

## **Introduction:**

I first heard about exchange in my first year. I happened upon a poster announcing a presentation about the Waterloo exchange program. I decided to go to the presentation to see what it was all about. At that point, I was somewhat intrigued, but due to the rigors of school, completely forgot about going on exchange until the second semester of second year. I was at home during a two week break between school and work and met up with one of my brother's friends who had just completed an exchange to the University of Leeds. After a brief conversation about his time abroad, my desire to go on exchange was again sparked. This time however, I made sure to follow up on this initial interest, so as to ensure that I made it happen. My first step towards going on exchange was to go online to the Waterloo exchange website to figure out exactly what the exchange was all about and to see where I could go. I was amazed at all the different schools that I could choose from and soon I was completely at a loss for which school to choose.

To solve this problem, I set up a series of criteria to try to help me limit the schools I was interested in. I started by doing a quick search through the schools in the countries that interested me most (England, France, Sweden, Netherlands and Germany) to determine which schools had hosted Waterloo Electrical engineering students before. I needed to make sure that the school I was to choose would offer the types of courses that I would need. I then decided to eliminate any countries where I had no knowledge of the language. This left me with the UK, France and Germany. At this point, I was pretty well stuck. My initial desire was to go to Germany to a completely different culture; however my mastery of the German language was basic at best. After a brief conversation with my sister, who had been on a one year exchange to France as part of her education at another University, I decided to choose a school in the UK. Basically, she explained that even though she was fluent in French, she had still had a hard time trying to learn Aerospace engineering in another language. Because of this difficulty, she spent much of her time in the library trying to catch up to her classmates and therefore did not have as much of a chance to really experience the culture. Based on this I decided that it would be best to go to a school in England, that way I would get both the most out of my education and my experience in a new culture. Since I had decide to go to an English school, I decided to go to Leeds, as that is where my brother's friend had gone and he went on and on about how wonderful a time he had had there.

## **Pre-Departure:**

Now that I had finally decided where I wanted to go, I had to start the application process and actually arrange the exchange. In the end, it took me five months from the time I started the application procedure to the time that I was finally accepted at Leeds. My first step was to visit the engineering undergraduate office to speak with Cindy Howe. She showed me the shelf in the undergrad office with information and reports about each of the schools abroad. She also gave me an overview of the application process and the steps to follow. Finally she showed me where I could print out a copy of the application.

Now that I knew what had to be done, I started on what I felt was the most critical part of the application: finding equivalent courses. This step ended up being quite a challenge. The University policy is to accept any courses that students have had approved in the past. However, in my case, the University of Leeds had audited its engineering program and changed all the course numbers. So I had to almost completely re-establish the course equivalents. Most of my time was spent cross-referencing the yellow-book site (<http://webprod1.leeds.ac.uk/banner/modulesearch.asp?Y=200405&T=S&L=UG&Z=/>) and the university of Leeds modules site (<http://www.ece.uWaterloo.ca/main/undergrad/yellowbook.html>). Once I felt that I had established equivalent courses for all the 3B ECE courses that I needed to take, I decided to speak with Paul Hayes, a Lab Instructor for a course I was taking at the time. He was very knowledgeable and was able to pre-screen the courses before I spoke to professor Sivoththamann for official approval. I spoke to Paul Hayes first, because he was far more accessible than Professor Sivoththamann. I also worked with two other ECE students applying to Leeds so that we could all find the same equivalent courses. My next step was to meet with Professor Sivoththamann and have the courses approved officially. To this meeting I brought my application form and a copy of the Waterloo and Leeds syllabus for each of the courses I was interested in taking. This made it quick and easy for him to approve them all.

Due to the fact that the exchange would require me to swap a work and school term, the next approval I needed was from the co-op department. Due to the English schooling calendar, the semesters are offset such that they start at the end of September and end in June. However, this would have been a problem because Electrical engineering students complete 3B and 4A back-to-back. I had to swap my 3B term to the fall and was then left with a shortened work term. Because of the partial stream change, I needed co-op approval. For this I needed to see John Westlake. I explained to him that I wished to go abroad and assured him that I would be responsible for finding my co-op position upon my return from exchange, as the co-op department won't help students who are out of the country. Once he was satisfied that I would be able to find and pass a work term upon my return, he produced a form explaining as much and I attached it to my application.

