

George Mason University – United States

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Xinran Zheng

Cindyxinran920@gmail.com

Preparation

After I was selected to study at GMU for one semester, the preparation started! Around the end of February I received an email from GMU, which included the application procedures. GMU requires all documents to be by post, which includes the official transcripts, Certificate of Financial Responsibility, Proof of funding and TOFEL/IELTS scores. After filling in the correct mailing address, you can simply drop your envelope at the student service desk in H6-02. The exchange coordinator will take care of it. The given instructions of the application were clear and I had enough time to complete my application.

After the application deadline, it took around one month before I got an acceptance letter from the GMU. You will receive your DS-2019 paperwork from the program officer in May, along with the academic calendar and university booklet.

At the same time your exchange coordinator from GMU will contact you by email to arrange details such as room and board, the purchase of a meal plan and compulsory student insurance, and eventually you can select your courses for the semester. Keep in mind that the earlier you submit your accommodation requirements, the more available choices you will have. I didn't book the tickets until I got my J-1 Visa in June, so the ticket prices were already quite high. What I recommend is to book a refundable ticket in advance, since the possibility that your application is rejected is low.

Arrival

My flight landed in Dulles International Airport (IAD) the day before the school started. This year some Mason students volunteered to pick up exchange students at IAD and drop them off on campus, which made my first few days much easier. Of course you can always call a Uber or take a shuttle. After reaching the campus, you need to check in first at the housing area desk. Since it is open 24/7, you can always go to them whenever you have questions. You will also have a guided tour around the campus; that will be the first time that all the exchange students are gathered. You definitely don't want to miss it, as it is the best opportunity to meet some valuable friends of your four-month stay.

In the first week you have many things to do. For example, meeting your exchange coordinators, acquiring your student ID, opening your bank account, fulfilling your payments and buying a phone card. Life will be really messy at the start but after two weeks you will be totally fine. Just keep calm and enjoy the life!

Courses

At the GMU I took four courses, each worth 3 credits, which is equivalent to 24 ECTS in total. Since most courses have a level restriction, if you plan on taking courses that have prerequisites listed, you must also fill out the Course Override Request form. You can always contact your exchange coordinator for the course override. I got the override for five

courses, but I dropped one of them because it was boring. When choosing the courses, you can always go to the website 'rate my professor', where you can look through comments about the lecturers and courses from previous students.

ECON 330	Public Finance Prof. Yong J Yoon	This course covers intergovernmental financial relationships; types, incidences, and consequences of taxation; other sources of governmental income; governmental expenditures and their effect; public economic enterprises; public borrowing; and debt management and its economic effect. We are required to read a book <i>Coming apart: the state of white America, 1960-2010</i> and write a paper about it. The course seems the combination of microeconomics and Economic of the Welfare State but it is nice that you will learn the taxation, government expenditures and voting theorem in United States.
ECON 340	Introduction to Mathematical Economics Prof. Zachary Bartsch	You will learn the fundamental mathematical applications of microeconomics and tools to help you address macroeconomic data. Methods include derivatives, integrals, and matrices. Applications include utility, supply & demand, marginal & average concepts, using data, indifference curves, as well as other fundamental economic concepts. This course seems the combination of the mathematics 1 and 2, which is more like a revise lesson for Erasmus student.
FNAN 341	Introduction to Firm Valuation Prof. Shelly L. Canterbury	This course contains examination of techniques for analyzing, understanding, and applying financial information in decision situations. It introduces topics include financial statement analysis, development of financial models, and financial forecasting and valuation. We use a semester to analyze, evaluate and forecast a company. The software being used are mainly excel, Bloomberg and Crystal Ball. This course is quite interesting and it didn't take me much time to study this course
FNAN 321	Financial Institutions Prof. Mike Anderson	Discusses basic objectives of financial institutions in light of industry structure and regulatory environment, and decision variables that management should concentrate on to achieve objectives. Includes role of financial institutions in allocation of funds in financial markets. The course itself was fascinating and the professor seems made every material pretty clear. However, this course really required lots of efforts. I had to answer on average 7 pages of questions every week. Although you learnt a lot from this course, still if you want your life easier maybe it's not your choice.
FNAN 311	Principles of Investment Prof. George Wang	I only took two classes for this course before I dropped it. For me, this course is quite boring. Moreover, the professor had a thick accent, which made it really hard to follow him.

For most of my courses, attendance was not strictly necessary. Grading is mainly based on written exams, which consist of short answers, essays, and quantitative questions. The courses are relatively easy comparing to what we had in Erasmus.

Finances

The following table summarizes my expenses of the exchange period. These numbers are approximations.

Housing	\$5000	Single room, with kitchen
Health Insurance	\$1194	Mandatory
Visa Application	\$340	SEVIS I-901 fee and MRV fee
IELTS	\$210	Mandatory
Flight	\$1500	Return ticket
Daily life	\$1000	Grocery shopping
Traveling	\$1800	In total 15 days
American SIM-card	\$120	T-mobile \$30 per month
ESE scholarship	-€500	Paid clear in twice
Study supplies	\$20	Digital books and printing cost
Total	\$10,684	

Daily life

Going on exchange at GMU is the perfect opportunity to get a better impression of American college life. Associations and dorms organize so many weekly activities that you will always find something fun to do during the free time in between your classes.

It is also a really nice experience living in the school dormitory. Thousands of students live on campus, which creates a unique atmosphere. I consider it to be fun and convenient since you can reach all classes within a five-minute walk. All my three roommates are friendly American girls. They introduced me to American culture. You can also easily access the sports facilities and dining spots. Gyms in GMU are not crowded and free of charge. However, the dining options are quite limited and most food is high fat, so most of the time I cooked for myself. Additionally, all the mason shuttles and cue buses are free to Mason students, which means that you can reach the nearby Wal-Mart or Macy's easily.

It is sunny almost everyday in Virginia, which is very different from Rotterdam. Temperature will be relatively high throughout your stay but extremely high in the first months or two, so don't forget to bring your shorts and t-shirts. The warm weather provides you the chance to grab a bus and go sightseeing in DC or New York. By the time I left, the temperature just hit zero. I don't think you should bring many winter clothes with you.

DC is also a reason for you to pick George Mason. You can always take the subway and have fun there. Although the Metro together with the bus takes you more than one hour,

considering the free time you have, you will have lots of opportunities to visit the museums there, which are mostly free.

In conclusion, I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to study abroad. Going on an exchange in America at George Mason University was truly an amazing experience. I had a great time there, and I met many people of diverse backgrounds. It was an unforgettable experience for me. I would recommend it to anyone who wishes to go on an exchange in America!