

**Exchange Program Semester 2, 2011**  
**Macquarie University (Sydney) Australia**



*“A once in a lifetime opportunity, full of fun and without any regrets”*

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## **Introduction**

The exchange program has provided me with a platform that is highly valuable in terms of academic achievement and personal accomplishment. To begin with, it enhanced my USP degree and provided me with an opportunity to study at Macquarie University in Australia. Macquarie University was established in 1964 and has a total of 37,000 students with a total of 110,000 Alumni in 120 countries. It is 126 hectares in size and located relatively close to the Sydney CBD. Macquarie University has a total of 1100 academic staff to cater for the needs of the students.

My exchange adventure began the very moment when the exchange scheme was advertised and a friend of mine had picked up an application form, encouraging me to put in an application. After I had submitted an application, I received an email stating that I had been shortlisted. It is at this time that I actually began to think about the significance and advantages of being an exchange student. This was followed by an interview and a week later I received an email stating that I had been selected to represent USP as an exchange student at Macquarie University; after which I began preparing paper work and other formalities in conjunction with the USP International Office.

To begin with, I searched for USP equivalent courses at the Host University which I would undertake during my exchange semester. Secondly, I sat for an IELTS test as per requirement of my Host University. In addition, I arranged for accommodation, applied for student visa and looked into my banking needs while USP International made arrangements for air tickets and bookings. The pre-departure briefing was very encouraging and it touched on what we were likely to experience abroad, both on campus and off campus. It emphasized that I will be representing USP at my Host University and it touched on how I was to conduct myself. This made me realise that being an exchange student was a privilege and a rare opportunity and that I had a responsibility of conducting myself as an ideal ambassador of USP, both academically and socially.

Hence, I had mentally prepared myself that I will do my best to portray myself as a good ambassador of USP and tackle any obstacles or challenges that come my way. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2011, I boarded the flight to Sydney with a positive mindset and a lot of excitement. Emotions were running high because family members and friends would be dearly missed. However, the thought of Sydney felt different this time round when compared to my previous visits due to the exchange scheme and I knew that this will be an overwhelming experience.

## **Exploring the Campus and Orientation**

On 26<sup>th</sup> July, I paid a visit to the Macquarie University campus located in North Ryde. It is at this time that a little bit of nervousness crept into me. I had delivered packages at the International Office, met my student advisor and took a tour of the campus. The self exploring tour of the campus was indeed beneficial as I had a look at where the library, lecture rooms, bookshop, Study Abroad Office and cafeteria were located. Unfortunately, I could not attend the pre-orientation trips organised by the Study Abroad Office as they were held prior to my arrival in Sydney.



**Macquarie University-Central Courtyard**



**Student Support Office and Campus Hub**



**Entrance of Macquarie University from Waterloo Road**

It is on this day that I also familiarised myself with the transport system since I did not live on campus but opted to stay with relatives. During the semester, I used to get dropped to campus everyday by a family member, however, after I finished class I used to travel home via train as Macquarie University was located just outside the campus gates and train services were regular.

Orientation for Study Abroad and Exchange Students was held on 27<sup>th</sup> July and this was a whole day affair. A total of 340 exchange students were present at the introduction and briefing where each of us received an orientation pack. There was an introductory briefing where we introduced to what Macquarie University was all about. This was followed by a lunch which was provided by the Study Abroad and Exchange Office. After lunch, there was a brief tour of the campus which was conducted by volunteering students. After the tour, all students were to gather with one of the three student advisors which were allocated to them and sort out their administrative formalities relating to our courses. Each of us received our copy of the registration and timetables for the courses we had registered for and after this we had our student ID cards done. In addition, all exchange students got their transport concessions endorsed at the Study Abroad Office after their student ID cards were done. This transport concession enabled students to travel on half fare either by taxi, train, bus or ferry.

The Orientation Day was very helpful for me as well as other exchange students as it gave us a sense of direction and a little boost just before commencing studies the following week. I met other exchange students from other countries and forged some strong friendships during the exchange orientation. Moreover, it was interesting to find out the emotions and feelings they were experiencing as exchange students as we were all on equal footing.



**Lisa Lederer (Exchange Student from Graz University, Austria)-met her during Orientation and she also undertook Criminal Law with me at Macquarie University**

As part of the Orientation, a three hour welcome Harbour Cruise was held for exchange students on 29<sup>th</sup> July. However, I did not attend this function as I had caught a cold due to the cold winter chills and I had become relatively unwell.