The final person to see with regards to arranging the exchange was the University of Waterloo coordinator for Leeds. At the time when I was applying this was Professor John Medley. Once all of my application was complete, I needed to have an interview with professor Medley. Firstly, he looked over the application to ensure that everything was correct, then he conducted a brief interview asking why I wanted to go on exchange and explaining what was expected of a student who was on exchange. Finally, he gave me more documentation to fill out. Once the Waterloo application was complete, a University of Leeds application had to be filled out, along with a housing document to arrange housing while abroad. However, at this point I was not guaranteed a spot at Leeds. Professor Medley explained that Waterloo could only send 12 students to Leeds. Seeing as many more than twelve had applied, he would perform some kind of lottery to select which students would go. Luckily, I was eventually selected.

Most of the work for the Leeds forms had already been done to complete the Waterloo form, so it was merely a matter of copying it over to the new form. However, there were certain things to consider, primarily, where to live. I had decided to live in a University residence, off-campus. I was told that exchange students almost never receive housing on campus, as this is reserved for first year students. Therefore, I took the list of off campus housing provided by Leeds and went about examining my options. I decided to again create a list of criteria in order of importance to help me screen the different residences. The things that were important to me were: proximity to school, proximity to center of town, internet access in room, cost, catered/non-catered, and number in room (single, double). Based on these criteria, Montague Burton halls, was the best choice for me. It was about 10 minutes off campus, and about 20 minutes to the center of town. It had internet in room and I had a single room with common shower, toilet and kitchen that I shared with four other people. It was slightly more expensive, but I felt that it was worth the extra cost to get all of the other things I had wanted. In the end, I was very happy with my choice.

The next consideration was when to arrive in Leeds. The week before school started was considered orientation week for new students and the week before that was orientation week for international students. My initial reaction was to go two weeks early and go to all of the orientation and frosh events that I could, to really start my semester well and get adjusted. However, housing was not covered for the week of international orientation and the housing expense was estimated to be an extra 200 CAD. After some deliberation, I decided that it was worth going early, seeing as this was a once in a life time chance, I decided to experience as much of it as possible. Again, I was very happy with this decision.

Now that I had decided when to arrive, I had to decide how to get to Leeds. I could not find any direct flights from Montreal to Leeds, so I started considering alternative arrival airports. The place I tried was London. Seeing as there were three direct flights, I decided to fly in and out of London and take the train from London to Leeds. In hindsight, it would have been much wiser to fly into Manchester. The train from London took about 2.5 hours and costs 60 GBP, where as the train from Manchester is about 45 minutes and costs about 11 GBP. Therefore, I would definitely recommend flying in and out of Manchester if possible.

The final question was what to bring. Personally, I decided to try to pack relatively light. I also made sure that my suitcase had plenty of room for all the souvenirs that I intended to buy. The first mistake I made was to assume that it would be fair weather during the month of September and that a pair or two of shorts would be worth bringing. In the end, I brought two pairs of shorts, and managed one days use out of them. One of my smarter purchases was a brand new raincoat. I used this both as a rain coat and as a shell over sweaters to double as a winter coat. I found it worked really well. I brought a set of sheets over with me, but seeing as I had not comforter or pillow, I ended up buying an entire bedding set upon arrival, so the sheets were completely useless to me. I also ended up buying a mobile phone in Britain. This too was a mistake; the phone ended up costing about 135 CAD and was only good in Europe. I should have

bought a phone in Canada that was good for both regions for the same price. Unfortunately, no cookware is provided in residence and so I had to buy some once I arrived in England; however, I would definitely say it would not be worth bringing any over due to the added weight of the cookware. In the end, I was glad that I had packed quite light, as I bought a number of souvenirs that I was able to start wearing so as to bolster my wardrobe. I would also recommend against bringing too many decorations for your room. I ended up picking up pictures and objects and maps on my trips that I put up to decorate my room as the term progressed.

