

CASS EXCHANGE



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Disclaimer/ Introduction

Firstly, thanks for clicking on my exchange report, I hope after reading this long-winded account (they make you write at least 4 pages) of my exchange experience, I could help you learn a little about Cass and the exchange experience as whole. If you are short on time, I highly recommend you reading this paragraph, why you should choose Cass and the conclusion, these are the most important sections. So why did I choose to go to Cass during the fall semester of 2018. I chose Cass because of one thing and one thing only, it was the only university offered at the time that is in London. During my application process I didn't even look at what transferable credits they had or any important information that one might want to look up before choosing an exchange partner because that's how badly I wanted to be in London, I didn't care about anywhere else, I only wanted to be in London. I didn't want to go to any other university, so I was very fortunate when I got in as my first choice. The reason why I chose the UK at first is because I once went on vacation there and I really wanted to see if I could work there one day. So, exchange for me was a test to see how much I would like it after spending a considerable time there. So why did I choose London, at first, I wanted to be in the UK, but my friends recommended me to go to London because the UK as a whole can be quite boring and after traveling to Exeter, I can totally agree with their analysis. Exeter is small little town in the middle of nowhere with the only thing to do there is to study, play sports and party because that's how small the place was. So, what did I go during the fall semester? I went during the fall semester because in spring I had to play for UST, and it would have conflicted with my sports schedule. But if it wasn't for sports I would have chosen to go during spring.

Here's a little about me and my mentality going into exchange. My motto, for exchange was "I am only here for 3 months". Essentially, I tried to do and try as many things as I could when I was there. So, I think my exchange experience is probably more extreme than most people. I studied abroad in the US for 4 years prior to going to UST so you should keep this bias in mind. For example, my willingness to venture out and be out of my comfort zone could be attributed to the many years I spent away from home.

Monthly Log

September

We started orientation on the 17th and had a week of orientation activities such as meeting our exchange advisor and most importantly learning about how the course registration process would work. This week was also known as fresher's week so there a lot of club fairs to entice students to join their club. Unlike many other UK universities there was no Hong Kong society. So, I joined the next best thing which was other south east Asian societies. In this case they were the Malaysian and Singaporean societies. I also wanted to join the netball club, but they only had a women's team, so I joined the field hockey team. During fresher's week a lot of sports teams run tryouts or taster sessions for people to join and see if they like the sport.

Fresher's week is also known as the party week. In fact, universities across the UK including my host university host and encourage people to party.

October

My exchange experience was compromised of three main themes: academics, hockey and traveling. During the first week of classes, I essentially was allowed to sit in any class and select classes at the end of add drop, which was at the end of the first week. So, I sat in ten classes and chose what I liked from those ten classes. I ended up choosing only 4 academic classes, which is the maximum number of academic classes. I chose classes based on how much they would expand my knowledge. With the lecture being two hours long and the tutorial being one hour long. My class schedule was somewhat compact as I had two-hour class and one tutorial on Wednesday. With the lecture being two hours long and the tutorial being one hour long. On Thursday I had three lectures, all two hours long. One of the major differences between the UK and UST is the amount of class time for each class. For the UK each class meets once a week and is one hour and fifty minutes long with a ten-minute break during each class so that students can get a coffee or go to the bathroom. Thus, making an effective class time of one hour and forty minutes. While in UST each class meets twice a week and for an hour and twenty minutes making an effective class time of two hours and forty minutes. This means that each class at UST meets on an average an hour more for each class. The point I am trying to get at is, in the UK there isn't a lot of class time. And this is also applicable to the homework as there wasn't much of it either. The main form of homework was readings, each class had about 30 pages of reading on average and at most over a hundred pages. Each would be about a case study of sorts from the Harvard Business School. For me, the readings were relatively simple as a native English speaker, in fact, I did most of my readings during commutes on the tube and busses. One thing I realized quite quickly was that in the UK nobody pushes you to study or work hard unlike UST or the US. In UST, you are frequently pressured and reminded to do well or to study by professors, your parents and other students. Studying is always a competition, and the curve is a hostile reminder that you need to stay above the mean and do better than the rest of your classmates.

