

UVA Exchange Report

An excellent academic environment contained in a peerless campus.



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Fall 2015

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Monthly Log	3
General Exchange Information	5
Items to Bring	7

Monthly Log

August

I finished my summer term and UROP works in HK in early August and returned to my hometown Beijing to prepare for the upcoming exchange semester. All the paperworks were double-checked and all the suitcases were loaded. In addition to all the necessities that I thought I may need in the US, I also put some gifts in the suitcases, including traditional Chinese food, ornamental gadgets and HKUST postcards. These things turned out to be very useful when I met new people and tried to make new friends. After settling in, there were several orientations held by the International Student Office of UVA, the Global Programs Office of the McIntire School of Commerce and residence assistants in my residence building, Bice House. The schedule was tight and finding my way on the gigantic campus (or “grounds”, as UVA people prefer) was a little bit hard, but with the warm-hearted help provided by students, staff and even strangers, these activities went on just fine for me. After several days of orientation and alterations of class schedule, the semester officially began.

September

The first month of exchange term was challenging, especially when I was not accustomed to the method of teaching and learning in the US and when all the courses that McIntire provided to exchange students were final-year courses. I also went on my first trip out of Charlottesville in September, as my first trip alone in the US, I chose to visit Washington DC which is close by and it turned out to be one of my favorite travel destinations in the US. If you love museums just like me the good thing about visiting DC is that you never run out of great museums to visit, the museums of Smithsonian Institution were instructive, well-designed and free of charge, meanwhile, the private-owned museums were interesting, insightful and not expensive as well. The exchange buddy program in McIntire also began to organize activities in September, some of the buddies drove us to Humpback National Park early in the morning, and we saw a magnificent sunrise on the top of the Humpback mountain.

October

At the beginning of October came the Thanksgiving holidays, to make good use of it, I planned a trip to Boston to taste the well-known Boston lobster and to admire its historical atmosphere. Boston was a city full of history, wandering around the city was like entering a gigantic book of

the history of United States, in addition, it was also a wonderful experience to visit the famous universities located in Boston, including Harvard, MIT, Boston College, and so on, so despite the long distance, I highly recommend it as one of the potential travel destinations. In October, I also took part in a case competition held by Cornerstone. I grouped up with one of my new friends from UVA, we worked hard on the case, and made it to the semi-final round. Courses began to grow harder in October, projects and midterms took up quite some time. Working with domestic US students was a great experience. We learnt from each other, understood better about the differences in learning methods, cultures, and group-working styles. The global programs office of McIntire also organized the “Virginia Business Excursion” in October. During the one-day trip, professors and exchange buddies brought us to the local Walmart distribution center to see how it works, and to the city of Richmond to experience its beauty and culture. It was a great day for me.

November

As final exams and final projects deadlines approached, the course work became more intense in November. Among all the coursework done in November, the most exciting and difficult one for me was preparing for the final debate of COMM 4741 Global Finance. I was dreading thinking that I need to persuade native speakers in their language, and the preparation was also time consuming as I need to read a lot of articles and ideas in English. Luckily, the same course had already prepared me by assigning regular readings from the beginning of the course and the amount was up to 300 pages per class, so the preparations were challenging but not overwhelming. It was also in November that I got more involved in the local community of UVA by interviewing staff and students, and by attending community gatherings and parties. One of the most interesting gatherings I attended was a potluck organized by Christian students. In the potluck, each participant contribute a dish and everyone enjoy a meal together. It was intriguing to taste all the home-made food and listen to stories about how the potluck was started and how the dishes were prepared. The commerce school also organized Halloween dinner and other activities aiming to highlight the Halloween culture of United States.

December

The beginning of December was for final exams and final presentations. As all my projects worked out fine, and all the group members were dedicated to their work, the final presentations went on smoothly. During this period, the global programs office also hosted a farewell dinner where staff, professors, exchange buddy leaders, and us came together like a warm family and enjoyed a wonderful night. I also went to say goodbye and thank you to all the professors who

taught me during the semester. After everything were done in UVA, I went on for a trip to the southern part of the country, visiting Orlando, New Orleans and Atlanta before I returned home.

General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

Applying for US visa is a little bit complicated as there are many tables to fill and many documents to provide, and in some occasions there could be delay due to technical problems or security reasons: you can never be sure when you will be able to get the visa, so be sure to prepare and get familiar with the procedures well in advance and reserve interview slot as early as possible. For mainland students, it is a good idea to apply for US visa in HK during the preceding regular semester, just be sure to do it as soon as the DS-2019 form arrives.