## **First Week and Setting Up:**

The first week in Leeds was one of the most exciting weeks of my life. I was in a new country, in a strange city with customs I didn't understand. To make things even more exciting, I was able to explore, buy fun gadgets and meet people from all over Europe and the world. As I mentioned before, I decided to arrive for the international students' orientation week, so I arrived in London in the morning on Monday. I then made my way up to Leeds by train. My first task was to try to make my way to school. I decided that the easiest way would be to ask the nearest person for directions. Luckily, I spoke to a train station worker who informed me that the university had set up a free bus to bring new students to the campus. Apparently it was possible to sign-up for with as part of the Leeds application, but I had forgotten to fill in that box. I was, however, still welcome once I had arrived and they did give me a free ride to campus. I would recommend signing up for this free ride as a cab to campus should cost around 4 or 5 GBP.

The bus dropped me off at Charles Morris halls, an on-campus hall reserved for international students for the first week only. I decided to inquire about my real room as I did not want to have to unpack and pack twice. Therefore, I dropped off my bags in Charles Morris, went to the housing office and negotiated to have my room switched to my real room for the first week. This ended up saving me some money as the non-catered Montague Burton was cheaper per night than Charles Morris. I would definitely recommend trying to move in directly. The only downside was that there was no one else there and the place had nothing inside, it had no cookware and it didn't even have toilet paper. My first move was to unpack slightly and to take a shower after a long day of travelling. After my shower, I made my way back to Charles Morris halls for a brief introduction meeting and just generally to try to meet people and make some new friends. It was really amazing, there were tons of students from all over and it was great to practice my French and German with them. Through the people I met, I was able to find out about all kinds of events and to get an idea of what I was supposed to do all week. There was also an outline of the week provided by the school in the welcome package.

One of the first things I did was to participate in one of the school's organized walking tours of the city. They offered several tours, one of the campus, one of the downtown and one of the library. I meant to go on all of them, but in the end only took the downtown tour. I found it to be quite helpful. It pointed out some of the major stores and gave me a general idea of the city's layout. My particular tour guide had a funny

habit of pointing out only the most expensive stores and commenting on how good they were, but the walk really helped me to understand the layout of the city. I also figured out where the bus and train stations were and where the farmer's market was. The market proved to be very cost effective and just an interesting place to shop. The other store that was a staple in my weekly life was Morrison's. It was the closets grocery store to my halls. It was relatively inexpensive, especially for the Morrison's brand food. It was there that I purchased all of my cookware and dishes. It may have been better to buy them in the market, but it was quick and easy to buy them at Morrison's. I went to Leeds with a friend of mine from class, so we split the cost of both the cookware and the food and found that this was very cost effective.

After I had managed to arrange my food situation, my next chore was to contact my parents at home. I decided to purchase a mobile phone. There are often great deals during the regular orientation week. However, as I mentioned before, I think that it would be wiser to bring one from Canada and then just buy a European pay-as-you-go card. I purchased a phone from the company Orange. In hindsight, it would have been better to go with Vodafone because it had much better coverage across the different European countries. Seeing as I was only staying for four months, I bought a pay-as-you-go plan. I found this to be quite cost effective, because it is free to receive calls. However, it is extra expensive to call a mobile phone, when calling from Canada. My next order of business was to set up my in-room internet so that I could stay in touch with my friends from home. I managed to get an Ethernet cable from the front desk of my halls. Then I went to the computer help desk in the Roger Stevens Building. There, I convinced them to give me a username and password. This is best done early in the week as some of my friends tried later in the week and were told that the policy had changed such that they weren't issuing passwords until the following week.

The last mandatory task for the first week was to register with the international students' office. This is very quick, you just have to show up and sign a form for them, so that they know you have arrived. The exchange office is also an excellent place to learn about the events that are happening for international and Erasmus students. They also hold daily teas with tea, coffee and cakes. This is another excellent way to meet more international students. I went to a couple of these in the first week, and one or two later on in the semester. Make sure to have fun and enjoy the first week as it is one of the best of the semester.

