

Student Article

My study abroad experience in Perth, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the differences between studying in the UK and studying in Australia from the perspective of a British exchange student from the University of Sussex. She is a third year student studying Politics and International Relations. In the following article she writes about her experiences as an exchange student at the University of Western Australia (UWA), namely the differences in the social life, the structure of modules and the way in which students are graded.

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Social life

Before I arrived in Australia, I initially planned to stay in the halls of residence, but after discovering that the rent prices were just shy of \$500 (Australian) a week, with an additional acceptance fee of \$1000, and a deposit of \$2000, I decided that staying in the halls of residence was not financially viable. In addition to this, a major deterrent was also that the halls of residences did not seem like a very sociable option, and after talking to other exchange students, I decided against staying in halls. Instead, I chose to live in a house share. My house share is in close proximity to the university. This is ideal because I can easily walk to and from university every day. I chose to live in a predominantly student-dominated house. Aside from me, there is one other undergraduate student, one Master's student and one PhD student. I have been very lucky in the sense that my house is very sociable and my Australian housemates have been very good at integrating the international housemates into their friendship circles and immersing them in the wider Australian culture.

Speaking to other exchange students from the UK, I have found that the halls experience is not what they thought it would be. Firstly, all of the residences are catered, which means that students are restricted to sticking to certain time blocks for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Catered accommodation also means that there is no kitchen on each floor of each residential building. This makes it harder for people to socialise, as the kitchen is generally the main social space between students when living in halls of residence. In the UK, you have the option of catered accommodation; however, self-catering is a significantly more popular option allowing the kitchen to be used as a social space.

While the absence of a kitchen means that there is no immediate social space between the students on each floor, there are other common spaces at the residences. However, they are in separate buildings, and are usually patrolled by residential staff. This means that the level of noise you can make is strictly regulated. It is also difficult to enjoy company in your private rooms as noise is forbidden after 10pm. In addition to this, the residences are privately owned, which means that rooms are leased to those other than UWA students. For example, I have met students who share their floor with high school students. For this reason, I am glad that I chose to live in a house share as it means that I have more freedom and also

because it has allowed me to interact with local Australians and immerse myself into Australian culture.

The drawbacks with regards to the halls of residence fits into my wider criticism of university life in Australia in terms of it being generally less social overall. This may be because it is not very common for Australian students to move out of their family homes for university. I have noticed that the large majority of students live fairly local to the university and still live with their parents. This is a striking difference compared to the UK where the vast majority of students leave their home town when they begin university. The suggested motivation for British students to do this is so they can seek new friendships and experiences, which can make going to university in the UK a very sociable affair. In contrast, starting university in Australia is not typically a life changing event for Australians as most of them do not move away from home. In turn, they do not feel the need to form as many new friendships, or seek new experiences. Having said this, there are Australian students who do move to different states to study, and others who have moved from the local country towns. However, in my experience, they are in the minority. For this reason, I have found it significantly harder to make friends at university in Australia.

Grading and module structure

The second major difference is the way in which professors structure their modules and grade students. For every module I have taken, attendance counts for between five to ten per cent of my overall grade. This is very different to the UK because even though attendance is compulsory, it is not graded. In Australia, my level of participation in tutorials is also weighted. Aside from the differences in attendance and participation, students are examined each week, be it in the form of short online tests, journal entries, or a summarisation of their readings. In the UK, students are not examined weekly, but only a handful of times throughout the semester and in the form of examinations, essays and lab reports. In addition to this, there is a far greater emphasis on group work in Australian universities. I have been set graded group exercises for nearly every module I have taken at UWA, in comparison to Sussex, where I only had individual assessments. I have found this particularly difficult because I am much more used to planning and managing my own time opposed to group planning and time management.

Conclusion

In summary, I have found the university experience to be quite different in Australia. The first being the difference in the social atmosphere. The emphasis on the university social life is much greater in the UK. Australian students tend not to be as social as they don't have the same need to meet new people due to the fact that they typically don't move to new cities when they go to university. The second major difference I have experienced is the structure of the modules and the number of different ways in which students are graded. This makes the workload feel heavier due to the overall grade being divided into many different areas and testing being administered on a more frequent basis.

Overall, despite the slower social life and heavier workload, I am having a fantastic time at UWA and have learnt that where meeting people isn't effortless, you need to go out and do it yourself. I have also taken the heavier workload as a positive as I know that the weekly tests will keep me from getting too distracted. My experiences here have been

invaluable and I look forward to expanding on them in the time I have left here as an exchange student.

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