

# USP EXCHANGE REPORT

---

**NAME: MALUSEU TAPAEKO**

**STUDENT ID: S00004963**

**PROGRAMME: BAGCED**

**HOST UNIVERSITY: VICTORIA UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

**SEMESTER: 2, 2011**

# Acknowledgement:

---

I would like to extend my heart felt appreciation and gratitude to the following institutions and people for making my exchange experience possible, awesome and unforgettable as well as their unfailing support:

USP for continuously offering the student exchange programme,

International Students office (USP) for selecting me and having faith in me that I represent USP abroad,

USPSA for financial support,

Multi-Ethnic Affairs,

Victoria University for accepting me,

VU International,

Victoria University Oceania students Association,

Ella Bennion, mobility officer at the USP Student International Office, for the hard work she did from the moment I was selected until my return and her unfailing support and continuous advice throughout the exchange period,

Larrissa Salinas and Anna Munro of Victoria Student International for their friendliness and support,

Dwain Tomavoko, Student Welfare Officer, VU and is also one of my flat mates for his guidance, kindness, advice, friendliness and support,

My cousin Josefa Vakadrano and his family in Mandura, WA, for their support,

My uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Vakadrano in Sydney for their unfailing support, will be forever indebted to you two,

Barbara Temo, Seteuati Nofo'aininga and Simione Tuni, also of Victoria University,

Misi, Joy Toloa, Sera, Sarah, James Bradner, David Bird, Brock, Tania, Selepa, Hubert and Mark for being great friends,

My exchange colleague, Clayton Simamao,

My flatmates, Nikhil, Sam, Louie, Dwain, Rocky, Madiah and Steve for the friendliness, kindness that we shared during my stay in Melbourne,

Emrretta Cross, Danny and Ethan for everything. It has been a blessing to have met and known you all. Enjoyed every moment we spent together. Stay blessed,

All my families here in Fiji especially in Labasa for their support. Also the Tuvalu Christian Congregation Labasa branch for their prayers,

There are also others that I may have overlooked to mention, please know that I am forever grateful for everything, big and small that you have contributed or done to make my exchange experience an unforgettable one. May the good Lord bless you all.

## **Introduction:**

I was so excited when I was informed that I made it through and would be one of USP's exchange students abroad for the second semester, 2011. There were a lot of preparations to be done while at the same time concentrate on studies, that time management was crucial. There were little obstacles during this preparation period, mostly being financial. However, I managed my finances carefully and wisely so that I would be able to cater for everything. With the unfailing support and assistance of the Mobility Officer at the USP Student International office, families and friends, my trip was well prepared and ready.

Almost every moment till my departure I would think with excitement of what to expect on this exchange period. I expected to meet a lot of other students and get involved in all the available activities offered. I even toyed with thoughts of getting adventurous, going camping, sightseeing and learning all I could about Australia and its people, even to live with Aboriginals, if a chance presented itself. All in all, I wanted to do as much as I could during this exchange period.

## **Academic**

At Victoria University, a student is allowed to take up to a maximum of 5 units. I, however, took 3 units, 2 education and 1 literature. These were very challenging. The only lectures I had were in my literature class which is once a week. Then also in a week I have a tutorial in the same unit and workshops in the 2 education units. Times was everything since all these 3 units, were assignment based or were all 100% course work as we understand here in USP. Assignments and presentations were due at their rightful due date without extensions except if one was sick, where a prescription accompanied a letter of request for extension. Participation in tutorial and

workshops was encouraged, compulsory and crucial in order to get a pass grade. Personal opinions on the subject of discussion are being highly regarded and one is always expected to know and understand what is being discussed.

To be honest, I found the studying system at Victoria University more convenient and easy. This is because I saw that the teacher student relationship was based on trust and understanding. Trust in the way that the teacher/lecturer trusted the students that they would not plagiarize and students never did, this is speaking only for my class mates. The lecturers were approachable and whenever I found myself in any difficulty, I would approach my lecturers and they were always to help. I really enjoyed studying at VU though it was only for one semester.