Accommodation

UVA provides many on-grounds accommodation choices as well as opportunities to find off-grounds accommodation. The international office will recommend the International Residence College (IRC) for exchange students. The advantage of IRC is that it provides many opportunities for international students to come together to enjoy parties and food, there basically is one event per week. Its disadvantage is the distance, IRC is a little bit isolated from the central grounds, for example McIntire school is 10 minutes walk away from it. If you do not like parties that much, Bice House is a good choice as it is extremely close to the McIntire school.

Course Registration

Be sure to search for both commerce courses and courses provided in other schools which interest you, McIntire allows us to take almost any courses provided by the university and the staff in global programs office will kindly help you register in popular courses during the add/drop period. It is also a good idea to contact the instructor directly and tell them why you want to

enroll his/her course, in most cases they will be very willing to help and they do have the ability to add you in the course through the help of course registration staff.

Health & Safety

It is very important to fill out the pre-entrance health form before setting off for the US, UVA takes health issue seriously and failure to meet requirements could lead to inability to access SIS webpages, use University ID and so on. There is also a issue worth noticing for mainland students that some of the immunization requirements of UVA is different from those in mainland China, for example, I have been vaccinated the tuberculosis vaccine twice, and the health institutions in Beijing took this as sufficient; however, UVA health center required a third vaccination so that the antibodies level is high enough to meet their requirements.

Food

UVA provides meal plans that grants visits to the dining hall and on-ground restaurants. I felt the meal plan is worth the price as I went to dining hall quite frequently for quick meals, and the plan also came with “Plus Dollars” that can be used in on-ground restaurants like Five Guys, Chick-fil-A, In the Nood, Subway, the Dumpling Car, and so on with the exemption of sales tax. As for food styles, dining halls provides buffets of a mix style, they of course cooks American food the best, but the Asian food provided in dinning halls were a bit strange for my taste. In the Nood has Sushi and Noddles in case you like them; Five Guys and Chick-fil-A provides American style burgers, and Subway provides sandwiches. There are also convenience stores and cafes across the grounds that you can use “Plus Dollars” to pay for. Off-ground dining choices includes restaurants at the Corner, in the Barracks road shopping center, and in downtown Charlottesville. You can find Ruby Tuesday, The Virginian, Hamilton’s, and so on for American-style dining, or Citizen Burger for the best burger in town, there are also several authentic Chinese restaurants that was run by Chinese and provides dumplings and fried dishes.

Transportation

Charlottesville is a little bit far away from the major cities Virginia, it is 3 hours away from Washington DC, and 2.5 hours away from Richmond. There is a local airport in Charlottesville but it is one, still 20 minutes drive from central grounds and two, provides very limited choices of flights. My recommendation for you is to land in Dulles International Airport and find a Uber to school for your arriving and leaving because it could be problematic and not worth it to carry lots of luggages while finding your way around Washington DC or to spend quite some time and

money waiting and boarding a flight to Charlottesville Airport. The one-way Uber fee from Dulles International Airport to central grounds is around 150 USD. During the semester, if you plan to visit other cities in the US, I would recommend taking the Amtrak or Grey Hound Bus, both of which have reasonable prices and serve almost all the major cities around. For on ground transportations, all the buses in Charlottesville are free upon showing University ID, and there are Apps for tracking bus schedules. You may also consider joining the Ubike program of UVA. It provide shared bikes all around grounds for hourly or monthly rental, there are bike stops at most places you may need to visit, but be advised that the roads in UVA are mostly not horizontal, and you may need to ride up and down hills.

Climate

The weather in Charlottesville is overall good, but it could be affected by hurricanes, so I recommend bringing umbrella with you. The temperature is similar to HK and the air conditioning there have heating functions, so it is mostly comfortable indoor.

Items To Bring

Check	Items
	Travel documents
	School specified documents (health form, insurance, etc.)
	Clothes for weather similar to HK's
	Formal clothes
	Shoes (sports, casual, and formal)
	Bedclothes
	Credit card that is widely accepted
	Cash (do not need a lot as almost everything can be paid by credit card)
	Convertor for electronic devices
	Gifts that can represent the culture you are from
	Stationaries
	To be continued...