## What I experienced at Macquarie University

### The Campus Itself

To begin with, the Macquarie University Campus was beautiful. It had a very serene, natural and soothing setting which I believe had a positive impact on me as a student. The campus lake was my favourite spot where I had lunch and relaxed in between classes with friends.



**Campus Lake-popular relaxation spot for students**

**The “Smiling Dragon” Panorama**

### A Transition: from anxiety to a well settled student

Classes for Semester 2 began proper on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2011, exactly a week after had arrived in Sydney. I looked forward to my classes and assessments. Nevertheless, I was slightly nervous and doubtful about my capability as a student for a split second on my first day of classes. This is because the campus was new and I was outside my comfort zone when compared to my previous semesters at USP. However, towards the end of the day I was satisfied that I would enjoy my classes as the content seemed very interesting and quite challenging. I felt as if this was my best way to put myself to a true capability test in order to prove that I am a good student who can perform equally well at a foreign university.

During my exchange semester I had undertaken four courses. I had enrolled in three politics courses which were examinable and a criminal law course which was 100% course based and non-examinable. The politics courses were challenging as the content was relatively different from what we learn at USP. In addition, the course assessments were enjoyable as it did not just focus on plain academic essays but required creativity, imagination and innovation. Moreover, the content was vast as opposed to USP where most politics courses are focused on the Pacific region itself. Likewise, the criminal law course proved to be very challenging as I was studying the New South Wales jurisdiction. The most important skill I picked up in my law class was that I was taught how to interpret legislations, pinpoint its advantages and disadvantages and conduct a reform to cover the loopholes of that specific legislation. This task was a challenge but group work had proved to be very helpful and I now utilise this skill in the current law courses I am undertaking.

Overall, the courses at Macquarie University are quite challenging but one can achieve really good grades if one puts in enough effort and completes all assessments well. The courses which I opted to study during my exchange semester had new aspects to it and this proved to be a challenge, which required me to do extra research and readings outside what was prescribed in class. Hence, I learnt how to look at certain issues from a wider scope and different perspectives. I feel that I had settled into the semester by the end of the second week of classes. This is mainly because I got busy with classes and assessments. In addition, I had made quite a number of friends who were locals and international students and I had adjusted well in relation to campus life at Macquarie University.



**Western Wing Lecture Theatres**



**Interaction between Students**

### **Events and Functions**

There are numerous events and functions held throughout the semester for students, organised by the different social clubs on campus. There are a total of 120 social clubs on campus out of which I had joined the Law Student Association, The Macquarie International Social Club, the History Club and Club Exchange. The Law Student Association organises a Macquarie University Law School Ball each semester for its students. Likewise, the History Club organises sightseeing trips and visits to popular historical sites around Sydney. The Macquarie International Social Club organises several interesting events and provides free breakfast fiestas every Thursday for International Students. Club Exchange organises several parties throughout the semester as well as sightseeing trips during the Spring Break for exchange students. Likewise, there are religious social clubs such as the Malaysian Students Association who organised a Diwali function for Hindu students. Similarly, a Multicultural Moon Festival was organised to mark the end of the semester on the last day of classes just before exams. A number of social clubs annually organise Conception Day marking the establishment of the University. In addition, there are a number of displays and exhibitions

throughout the semester by different faculties; such as the astronomy night event held on 5<sup>th</sup> October where a gadget constructed physics and engineering students was put on display and was used to take a glance at the stars that night. As part of campus events, Thursday night witnesses theme parties for students at the Unibar, which is located at the Campus Hub building on Campus.



**Halloween Harbour Cruise organised by the Macquarie International Social Club**



**Chocolate Fountain Party during the Melbourne Cup 2011**

## **Recreational and Amusement Facilities on Campus**

Macquarie University has a number of recreational facilities for students to use such as the sport and aquatic centre which consists of two heated pools and a gym and several sports options. Similarly, the Unibar is a popular hangout for students due to amusement facilities such as poker machines, relaxation lounges, a bar and the availability of games and pool tables. In addition, there are more than 35 sports clubs on campus. The Atrium which is located on the ground floor of the Campus Hub building is used for dance lessons and aerobics. The campus also has dentists, doctors, chiropractic, physiotherapy, pharmacy, a hospital and a free counselling service. It also has a separate research park and a research hub.

From a more academic aspect, the new library accommodates more students and has more resources available to students. Likewise, the campus features an Australian History Museum and seven galleries. There are a total of 5000 car parking spaces on campus. Since the student population of Macquarie University is religiously diverse, the university has multi-faith prayer rooms with facilities for both men and women. It has more than 20 bus routes and a train station on the campus itself with direct routes to the city. The location of the campus is favourable as it has 230 shops within walking distance, out of which 220 are located in the Macquarie Centre complex which is situated just opposite the University. The University also provides Internships for Exchange Students who have a GPA of 3.0 or above. They also offer a Global Leadership Program to exchange students where students attend several workshops throughout the semester.