## **Courses:**

The first real challenge is to actually enrol in courses. I found out upon arrival that one of the courses that Leeds had approved had been switched to second semester. So, it is not guaranteed that you will complete all the courses you had planned to. Therefore, I was left scrambling trying to make up the course. The best way to start signing up for courses is to see Professor Stavros Iezekiel. He is the Electrical engineering professor in charge of dealing with foreign students. He is also able to approve many of the engineering courses you may wish to take. Therefore, I arranged a brief meeting with Professor Iezekiel, who approved all of my engineering courses. If you wish to take any

other courses, then you need to have them approved by their faculty directly. So, my next step was to visit the faculty of Mathematics, Computer Science and Classics. I managed to arrange to see all of these except the school of Classics in one day. The next day I went to actually register. This is a very long process, so be prepared to line up and wait and to be patient. The first step is to go to the finance department and receive a stamp signifying that you have paid your tuition. This stamp is a mere formality, but still will require some time. Once you have acquired the stamp, you then have to wait in line to make it into the gym. The gym is where the student cards are issued, and there are often members of the different faculties there, so that if you have not managed to get a course approved yet, you can get it approved in the gym. Once you finally have all your courses approved, you line up again to have them stamped by some sort of official and finally you have your student card made and then you are allowed to leave. The process took me two days. I also waited until the time when engineering students were supposed to register, the last two days, and found that many of the extra course (CSE's) had already filled up. Therefore, I would recommend going earlier and just trying to register on the first day.

Also, on the way out of the gymnasium, there were a number of clubs presenting themselves for members. Clubs like the hiking club, football club, fencing and the list goes on. Personally, I did not join any clubs in the end. I found that I was too busy travelling and just generally meeting up with other foreign students to make time for a club. However, they can be a good idea, especially for students staying for two semesters. Clubs such as the ski club or hiking club arrange fantastic trips at very low costs and would definitely be worth looking into. The other major reason that I did not join any clubs was the cost. Many clubs require you to be a "sports user member". This will cost about 40 GBP for the year and they do not offer half year memberships. It gives you access to use all of the campus facilities, including gyms and soccer fields. Seeing as I was only staying one semester, I did not wish to spend 100 CAD to become a sports user member and then to pay more to join specific clubs. However, it may be worth it for year-long students.

Once you have signed up for courses, the next step is to pass them. I found that the courses were taught in much the same way as at Waterloo. One key difference was that there were no textbooks. All the learning came from handouts or through the notes copied down during lecture. This is nice when trying to save some money, but not always great if you don't understand the professor. Also, there isn't really any homework. We had one essay in one course and two short, one page problem sets in another and that was all the work that was graded. The courses generally have a midterm which counts for around 20% of the mark. The final then makes up the remaining 80%. There are problem sets given out during term and these are worth doing as they are excellent practice for the final exam. Also, doing old exams is very helpful when it comes time to study for the final. Most exams were very similar to previous years. Some of the old exams can be found on-line. There is also a documentation office in the student union. I went there to purchase old exams only to find out that our professor gave the same ones out the next lecture. So I would wait to see which exams are given to you before you resort to buying them. Like at Waterloo, lectures are not mandatory, although it is a good idea to go, as there are no real textbooks to study from. The teachers in Leeds are also more particular

about arriving late and about the amount of noise they will tolerate in their classroom. As to the subject of labs, they are considered to be separate courses. While I was there, none of the labs associated with the courses I was taking were being offered. They seem to teach the course and then have the lab the following semester. There are only 20 hours of lectures per course as opposed to the 36 at Waterloo, so I was able to manage seven courses in one semester. I would definitely recommend taking some extra courses, it is easy to find the time for them and it will make your life easier when you return to Waterloo.

## **Travelling:**

Probably the best part of the entire exchange was the travelling. I spent most of my free time either trying to arrange trips or going on trips. In the end, I managed to visit 16 countries and was able to catch such events as Oktoberfest in Munich and Halloween in Dublin. Most of my travel was by airplane. Europe has some excellent cheap airlines. The best were, Ryan Air ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)), Jet2 ([www.jet2.co.uk](http://www.jet2.co.uk)) and Easy Jet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)). Most of the flights I took were on Ryan air. It has some very cheap flights out of both London and Glasgow. It is important to book well in advance as I managed to get tickets as low as 0.49 Euro by booking two months in advance. For all local travel I either used the British rail system or the coach system. It is worth buying a student rail card if you plan to travel more than three times. Also, if you book well in advance for either the Coach or Trains it is much cheaper.

