



# Exchange Report

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## THE BASICS

Your name: Justin Laflamme

Your email address: [laflamme@uvic.ca](mailto:laflamme@uvic.ca)

Your partner university: [University of Southern Mississippi](#)

Your UVic major during the exchange: [History](#)

UVic session(s) during which you did your exchange: [Fall/Winter 2005/2006](#)

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## GENERAL EVALUATION

Please rate your overall exchange experience on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: [4](#)

Comments:

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## ARRIVAL

How satisfied were you with your experience of arriving in your host country or city? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: [5](#)

Comments: [A van was sent to pick up all exchange students arriving at the airport in New Orleans, and a very good homestay program was in place to make sure our adjustment to living in Hattiesburg was comfortable.](#)

What assistance, if any, did you receive when you arrived at your exchange destination?

[Homestay program and international student orientation.](#)

How difficult was it for you to obtain your travel documents (visa, etc.)?

[Not difficult at all.](#)

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## ORIENTATION AND ASSISTANCE

How satisfied were you with the orientation and assistance available to students at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: [3](#)

Comments: [Assistance was very good. Alex Kenner, the international coordinator at Southern Miss, made sure all concerns were addressed. However, much of the orientation was unnecessary for most of the students who were in the same international program as I was. There were quite a few students in the English Language Institute program at USM who likely needed most or all of the information included in the orientation, but for those of us already familiar with America in any way, shape or form \(even if your experience is limited to watching the occasional episode of Friends\), it was a long, tedious process. In addition, I wasn't impressed by the fact that, as the orientation was held in the Baptist Student Union, members of that group were circulating the hall recruiting us for their "Survival Weekend," without making it clear to us that this was a faith-based event. As a result, when I and several other of my non-religious fellow exchange students attended this Survival Weekend, we ended up feeling quite uncomfortable, especially when the hour-and-a-half Praise and Worship session started. In short, assistance was good, but](#)

the orientation needs some work.

How easy was it to find information you needed to know right away?

Fairly easy.

What help did you receive from the international staff or office?

Already answered.

What was your impression of the international staff or office?

Very helpful and friendly.

What was the orientation like at your partner university, if there was one, and how well did it suit your needs?

Already answered.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site and were there people you could talk to about what you were experiencing?

The culture wasn't all that different, except for the food. Nearly everything down there is drowned in grease. That was the only real adjustment I had to make, but it wasn't major enough that I had to talk to anybody about it, but I'm pretty sure that there were counsellors available.

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**HOUSING**

How satisfied were you with the housing available to students? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 4

Comments

How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term?

About four days before the start of term.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities?

Every on-campus student is required to buy a meal plan. There are three options, depending on how much you plan to eat on campus. As for cooking facilities, there was one kitchen for the entire dorm, but it was relatively unused. Each room also has a microwave and minifridge/freezer.

How satisfied were you with the food?

It was hit-and-miss. There were a number of different options in the cafeteria during the week, but during the weekends, there were only one or two options, frequently fried. There was a salad bar, however, quite often it was understocked. Basically, there were good days and bad, like any other cafeteria. You get to eat all that you want, though, so when the food is good, you can really go to town.

How close are the residences to the university?

All residences are on campus, except for Elam Arms, which is just across the road.

Could students stay in the residences during major holidays?

No (and this was a major source of frustration for many people)

Which residence would you recommend to UVic students?

McCarty Hall

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find?

Relatively easy. Several exchange students chose this option.

What should future UVic exchange students know about living off-campus?

There are a lot of rental units surrounding the university, so it's easy to find, and a lot cheaper.

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## COURSE REGISTRATION

How satisfied were you with the registration process at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 4

Comments:

Please describe the registration process at your partner university.

Registration is done online.

What kind of help was available?

We were required to meet with an academic advisor before registering.

How successful were you in registering for classes you wanted?

Very successful.

What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your partner university?

None. It's not difficult.

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## ACADEMICS

How satisfied were you with the academic program at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 3

Comments:

How did the style of teaching at your partner university compare with that at UVic?

