

Hi! I'm Rebecca and I am an Interactive Arts and Technology major at SFU. I went on exchange to the University of Leeds in Leeds, England from January to June 2015.

Planning my time abroad was relatively smooth, however knowing some details about the term calendar in the UK would have been extremely helpful. The calendar provided online by the University was quite confusing for someone who isn't familiar with university vocabulary of the UK. For example, when I was trying to figure out whether there was an equivalent of Reading Break or Spring Break at the university, the university calendar didn't explicitly name the dates in which lectures would be on break as SFU does; instead, it listed the dates of the three "terms" within the semester (however they don't use the word "semester") and students have to deduce that Easter Vacation is between the last date of term 2 and the first date of term 3. So, that is a longwinded way of explaining that certain words mean slightly different things in the UK than at SFU, and those differences can be quite confusing.

Packing for my exchange was also a little bit difficult since I'd be in England through two seasons, and I wasn't quite sure how much rain or sun I'd experience in either of those seasons. It turns out that I didn't have to bring rain boots or an umbrella, but could have brought another jacket; it turns out that in Leeds, it's not so much rainy but *extremely* windy most of the time.

Travelling to England is pretty painful any way you slice it, I think. My flight landed in Manchester, and I took a train from Manchester to Leeds. That worked out fine for me, especially because I had luckily ran into another student from SFU going to Leeds, so we got to figure it out together. I might venture to say that the time between stepping on the plane and stepping into my new bedroom was the most taxing part of my exchange. Most everyone I talked to who came from North America had about 24 hours of travelling. I don't think I was quite prepared for just how exhausting that would be.



The way the University of Leeds operates is quite different from SFU. In fact, the entire post-secondary system in the UK is very different, so that was a big adjustment. Lectures were often only one or two hours, but students were expected to do significantly more independent study and research. Attendance was taken at all of my lectures and seminars (however I know that other Schools did not take attendance at any lectures). Grading was also quite different- between different Schools, and even different classes, the scales and methods of grading varied. Some classes were graded out of 90, some were graded on a "Not Satisfactory" to "Excellent" scale, and still others were done differently.

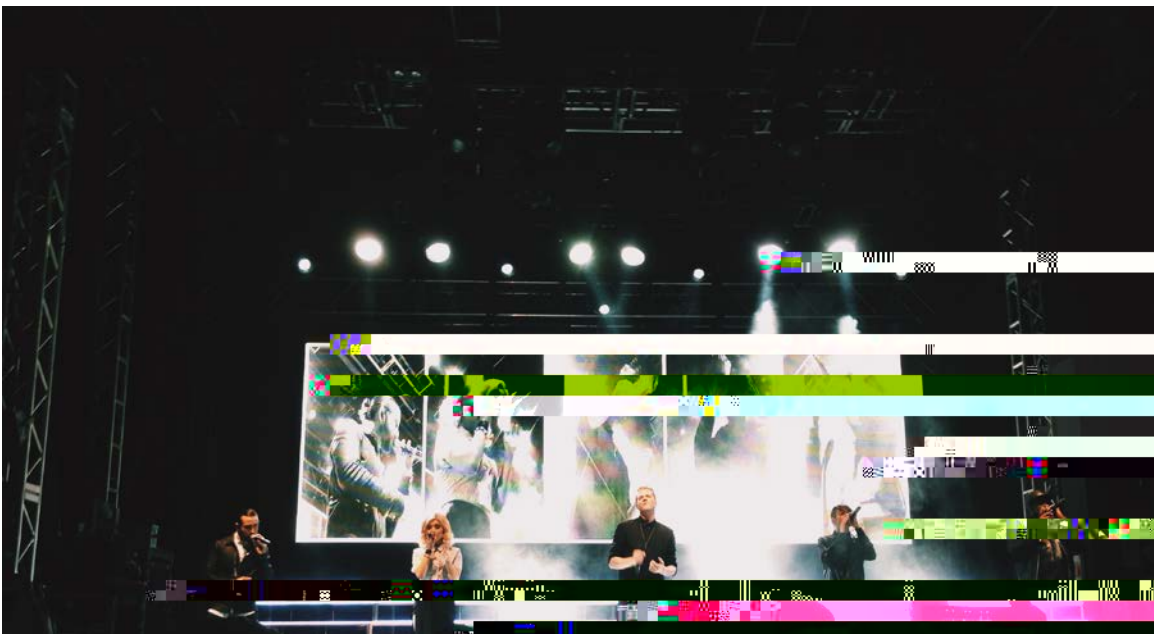
There are tons and tons of societies and clubs that students can join at the University, as well as lots of university-wide events and club nights that are very popular to attend. Although I didn't really do many university-run events myself, I know lots of exchange students had a blast at them all.

Going into my exchange, I was expecting a very stereotypical English experience (tea, biscuits, soccer/football, rugby, etc.). The culture was much more interesting and rich than I expected, and I definitely fell in love with it. Although English culture is not wildly different from Canadian culture, there are small differences that add up to a very new and exciting way of life. As well, being in the North of England was quite different than living in the South would have been. Aside from the accents being different, the North is known to be much less "posh", which in my opinion, gave me a more

relatable and down-to-earth experience. As for the weather, it was pretty much as expected: rain and/or wind more days than not, as I talked about above. It was like a more intense Vancouver for most of the semester.



England has lots of amazing cities that offer great history and sights to see, all over the country. Obviously London is a big one, but cities like Liverpool, York, Manchester, Brighton and Durham are also fantastic places to visit and learn more about English history and culture. Across the country, the music scene is fantastic. There were always concerts and festivals going on, whether big or small. I made it to three concerts in my five months alone, when I'd been to two concerts before in my life.



My exchange was an incredible learning experience. I learned something new about myself and my personality almost every day, and I know that in the years to come, I will continue to draw from experiences that I had while abroad. I'm not necessarily a home body, and I didn't get home sick, but being away from my tight-knit group of friends for so long was difficult for me at times. Obviously being away from my family was also hard, but I also revelled in the opportunity to live by myself and do life alone for the first time. I think one of my biggest challenges was figuring out who my new group of friends would be and where I fit in with them. It was pretty stressful for me in my first month to try to meet a ton of exchange students but also locals at the same time, and seeing who I connected with. I eventually found some amazing friends through my new church, and a few exchange students here and there, and that was a big relief for me.

It sounds pretty cheesy, but I wish I knew to really savour every day of being on exchange. After being away for a few weeks, it's easy to get into a routine and rhythm, and forget that you're across the globe on a once-in-a-lifetime experience. A month before I left, I was terrified; the semester went so fast and I suddenly realized that I was going to have to say goodbye to my

friends so soon. I wish I'd taken more time to appreciate the life I had for such a short time.

If you're about to go on exchange, my number one suggestion would be to prepare to experience life in a new way. Don't constantly compare your exchange life to your life in Vancouver—it will be different, but different can be fantastic. Try to do what the locals do, try to understand what they think, and you may find that you change in ways you never expected.