I guess the biggest part of travelling was planning ahead to try to save money and to ensure availability. I found that although booking flights and trains was easy to do on my own, it was much easier and cheaper to arrange accommodations through a travel agency. I used STA travel, as there was a branch inside the student union, which made it very convenient. I would definitely recommend booking hostels through them. I also managed to get myself on two organised tours. These were both run by Radical Travel ([www.radicaltravel.com](http://www.radicaltravel.com)). I took their tours both in Scotland and in Ireland. I found them to be lots of fun. It allowed me to see places that I never could have reached without a car. They also provide a ton of information about the local culture, history and interesting tidbits. The tours were well worth their cost.

One last consideration is visa. It is important to check which countries allow Canadians to enter. During my travels, I decided to go to Turkey and so I needed to purchase a temporary visa to be allowed in. It is not generally a problem, but worth checking out. A good site for finding information about visas is <http://www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/ctry/visa-en.asp>. Other than that, it is just important to keep on top of travel planning and to budget both your time and money well. It helped to make a list of all the key sights I wanted to see in each city before going. Another useful tip would be to get hold of a map of the city you are going to and locate the place where you will be arriving and at the very least, where your hostel is. From there, it may be good to try to locate all of your touristy sights on the map too, to allow for as much time as possible visiting and the least amount of time planning. Also, in some countries it is

worth getting metro passes. Paris offers excellent day passes as does Rome. It is worth the cost to be able to get to all the places you want to go. Other than that, just make sure to travel. I managed to make it to Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic and of course all over England.

## **Costs:**

Living and travelling in Europe can be very expensive. I did my best to limit my costs during the week to save money to go travelling on the weekends. During an average week, I would buy the cheap grocery brand foods and split meals with another Waterloo student to save money on food; that way we both ate quite well for about 8 GBP each a week. I also tried to minimize the amount of times per week that I went drinking. I basically went out one night a week, on the cheapest night. This strategy allowed me to spend only about 6GBP per week on drinks and socializing. Seeing as I brought very few clothes, I ended up having to do a laundry almost every week. This cost about 2 GBP per week. I also probably spent about 10 GBP a week on other expenses, such as going to art galleries or movies. I also spent a significant amount of money in the very first week. I had to buy all of my cookware, toiletries, bedding and a phone. The phone cost me about 120 CAD, the bedding cost me 30 GBP and the toiletries and cookware cost around 20 GBP. Besides my weekly expenses, I also budgeted about 140 GBP a week for travelling on the weekends. This included flight, food and entry into any exhibits. Most of the trips cost about this much; some were slightly over and some were slightly under. Probably a budget of 200 GBP per trip would have been more enjoyable and allowed for more luxury during the trips. The last major expense was housing. This ended up being over 3000 CAD. In the end, I ended up spending about 6000 CAD on travelling alone. I spent approximately 16000 CAD on the exchange. This sum contains all my travelling, weekly expenses, Leeds housing and Waterloo tuition of about 4500 CAD.

## **Conclusions:**

In the end, this exchange proved to be one of the best experiences of my life. I had already spent a work term abroad in Paris, but I found that it paled in comparison to my experience at Leeds. I really enjoyed meeting students from all over the world. I was also fortunate enough to become good friends with two German Electrical engineering students. It was very interesting to meet people from a completely different culture studying the same subject as yourself. I would definitely recommend the exchange to any student; I felt it has helped me to develop as a person. Looking back, I wish I had planned it a little better, as I had to take out a line of credit to be able to finance my exchange. Perhaps if I had saved up some money along the way it would have been easier to afford. I sincerely hope that any students reading this report will now seriously consider going on exchange. Even if you don't go to Leeds, you are guaranteed to have a fantastic time and an enriching experience.