For my extra circulars, I mostly played hockey. I played hockey three times with practice on Friday and matches on Wednesday and Sundays. So, I spent most of my time playing hockey when I was outside of classes. One quite unique thing about the UK is that they have an event at the university bar every Wednesday called sports night. Students mostly student athletes like to go to the university bar during sports night to celebrate their wins with other sports teams.

I had only two days of school a week and I used one of the weekdays to play hockey and the other to do my homework. Leaving me with only Monday to travel. So, every Monday I went around the UK for a day trip. In the month of October, I travelled to Seven Sister Cliffs in Brighton, Oxford, Reading and Bristol. My first adventure was the Seven Sister Cliffs and I instantly fell in love with the British cliffs and country side. In fact, the reason why I traveled all the way to Cornwall, which is the complete other side of the country was because I wanted to see the extraordinary cliffs of the most western coast of the UK.

November

November was highlighted by my solo trip to Cornwall. It took me 11 hours to travel there as I had to take multiple trains and busses. Though I have traveled many times before by myself this had to be one of the loneliest travel experiences I ever had. As I had decided to travel a summer vacation place during the middle of autumn. It was one of the most barren places I haven't been. Though it was serene it did allow me to take a lot of pictures of the beautiful landscapes of the UK, a strong passion of mine. I strongly advise people who want to go to such isolated places to be really careful cause you will start feeling lonely very quickly as there were not a lot of people. Furthermore, as an Asian college you will become an anomaly since most people there are either elderly or white or even both. During my trip, I had an accident while I was hiking. I fell when I was on the side of a hill and fell onto a rock. Though, I didn't feel much pain initially. My back was bruised so I went to visit the school nurse. She said it wasn't much and I should just get some rest. As the weeks went by, the pain was gone but I felt a shortness of breath and had difficulty breathing. So, I went to see a doctor at a clinic, and they referred me to go to a hospital. I essentially spent the entire day the hospital and they concluded that blood was built up in my lungs because of my fall. They initially drew out some blood from my lungs via a tube. But they couldn't draw all of it and I would need to come back the next week to get it all drawn. I came back a week later and got all my blood drew. Unfortunately, I had to stay overnight at the hospital. Something that I hadn't done before in a foreign country. Afterwards, I had checks a week later and I did so in Hong Kong. I am glad to say that I am alright and healthy again. But that process was a nightmare as I had to spend hours at hospitals.

December

Class ended in the first week of December and none of my classes had in person exams. December was a bittersweet period of time. Bitter because it was sad that I was leaving soon and sweet because of the all the Christmas parties and events going on at school and throughout the UK. Throughout December I went to numerous Christmas markets in London. In fact, I tried to go to all the Christmas markets in London, I ended up going to five different Christmas markets. My love for Christmas markets came from my passion of markets. Every Sunday, I would go to a new market in London and try different types of food. Christmas markets are amazing in London as the whole country is very festive. I attended the hockey Christmas dinner and after party. It was a great experience, we ate pudding, wore Christmas sweaters and partied for one last time. The most difficult thing about exchange is going back especially for a kid like me who has spent so many years studying abroad. At times I feel more at home when I am in the UK than in Hong Kong. As a person who grew up in international school and boarding school abroad, culturally I fit more with people from western hemisphere. We got along better, and they are more accepting of a quirky Chinese person who speaks poor Chinese. What people don't tell you is that the hardest thing about exchange isn't adapting to new environments but it's coming home. Because no one wants to be home, everyone who I spoke to on exchange loved their exchange experience and had no regrets about going to Cass. It is really hard to come back as exchange was almost like a utopia. Class time is limited, A's are easier to get as competition is less stiff, sports is more fun, partying is more fun. Coming back is

honestly very difficult especially for students who went to international schools as most of your high school classmates are abroad and some of your UST classmates are on exchange as well. So, when you return it feels like you are exchanging back at your home institution since you know so little people here.

Visa procedures

I am a UK passport holder, so I didn't need to apply for any Visa for studying or traveling in the UK.

