The Exchange Student Experience: Why Choose to Go Abroad?

“Exchange lived up to everything I thought it was going to be.” For Jacqueline Rutherford, exchange was something that was always part of her university plan. Growing up in a family that prioritized travel and loved learning about new cultures, Jacqueline started planning her exchange when she was still in high school. “The Exchange Program at UVic is one of the reasons I decided to study here,” she explained. Because she is studying French, Jacqueline chose to go spend a semester at Université Paul-Valéry in Montpellier, France during her second year. She felt that the only way to overcome any barriers in mastering the French language would be to immerse herself in French culture. Now in her third year and back at UVic, she can see just how much of an impact exchange has had for her. Not only did her French language skills drastically improve while living in France, but also she had the chance to travel, learn about new cultures, and meet new friends from all over the world.

Of course, not all students have the lifelong dream of going on exchange. For some, the idea of education abroad is something that never crosses their mind. This was the case for Howard Huang, who grew up in Taiwan and never thought he would live anywhere other than his home country. After high school, Howard completed his Bachelors in Taiwan and then decided to embark on a Master’s degree studying Marine Environment and Engineering, with a focus on renewable energy, at National Sun Yat-sen University. However, during the first year of his Master’s degree, Howard had a change of heart. “One day I was looking at a map and realized just how small my country is and how much of the world I was missing out on,” Howard explained. After that realization, he decided he did not want to stay in one place forever and chose to spend a year on exchange here at UVic.

As Jacqueline and Howard both experienced, being in a new country, surrounded by people who don’t speak your language, can be quite intimidating at first and there were obstacles they both needed to overcome as they adjusted to life in a new culture. For both students, although the decision to go on exchange presented challenges, it was absolutely worth it in the end. “There were times when things were hard and I felt discouraged, but in the end, I learned I can take on a lot more than I thought I could,” Jacqueline described, “I now feel like a new sense of adventure has been established in me.” For Howard, he is still in the middle of his exchange, but he can already see the benefits this will have on his career. Most of the companies that focus on renewable energy in Taiwan are foreign companies. Howard is certain that his international experience and improved English skills will make him a desirable candidate for companies in Taiwan once he completes his Master’s degree.

When asked if they would recommend exchange to other students, the answer was a resounding “yes!” from both Jacqueline and Howard. The impact on their education, future careers, and personal lives made this experience something that will stay with them forever.

As a UVic student, there are so many ways to embark on an international experience. If you’ve ever considered studying in a new country or want to experience life in a new culture, click here to learn more about the International Student Services Exchange Program.