

# Exchange Report University of Pennsylvania

SPRING 2017

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## Part 1: Monthly Activity Log

January 2017

I reached Philadelphia on the 7<sup>th</sup> January and had a couple of days to settle down and attend some exchange student orientation activities. I spent the first few days walking around the city, setting up my room and getting familiar with the campus. I also tried some of the famous restaurant chains in the US and got familiar with my classes and schedule. Near the end of the month I went to New York with some friends from Penn and HKUST and managed to see all the classic NYC sights.



Philadelphia Downtown



The famous rocky statue in Philadelphia



Times Square



Entering New York the old fashioned way, via Ellis Island



## February 2017

Although in February we had more academic work with quizzes and midterms – I managed to go the west coast for a grand tour covering LA, Vegas, SFO and the Grand Canyon. I went to Universal Studios, Hollywood and some of the classic places where movies are made and where magic happens. All-in-all I covered 8 states in one week, and was joined by a friend from SENG on this trip. In February I also managed to make a quick one-day trip to NYC to meet some family members. I also managed to attend some Penn extra curricular activities.



We luckily saw golden gate bridge on a clear day after a 1-hour trek



Some of our attempts to relive The Hangover



Rainbow at the Grand Canyon

### March 2017

Although March once again was full of exams, assignments, midterms and quizzes – I went to Washington DC where we were joined by a GBUS student from HKUST also. Although President Trump was too busy for us – we did manage to see VP Mike Pence in the capitol. Of course as stress levels increased – the partying on campus did too. I also continued to explore nearby areas and as the seasons changed, and the sale signs started going up – the shopping started to pile up also. I also attended a concert by Penn Masala, an Indian a Capella group fulfilling something I had wanted to do for a few years. I also made a quick one day trip to NYC to eat some Thai Food as that was something I was craving and did not get too much of in Philadelphia.



HKUST in Washington



## April 2017

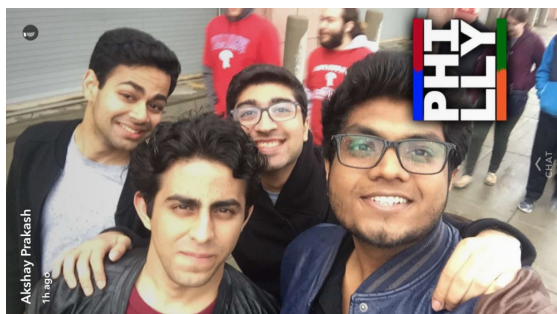
April was a great month as the cold weather finally came to an end and there was a brief lull in the academics (only for the last week) before the final storm in May. We were visited by some HKUST friends from Cornell, and attended a couple of Basketball/Baseball games. Although there was not much travelling in April, as we had group projects to work on we explored every nook and cranny of Philadelphia. We also had our first UST@Penn party and I finally attended Holi @ Penn which is one of their signature events every year. Although I did prefer ultimately the slightly wilder HKUST Holi, attending Penn Holi was also a great experience.



HKUST at UPenn



3am Parties



When friends from HKUST reunite ☺

## May 2017

I only had a couple of days in May in the US and although most of it was taken up by exams – I did make a trip to Niagara Falls and Buffalo, in addition to a final NYC trip to say bye bye to one of my favourite cities in the world. The exam schedule at Penn was cramped and before I knew it – it was time to say bye to UPenn and all the great experiences I had there.



Huntsman Hall, where most of my classes were held



Niagara Falls, from Maid of the Mist

## Part 2: General Exchange Information

### **Visa Information:**

The visa process for was actually quite simple, UPenn sent me all the documents and although it makes no tangible difference as to which visa you chose (F1 or J1), I went with the F1 category. Once I got my docs from UPenn I applied for my visa in HK and from starting the application to receiving my visa it took 2 weeks. It was not too challenging a process but it was a long winded application so it makes sense to get it out of the way quickly.

### **Orientation Events:**

The Spring exchange at UPenn is smaller than the Fall exchange class. Although Fall exchange students get to attend the full freshman orientation programme, Spring exchange students have a separate and slightly shorter event. Although the events are not compulsory there is a lot of food (you get to find out about all the cool restaurants), a lot of information on the city and you get to meet all the other exchange students.

### **International Services & Activities:**

The go to people at UPenn for any issues are ofcourse your peers, and more importantly the Penn Abroad advisors.

### **Accommodation:**

I lived in a double room at Sansom West, and although that residential college is now closed I had a very enjoyable experience. The rooms were big, and had kitchens. Moving ahead though I would suggest that it may be best to live in any one of the high rises in the quad (Harrison, Harnwell and Rodin) as they really are in the heart of the campus and close to classes, food and all the activities.

### **Course Registration:**

Course registration is straight forward and is in a way quite similar to HKUST. Courses are registered for a couple of months in advance and you are enrolled into them. Once at Penn though it is harder to change courses and instead of an automated waitlist system – professors have more discretion. As a result if you want to change from your original classes it is advisable to go to the professors directly for guidance.