Orientation Activities

At City University, there aren't many orientation activities. As mentioned earlier you are required to attend school a week prior and are forced to go to information section that teaches you about course registration, sports and other services that you may want to use during your time in City University. There are also two days dedicated to club fairs where students can go to check out different clubs.

International Services and Activities

City University offers ZERO international services and activities dedicated to exchange students or international students. So, you are essentially on your own. There is an exchange coordinator but she is in charge with informing you to sign up for classes and to fill out important forms.

Accommodation

Exchange students are entitled to live in on campus housing and I highly encourage you to live there as it's about a 5-minute walk to the main camp. It is about 31,000+ HKD for about 3 months. To put matters in perspective, my school fees are about 21,000 HKD as I pay local fees. You will have your own room and your own bathroom. You will also have access to a shared kitchen with other students. One thing I didn't enjoy about the living accommodation is how they put all the Hong Kong exchange students together i.e., CU, HKU and BU. Though this made me very comfortable, it limited my friend group to only HK students and other Asian students.

Course Registration

You have to fill in 3 different course registration forms 2 before you go to school and one at the end of add drop period. Add drop period lasts about 1 week from Monday to Friday and you can go to any of the classes to see what you like and submit your request at the end of the add drop period.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

The UK style of teaching is very liberal and loose as mentioned earlier. There is little class time and you are not graded on your participation. There isn't a lot of homework either outside of readings. So, you are really on your own. For the Autumn semester students are allowed to take an alternative assessment, which is in the form of a take home essay. Depending on the class

this can range from a 500 to 1000 words. I highly encourage students to take this because it is much easier than taking the normal assessment like other students in January.

Sports & Recreation Facilities

City University like other major universities in London don't have any outdoor sporting facility unless you go to Kings or Loughborough, which is a sports university. City university has a gym and indoor gymnasium, which is about a 5-minute walk from the university's main campus. At school gym is an opt in option i.e., you have to pay to play sports. It costs about 200 HKD a month for a school membership but if you play for a university sports team it will be only 100 HKD a month. The university gym is much nicer than the UST gym and has many classes that you can join each day like yoga, Zumba, etc. To play on a university sports team you must pay 500 HKD to join but once you pay you can play on as many sports teams as possible. City just like UST is very poor at sports and they tend to play on of the lowest divisions depending on the sport. I highly encourage people to join a sports team as most of them are quite inclusive and may not require tryouts especially if they aren't too popular or too good like hockey and rugby. Hockey was my home and source of social activities for my semester. We played hockey and partied together afterwards. Unlike sports teams at UST, the sports teams here organize social gatherings monthly such as parties like the annual Christmas party. Sports teams also sometimes organize events with other sports teams, giving you a chance to meet other people from other sports teams.

Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

Before heading over to the UK, I asked HSBC to allow me to withdrawal money from their atm. This service allowed me to withdraw money freely but at a unfavorable exchange rate. I carried about 3000 pounds to the UK and paid mostly in cash or credit card. Contactless is very common so it would be a good idea to bring a credit card that has this function. Also, credit card payments are quite common so remember to bring one cause some places don't allow cash payments. As a country UK is relatively cheap in terms of European standards but expensive in terms of Asian.

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

At the beginning of every semester there are clubs to join and you can join any club for a fee of 50 HKD. Unlike most UK universities there isn't a Hong Kong society. So I joined the Malaysian Society as that to me was the closest thing to a Hong Kong society.

Health & Safety

The UK has universal healthcare, which is a good thing because healthcare is free for the most part except certain medicine. But as a whole consultation are free. The university will tell you not to register for the NHS (government run healthcare system) but that should be the first thing you do when arrive because you don't know what might happen and may require their services. To access any of NHS's services you need to register with them, and the application take 2 weeks to process so you should really register ASAP. Medication as a whole in generally pretty cheap especially when you buy generic medication from the pharmacy. The pharmacy in

the UK covers more medication than in HK so they should honestly have you covered for the most part.

