

University of Missouri – Kansas City student exchange

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I took part in student exchange at University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC) for their Spring 2014 semester. Before leaving, the greatest challenge I had was course selection and approval, due to their prerequisite courses differing to UWC's as well as finding courses that covered the same work with equivalent credit hours, in the same semester as at UWC. With assistance from the chemistry department heads at UMKC and UWC, I was able to register for five UMKC courses (13 US credit hours) that corresponded with my two modules at UWC (60 SA credit hours).

The applications for my US visa and to study at UMKC were tedious, but valuable information and support was provided by UMKC's International Academic Programs office, which eased the process.

After 24 hours of travel, I arrived at Kansas City International Airport and was met by Prof. Linna Place from the international office, who took me to Oak Place Apartments at UMKC and assisted with the check-in procedure. Unfortunately I missed the international student orientation due to my courses not being finalised before its commencement, and I arrived in America two days before classes began. I was given a tour of the campus, as well as international student support brochures which included information on transport, where to shop and things to do in Kansas City, which were very helpful. The registration of my courses at UMKC was a bit difficult due to me not having completed the prerequisite courses at UWC for some of my chosen courses at UMKC, but this was sorted out by the chemistry department.

The Oak Place Apartments comprised of fully furnished apartments with four bedrooms with private bathrooms, and a central living room and kitchen. Meal plans were not compulsory, so I purchased and prepared my own food. The UMKC campus is relatively large, with all buildings within a 15-20 minute walk from the residences. Bicycles are available to rent for free, and the Kansas City buses are free to UMKC students. UMKC also offers free gym membership, and has a large library that is close to the residences.

I completed three chemistry theory courses and two laboratory courses that supplemented the theory. Due to their four year BSc structure, I was taking third and fourth year courses, some of which contained work that would be considered honours level in SA. It was a heavy workload, which was a concern to the lecturers. Physical chemistry was a particular concern as I had not taken the first year physics and second year calculus prerequisites, but the work was manageable with the help of weekend review classes offered by the lecturer. The lecturers were very supportive and offered help if I needed it, and would often follow up on my progress.

The US grading system differs quite significantly to SA's, their grade scales are higher with an A being 90% and above. Their marking system did allow for partial credit which wouldn't necessarily be given in SA, which balanced the grading. In some of the courses, the final grade is composed of three or four large class tests and no final exam. I found this to be a good system as it allowed students to focus on the sections for each test, without the pressure of studying all the course material for a final exam.

The chemistry laboratories had a lot of equipment that I hadn't had the opportunity to use before, and it was exciting to be able to do both organic and physical chemistry experiments in their labs. I

gained experience in lab report writing in the physical chemistry writing intensive course, where we performed weekly experiments for which we had to write full reports at a standard acceptable for publication.

I was introduced to other international students by the International Academic Programs office, and attended social events hosted by the International Students Fellowship group, where I made a lot of friends. They hosted social evenings where students from a wide range of countries brought traditional food from their countries, as well as a Super Bowl party and an end of semester farewell picnic at the end of the semester.

In my free time, I tried to visit as many of the tourist attractions as I could, and I enjoyed trying all the different food in Kansas City's restaurants. Over spring break I played paintball, went to First Fridays in Lawrence where they have all the shops open with free food and beverages to attract customers, and I visited art galleries. The Nelson-Atkins Art Museum had an exhibition for Chinese New Year where they exhibited Chinese art and had live performances. One of my classmates invited me to spend Easter with her family, where I had a home-cooked American meal and participated in games with the family.

I took road trips with other international students. We went to Jamesport, an Amish village with a population of 1200 people, where we were given a tour. We visited Weston, an Irish village in Missouri, where they had a redhead parade for the weekend. At Kansas University was the Natural History Museum, where I got to explore the museum and the campus, where I visited one of the biochemical research labs and spoke to some of their postgraduate researchers. We also drove to the Omaha Zoo in Nebraska, a 3 hour drive from Kansas City.

Upon returning, I obtained my official transcript in electronic format. UMKC advised on the best method of acquiring the transcript and I received it within a few hours of settling all outstanding fees and requesting the transcript. I have applied for recognition of my UMKC credits at UWC, for which I needed the transcript and the outlines for each course.

I really enjoyed the exposure to so many different cultures, as well as the different educational system and laboratories. The weather was beyond anything I'd experienced, with the temperature being -20 °C in the afternoon on some days, and I saw snow for the first time that I can remember. I made a lot of friends and international contacts which will be helpful in my career. Kansas City as a town is diverse, rich in culture and its people incredibly friendly and well-mannered. I hope to return someday, and I would definitely recommend the University of Missouri exchange program to other UWC students.