51

UIUC Fee (Insurance and Miscellaneous): \$612

Total Expenditure: \$6987.10

Travel Expenses: \$5100

## 5. Challenges

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

My first challenge is learning how to interact well with foreign peers given our cross-cultural differences. To make my exchange more fruitful and lively, I was encouraged to venture out of my comfort zone and made new friends through student organisations, fraternities and social events. That made me more confident in initiating interaction and I have also, from those interactions, picked up useful skills such as giving comfort to friends and managing conflict. I also appreciated the importance of small talk as important preludes to further conversation, especially when I was unfamiliar of the personal histories and experiences of these newly-met friends.

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My second challenge was in maintaining existing relationships with my friends and family, especially with the time-difference. As such, I had to stay up slightly later in a bid to communicate with them via computer-mediated communication. I also made a conscious effort to actively utilise social media platforms, such as Skype and WhatsApp, to keep in touch with them. Such methods allowed our conversations to maintain the necessary efficiency, flexibility and spontaneity.

My third challenge involved managing my time wisely. Given that I am only on exchange for a semester, I had to balance my time in making new connections with my foreign peers, plan for road trips, as well as catch up with the academic rigour. This allowed me to learn how to prioritise my time, a skill which I have arguably improved on over these few months.

## 6. Overall SEP Experience

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

Studying abroad in UIUC allowed me to be immersed in their strong culture for interdisciplinary teaching and research, as well as academic discourse that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Furthermore, having acquired a global view has put me in a better stead in my discipline of Economics, where the global activities in the marketplace makes international competencies especially important for employers. On a personal basis, I find myself being more independent and confident through living by myself as well as travelling on road trips. My interaction with foreign peers at UIUC allowed me to hone my cross-cultural communication skills and adopt broader perspectives. While I might not have experience United States and her culture to the fullest, I certainly felt more immersed in the day to day living compared to an average tourist.

## 7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

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

Forge interactions with foreign peers to make your exchange experience more fulfilling. I made lots of friends (and even close ones) at UIUC. I continue maintaining relationships with them and am expecting to host when they visit Singapore. It offered me a great opportunity to make friends across the world, especially for a person who does not have many foreign friends other than the ones forged through social media sites.

Be open minded and take on activities that you have not taken part in before. I certainly enjoyed the adrenaline and soar-above-the-world boost in my very first skydiving experience.

Finally, plan as many road trips as you can given your time and budget constraints. Given that it is relatively costly (in terms of airfare) to travel to the U.S., travelling to neighbouring states such as Michigan and Indianapolis, or counties such as Naperville and St Louis will offer you more bang for your buck!