Food

Food in the UK is super expensive an average sit-down dinner runs around 200 HKD and that's a very average meal. On the other hand, it is very easy to make a meal by yourself for less than 20 dollars. Generally, I cooked at the dorms because it was cheaper. At school, there is a cafeteria, but it is only open in the morning and at lunch. The food there is pretty good and generally and decently priced, so I usually eat there when I have class in the afternoon.

Transportation

Transportation as a whole is generally pretty convenient. I recommended getting a student oyster and a rail card as you need both to get the discount. The discount is about 33% on all transportation except busses. So, it's well worth it to get one. Trains and buses are around 20 something HKD per train/ bus ride so as a whole it's pretty expensive.

Climate

UK has a reputation for being cold and raining. When I was there it was cold, but it wasn't that rainy, but a pair of rain boots is highly advised.

Is Cass right for you?

I am of the belief that Cass exchange is for everyone, as there is at least something that someone would like about it. Here are the following things you should ask yourself before applying to Cass:

1. Do you like having less class time?
 - a. Cass like a lot of UK schools have limited class times and lots of free time, that's just how their curriculum works
2. Do you like to travel?
 - a. Cass is great because it is in London and there are 3 major airports in the city of London all of which have cheap flights to places around Europe
3. Do you like the cold?
 - a. Depending on when you go, the UK can be quite cold but never below 0 degrees
4. Do you want to embrace other cultures?
 - a. The UK is probably the biggest melting pot for cultures. From the food that they eat to the students in class, there is always foreign influence. Contrary to popular belief, the most popular dish in the UK isn't fish and chips but is chicken tikka masala. Students are predominantly from outside of the UK. In fact, from my observation most students are of South East Asian or Middle Eastern heritage. Though racism will always exist, you won't feel too left out especially when compared to very homogenous countries like Norway where you would essentially be the only Chinese student in the entire school.
5. Do you think you will miss Chinese culture or people?

- a. London has a great Chinese community, as lots of Chinese people have immigrated there over the years. In fact, their Chinatown is one of the best I have seen. If you ever miss Chinese food, you can always pop down for some authentic Chinese food operated by Chinese immigrants.
6. Do you like to drink alcohol?
 - a. This probably is the least important question, but it is good to know what culture a country is known for. Just like the most of Europe, the UK has strong drinking culture. It is their way of getting to know people, like us going to get tea in the afternoon. People drink after classes, after sports or honestly, they will find any excuse to go to a pub. Though they won't force you drink alcohol the act of people drinking all the time maybe disturbing to you then you should probably consider going somewhere else.

Conclusion

As of the writing of this conclusion its early February and I had a good 2 months to reflect on what happened on exchange and started to come back to reality and embrace the good old academic life of UST. As clique as it sounds, I loved every bit of my exchange experience, the good, the bad, the stupid. C and City University is my family and the experiences gathered, and the knowledge gained is what makes exchange so memorable. But as the saying goes all good things come to an end and that is honestly the hardest part. Not adapting to foreign environments but coming back to somewhere not as good as the last place you were just at. For me, my objective of exchange was to see if the UK was a place, I wanted to immigrate to one day and I am glad to say UK is definitely a place I want to move to one day.

I would like to thank you for making it all the way to the bottom and at this point you after reading 5 pages of mumbo jumbo that you are probably wondering when I am ever going to make my point of do, I recommend you go to Cass or on exchange. The answer to that is a HELL YES, I highly recommend you to. Cass exchange was probably the most amazing thing that has happened to me for the last 22 years that I have been around. Cass can't be summed up in this 3000-word report or any report written by any student, Cass exchange needs to be experienced. If you are on the fence of if you should go on exchange or to Cass, I would say give it a shot cause at the end of the day its only 3 months, what is there to lose.

Checklist

Here is a list of things you may want to bring

1. Sweater
2. Thick Jacket (it's really cold there)
3. Waterproof boots or rain boots
4. Blankets
5. Bed Sheets
6. Pillows

7. Notebook
8. Stationary (it's pretty expensive over there)
9. Camera
10. Charger
11. Hand Cream
12. Passport size photo (you may need it for registration for certain things)