### **Social/Cultural**

Through social and cultural gatherings, I got to meet a lot of other exchange students, VU staffs and VU students who have returned from exchange. These gatherings was a great opportunity to share experiences, meet people and for me, it was also a time where I mostly asked the Australian students about any information that I needed to know, like the hows and whats. During these gatherings, I also tried to learn about Australian lingo from other students, and all these things kept me busy and more interested in Australian culture and art.

These gatherings included a welcome function for international and exchange students at the beginning of the semester, trips to various places that are significant to Victoria like the Great Ocean road. There was also a catch up gathering which was held at on the week before mid-semester break. In the end of the semester, there was also a farewell party for all international and exchange students.

My flat mates were awesome people. Though we were of different nationalities, we managed to live together as a family. They got me involved in events and even showed me places. During Diwali, three of my flat mates who are Hindus invited me to dinner, which I extremely enjoyed.



Dinner with flat mates during Diwali and then drive around the city.



Mark, James, Maluseu at mid-semester catch-up



At the welcome function with Oceania friends

Between and all throughout the semester, there were functions and gatherings that we were invited to at our own expense, though some were being paid for by the VU international office. These ranged from watching footy (Australian football), camping, focus group discussions, visits to the zoo and aquarium, tour of Melbourne city and many other activities. The university also had volunteering work where we did volunteer work at selected organizations within the community. I did volunteer work at Maidstone Community Center, where we cleaned their backyard. Breakfast and lunch was provided by the university and I really enjoyed doing the work that day.



Doing volunteer work at Footscray

Victoria University had a lot of social, cultural and recreational activities for international and exchange students which unfortunately I was not able to attend all, but never missed any when I am free to attend. Through these gatherings I was able to meet and make a lot of friends from around the globe where we shared about our country and most specifically our universities. It was always a time for us to relax from studying, get to know each other and be socially involved.

### **Challenges and solutions:**

I arrived in Melbourne in the middle of winter and getting used to the cold climate was a real challenge. Since there was nothing much I could do about it, I tried to stay as warm as I could.

The first week I spent shopping for woolies and trying to know my way around. Fortunately, one of my flat mates, Dwain, is a student welfare officer at VU and he took me for a tour around VU Footscray campus and also helped me to shop for warm clothes.

Trying to get my subjects enrolled was not a problem, for during orientation week, we were introduced to Ms. Farrah, who, on appointment, dealt with our enrolment. This made our enrolment fast and easy. During the semester, I seldom approached my coordinators' if I did not understand anything. The coordinators were kind, approachable and were always willing to help. I never hesitated to ask anyone anything if I needed to know, even for directions. People are always willing to help, all I had to do was ask.

At the first week of classes, I had difficulties trying to participate in discussions. Students voiced their opinions out loud and sometimes even debated with other class mates. I was silent most or all the time during the early weeks of the semester. I guess I was trying to fit in and also trying to understand the Australian accent. Then as the weeks passed, I got used to the accent and also participated in the discussion openly as my Australian colleagues and enjoyed all of my classes until the end of the semester, and all became normal to me just as I was back here at USP. I always looked forward to attend classes especially workshops and tutorials to be able to voice my opinions on subjects being discussed, even sometimes debated with my colleagues which were always productive for us all in the end.



Once I forgot my way around Melbourne city. Fortunately I had one of the Fijian students number so I called her and after having a good laugh at me, she directed me to the nearest train station. I quickly adapted to life in Melbourne and settled in really fast that I found myself facing less or nil challenges except for the normal – assignments due date

**Conclusion:**

Going on exchange is a priceless life time experience that I would never forget. Not only that but I was also able to make friends that I believe would last for a long time. Beside the academic benefits, these are extra benefits I got from going on exchange.

Any USP student who read this report and who is also up to go beyond their comfort zone, enjoy life, study in a new academic environment and meet students from around the globe, I do encourage you to take that single step. There would not be any regrets but quite a lot of ‘if only’, the first being, ‘if only I could extend my stay’. Again I close this report with thanks and gratitude to all who made my exchange experience a memorable and unforgettable one. God bless.