There were very, very few discussion groups.

How did the workload compare to what you would expect at UVic?

In some cases it was much less, in others it was greater.

How many courses did you take in your first term abroad?

4

Your second term?

5

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other UVic students visiting your partner university?

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What specific courses would you recommend to visiting UVic students?

Military History (HIS 340, Nieburg) , American Foreign Policy (POL 330, Wolfe), any course with Drs. Drummond or Sarantakes.

Why?

Both of these courses were very interesting, and had very good instructors, and Sarantakes and Drummond are very engaging.

What advice would you give UVic students about succeeding academically at your partner university?

Make sure you go to all your classes. Some profs take attendance, and some will fail you if you have three unexcused absences.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your partner university?

Mediocre. There were few public access computer labs, and the wireless internet provided through the university (which was our only option in residence) was constantly experiencing service interruptions.

What electronic devices would you recommend a UVic student bring (laptop, PDA, etc.)?

A laptop is a good idea.

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**COSTS**

Books - per term: 400

Accommodation - per month: 400

Meals - per month: 300

Local transportation - per month: 0 (there is no taxi service or public transit to speak of)

Health insurance - per term: 425

Personal spending - per term: \$2000

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: \$300

Other university related fees - per term: 0

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**EXTRA-CURRICULAR/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

How satisfied were you with the out-of-class opportunities at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 4

Comments:

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students?

Intramural sports, sports teams, a variety of clubs

What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There are many interesting extracurricular lectures, and the athletic facilities are very good.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Go to New Orleans. There isn't much to do in Hattiesburg itself.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus?

Very limited. Most positions are work-study, and so international students aren't eligible.

Off-campus?

None. According to our visa, we have to work on-campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I have no idea.

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**SAFETY AND HEALTH**

How safe did you feel at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments

What are the biggest safety concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

Hurricanes/tornadoes

What are the biggest health concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

Sexually transmitted diseases. Mississippi has one of the highest rates in the US. Not that I had any personal experience with that. I'm just saying...

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**PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS**

**What was it like making friends?**

**It's very easy to make friends with the locals. Everyone's very friendly.**

**How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?**

**Very successful.**

**What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site?**

**Not difficult... it's like Canada, but a bit more high-strung.**

**What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?**

**The food.**

**What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?**

**The friendliness of the people.**

**How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?**

**Well.**

**As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?**

**Very easy. Everything is accessible.**

**For students who are visible minorities in your host country?**

**It would be fine, there were many visible minority students.**

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#### **TAKING STOCK**

**What are the three most important things for students to take with them when they go to your host country or region?**

**Shorts, t-shirts and flip-flops**

**What are the three most important things you would tell a UVic student who is going to your partner university on exchange?**

**Look both ways when you cross the street, because they drive like crazy people down in Mississippi. Go to a football game. They're as crazy as a Mississippi driver, and you get in free.**

**Don't use up your Bonus Bucks (meal points) right away. You get to use these points at non-cafeteria restaurants on campus, like Quizno's, Starbucks and Chick-Fil-A. A lot of people use up their bonus bucks quickly, but it pays to keep them for the weekends late in the term when the cafeteria workers have given up on us and it's "Barbecue Chicken Wings and Baked Beans" night yet again.**

**Is there any other information that you think might prove useful to UVic exchange students attending your host university?**

**St. Elmo's isn't a bad bar.**

**Checker's is one of the best fast food restaurants in town, and it's right across from campus.**

**IHOP gives you free refills of coffee, and it's also right across from campus.**

**What was the most rewarding part of your exchange experience?**

**Discovering that many of my preconceptions about Americans were wrong.**

**What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?**

**Getting used to the way they eat in Mississippi. A lot of fried food, bacon in the vegetables, pork three nights a week, etc.**

**How has your perspective changed as a result of the exchange?**

**I used to think that the South was this backwards, backwater place, and Mississippi even more so than the other states. Now I know that it's just like anywhere else in North American, albeit with more religious**

**fundamentalists.**

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