**The New Macquarie University Library**



### **The Benefits of the Exchange Program**

Undertaking an exchange program has many benefits for the lucky participant. It is truly a magnificent and a life-changing experience. It enables the student to develop a broad mindset whereby he or she becomes more tolerant and respectful of other peoples' cultures and religion. I feel that Macquarie University boosted my intellectual capacity as the exchange experience helped me develop a global perspective and enabled me to look at a situation from different angles rather than being confined to a narrow opinion and being prejudicial. Moreover, the exchange experience has made me more independent and fearless and enhanced my capabilities of looking after myself as a whole. It has made me street-wise, cautious and more aware of the dangers in a metropolitan city like Sydney.

During my exchange semester, I got to experience culturally diverse campus which accommodated exchange students and international students from all around the world. In addition, I learnt a lot about their cultures and way of life and I believe they also learnt something about Fiji, my home University and the Pacific as a whole. Macquarie University is the epitome of cultural diversity at its best and experiencing this in itself is priceless. The exchange experience has given me a great degree of exposure and makes me feel competent about my capabilities as a student as I feel I have done relatively well at a very prestigious foreign tertiary institution.

The exchange scheme was advantageous for me because it provided me with the opportunity to promote USP and project myself as an ambassador of USP. The Macquarie University Open Day which was held on September 10<sup>th</sup> provided me with the chance to propagate the positive features of my Home University. I had displayed posters and pamphlets at the Macquarie International booth where exchange programs were advertised for students. In addition, I had been asked to give a brief 2 minute talk about my Home University in my first POL 258 tutorial session where I had very given a simple overview of what USP is like.

### **Some obstacles/challenges and how I overcame them**

During my exchange scheme I discovered that it is normal for any exchange student to be nervous, homesick and anxious. Likewise, I had slightly for a very short period of time experienced anxiety and doubt regarding my capabilities, before the start of the semester. I overcame this anxiety by reminding myself that my I had been selected to represent USP at Macquarie University due to merit and my abilities. I did not feel homesick at all because I had travelled previously and on many occasions I have lived apart from my family. In addition, I was living with my relatives, who were very supportive during my exchange semester and I did not for once feel as if I was away from home. Nevertheless, I did miss my family and friends dearly. This feeling had soon disappeared when I got busy in the semester and I constantly spoke to family and friends over the phone and online so being homesick

was never an issue. In addition, my family had visited me during my 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday and this made the occasion very special. Later in September, my dad paid me a visit and this made my Spring Break very enjoyable.

During my exchange semester I found out that I was under a lot of pressure academically as the courses I had undertaken were pretty intensive and demanding. This is mainly because deadlines for due dates were not flexible and I had effectively derived methods to manage my time wisely. I was not used to the cold and there were a number of times when I had become ill and it was at the same time when I had assessment deadlines. This had caused me to become quite frustrated.

I had also come across various instances of danger where I had been stalked and followed at train stations and even along the road as I was walking home. As a result, I became very cautious and always carried a fully charged phone with sufficient credit to make calls. I also carried a reasonable amount of coins and kept in mind emergency numbers. I had somewhat experienced racism and prejudicial comments due to having an ethnic Indian ancestry. However, this was not an issue for me on campus.

### **Recommendations**

After my exchange experience, I believe that:

- more USP students should be encouraged to apply and study as an exchange student for at least a semester.
- USP International had effectively marketed and promoted the exchange scheme during Orientation Week before the start of this semester.
- USP should allocate funds in order to enhance the student exchange scheme so that more students can enjoy this opportunity. Having spoken to a few students at USP, I realised that most of them are reluctant to apply for exchange due to financial constraints.
- Students who undertake student exchange must prioritise and be motivated to make their exchange semester a fun-filled experience and achieve the best possible academic success at the same time
- Students who undertake student exchange must portray themselves as good ambassadors of their Home University
- Students who undertake student exchange must always behave ethically and conduct themselves in a manner which is acceptable at their Host University, avoiding instances of plagiarism, dishonest practices and getting involved in brawls or illegal activities.

## **Conclusion**

Undertaking an exchange scheme at any University is a once in a lifetime opportunity and this experience is priceless. I feel that representing USP at Macquarie University as an exchange student is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. I believe that the exchange scheme is a boost for my academic career and it has made me a more stronger, confident and independent person.



**Student Exchange-A totally different experience**