### **Teaching & Assessment Methods:**

Teaching methods and assessments are largely similar to HKUST however at UPenn and especially at Wharton there is a greater emphasis on team/group projects with many courses building up



towards a big final project. There are also more regular quizzes and assessments which make it necessary to go to class regularly as some of these are conducted at random. Lastly, a lot of courses emphasize 'facetime' so attending all classes is advisable. I took four courses at Penn FNCE 250,219 and ECON 212, 050 and they were largely similar in terms of assessment methods. If anything I would say HKUST is more rigorous academically speaking.

### **Sports & Recreation Facilities:**

There are two massive facilities on campus – the more popular one is Pottruck gym as it is closer to the halls. Although we were told we may need to buy memberships to use these facilities we could enter and use the facilities just by showing our Penncard. The swimming pool and gym facilities are quite comprehensive although it is better to avoid the gym at peak times as it can get quite crowded.

### **Finance & Banking:**

I opened an account at PNC bank and the process was quite straightforward as there is a counter at the library itself – you are also issued with a Visa debit card which makes it quite easy to access funds/withdraw money. The only issue is that there can be limited withdrawals outside PNC ATMs. It is very easy to receive funds from HK/your home country and there is no need to carry large amounts of Cash. Venmo is also very popular and it is quite easy to share / split costs using the app. Facebook Messenger can also be used for that purpose. In terms of my total costs excluding non essential Travel/Shopping would have come up to \$9-10,000.

### **Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities:**

There are a lot of clubs in UPenn and you can get more information on them from the variety of FB pages / on Locust Walk where there are a wide variety of promotional events. There are also a lot of intra-exchange students networking opportunities which are arranged by Penn Abroad. There is also a big club fair a couple of weeks into the semester where all the clubs open up for registration and to share more information.

### **Health & Safety:**

Although Philadelphia is not the safest city in the US, the Penn Campus itself is quite safe. There are a lot of security services around campus and they ensure there are no untoward incidents. Furthermore, Penn also provides services across the city in case of any emergency. In terms of health insurance, the UPenn offered service is quite expensive

and it is better to take a comparable policy provided by ISO as it provides the necessary coverage and is substantially cheaper. UPenn also has slightly cumbersome immunization policies and whilst it is advisable to get them done from your home country – the majority of these immunizations are covered by insurance policies so they can be administered by the Penn Student Clinic at no cost to you.

### **Food:**

Despite being in a smaller city, there are a wide variety of food options in Philadelphia. The food trucks around campus offer a lot of options that are quite cheap – Yuu Kee and a Halal food truck being some of my favourites, there are a lot of restaurants around including things like Han Dynasty, Penne to name a few. It is also very easy to travel to Drexel where there are many dining options. It is compulsory to enrol in a dining programme and it makes sense to enrol in the cheapest plan as despite doing so I struggled to finish my dining dollars and swipes. Whilst the campus provided food is not the best Houston Hall is a good place for lunch. Gourmet Grocer is also a place to splurge your dining dollars as it is a supermarket. Fresh Grocer was also a big supermarket where everything is available, although there were rumours that it may be shutting down.

### **Transportation:**

Although Philadelphia does have public trains/buses provided by SEPTA it is much easier to use Uber, cost wise it does not make much of a difference if you share the cab with a couple of people. SEPTA also may not be the best to use at night / odd times. Whilst I did not face any issues when using SEPTA it is not the most comforting experience. For travel to NYC / around the east coast BoltBus/Megabus are quite good to use. Do not use greyhound as despite having the best name it is frequently late from PHL. Also, do use the Amtrak once as it is a great way to travel across the region despite being slightly more expensive. Flights can also be quite cheap provided they are booked well in advance – that said do keep an eye out for last minute deals.

### **Climate:**

The weather in Philadelphia has a mind of its own and whilst the first couple of months the winter was quite harsh once spring started coming in – it did get much better. A note of caution however – do not pack all your winter clothes on the first day it gets warm as they winter has a canny ability to make a comeback even if it has been sunny for a week.

**Communication:**

As there were quite a few people from HKUST – we all got together and got a TMobile unlimited plan, although not the cheapest (it is possible to get something for 5-10 USD cheaper per month from Verizon) it was a great data plan as we got unlimited data and that is something great to have when in a new country. The plan was a sharing plan so it is best to get the plan in a group of 4-5 to split costs and avoid overpaying.

**Cautionary Measures:** A quick note of caution, Philadelphia is not the safest city and it is best to use common sense when moving around at night. Do not get too open with strangers / avoid shady areas as there may always be danger around the corner. Whilst it is important to keep an open mind at Wharton it is more important to keep you eyes and ears wide open in the streets around Wharton at night. We were followed by someone late one night so it is best to be careful.

**Other Notes:**

There is no need to bring too much bedding material / utensils etc as they can easily be purchased on Amazon or at the local supermarket. Clothes are also super cheap in the US so keep some luggage space empty and do your shopping in the US itself.

***Note: I am not being sponsored by the US government in a bid to help them reduce their deficit figures***

### Part 3: Checklist

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Winter Clothing

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Power Adaptors

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Notebook

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Mobile

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Money

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Travel Documents

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Medicine

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