

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2007
Reflection #1

Overall my study abroad experience has been absolutely amazing. It has made me grow as a person and I think that it has showed me how to enjoy myself even more than I did before. To anyone that is able to or given the chance to study abroad at some point during their college career I would definitely recommend that they take advantage of the opportunity and go. Everyday was a new experience and I do not regret a single moment that I was there. I studied abroad in England at the University of Leicester. I really needed a change of atmosphere from regular school and I ended up having some of the best times of my life.

I had been to England previously so I was pretty sure that I was going to like going to school there but I was still a little bit worried. I was nervous about being able to make new friends and whether or not I was going to fit in and actually make the most of my time abroad. However, right away I felt welcomed and quickly became friends with the other exchange students. Since the University had chosen to house many of the exchange students together we all instantly stuck together. I lived in Hastings House with a bunch of awesome girls and guys. The majority of the house was international and only about four English students. Although I did really like the people I lived with and became quite close with a few of them, I do wish that we would have been more integrated with the other English students. I only say this because the people that you live with are generally the people that you hang out with and become closest to. I did meet a few English people that I would call my friends but the majority I would say were

just acquaintances. This separation of the international students was probably my main complaint of the whole trip and that really isn't even all that big.

Signing up for classes probably was the most difficult thing I had to do all semester. Instead of having class registration online like we have at JMU, Leicester requires you to go to each department head and sign up for a class and then get it signed by the head. This was an absolute pain and took all week to figure out. The classes here are just like at any other university. Some of the professors were so boring that you dreaded going to class and others were quite amusing. Two of my professors were completely intrigued that they had an American in their class and constantly would ask me questions. They were both very nice and I enjoyed their classes very much. Overall all of the teachers and people that worked for the school just wanted me to have a good time and worked so hard to ensure that.

In particular, the porter for our house was so nice and did absolutely everything he could to make our stay more comfortable. Anything that you need you will most likely get if you ask. The study abroad office in Leicester was also very helpful and nice; they tried hard to accommodate all of our needs as well.

One thing that I disliked about the school was the dining halls. Unlike at JMU, where we have tons of options of what we want to eat, there are basically no choices here at Leicester. If you don't like what they are serving then you either don't eat or you force it down. I guess most of the dining hall food was edible but the majority of it was not good. If you go down to city centre you will be able to find some good food places and bakeries and of course there is a shopping center down there. The stores are actually not

that bad and you can find some cute clothes for pretty reasonable prices. The city center makes for a good day out.

If you like to go out and night and have a good time this is definitely a school to consider studying abroad at. Nearly everyday of the week and weekend there was something going on. The University itself plans many student events, and these events are not lame like you might think, but they are actually quite enjoyable. Students are often passing out flyers for some of the local bars and clubs so that you know what is going on and where it is happening. For example, every Monday, without fail, there is a bar crawl. These are good to go on in the beginning of the year because you then learn where the good bars are and which places you want to go back to. There is never a dull night out in Leicester.

Personally, I really enjoyed being in England for Rugby season. The English are crazy about rugby and going to a bar on game nights was out of control. The Loaded Dog was one of the hottest spots, and by far my favorite place, for rugby players and fans to hang out in. Meeting people in England was so easy and everyone wants to talk to you so don't worry about not meeting people. The night life in Leicester is so different then at JMU; I loved it. The only downside is that the buses stop running pretty early, I think the last bus is at 11:45pm, which means that you are going to need to bring money for a taxi. This isn't that bad though if you have a group of people with you.

My main advice for going abroad would be to be prepared to spend money. If you are going to constantly worry about the exchange rate and how expensive everything is then you are not going to have as much fun as you should. You need to go onto the trip

with a decent amount of money and be willing to spend it. In a way this is like a vacation from your real life so just have fun; it is worth every penny.

Also make sure you travel while you are at Leicester! If you book flights early enough on airlines such as ryanair.com or easyjet.com you will get incredibly cheap flights. I went to so many different places with some of my housemates and we had an awesome time. Most places we only stayed for about two days but it was plenty of time to do and see what we wanted.

I am so glad I had the chance to study abroad and I highly recommend you do it. Leicester was awesome, but even if you don't choose to go there I think that anywhere you choose to go you will have an incredible time!

University of Leicester, England
Fall 2007
Reflection #2

This past semester I have spent studying abroad at the University of Leicester in England and overall it has been an extremely amazing experience. The staff of the study abroad office here in Leicester is extremely helpful and very nice if you need help with anything at all. Before coming to the UK I tried to pick out what classes I wanted to take while abroad and then got them approved by the departments at JMU. However this really was not worth all of the time and stress it caused me before leaving because once I got to Leicester some of the classes were no longer offered and some of the classes clashed. I then had to choose all new courses to take and now need to get those ones approved by the departments when I get home. Also, the registration process here at Leicester is extremely different from what we are used to and can be very frustrating.

This is because during your first week at Leicester you have to go around to each specific department and get the classes signed off on and then make sure none of the classes you have chosen clash. This is especially difficult to do if you are taking courses from a variety of departments because in England most students just take classes from one department and therefore the department tries to schedule the different classes at different times. However, just be patient with the process because eventually you will figure out a schedule that does not have clashes in it.

I would strongly recommend that all students attend the week orientation program which the University of Leicester offers to its international students as well as being picked up by the arranged bus from the airport. This really helped me and gave me the opportunity to meet the other international students whom I would be spending the semester abroad with. I would also suggest living in a catered hall in Oadby Village so that you do not have to worry about cooking for yourself and can just enjoy your time here. I currently live in Oadby in Hastings House (which is basically an international house). Most of the rooms have their own sink and then there are four showers for 16 girls to share-I have never had a problem getting a shower when I needed one. If you have any problems or something isn't working just put in a request and it is normally fixed within a day or two- the porters are extremely nice!

For the most part I would say that most of the friends that I have made while being here at Leicester are other Americans, however I have met some English people through my classes and just going out at night and talking to people. Although, I came here wanting to make tons of English friends it has not been that easy to considering I live with all international students. However, living with all international students does

have its benefits because everyone is experiencing the same thing and you always have people to talk to who know and can relate to what you are going through.

Oadby Village is about 3 miles from the University so you can either buy a bus pass which is £119 or about \$240, buy a used bike, or walk. I would suggest buying the bus pass because even though it is a lot of money it allows for you to use any Arriva bus route at anytime, so in the end you really get your money's worth. Another additional cost which I found out about when getting here was the gym membership which is £55 for the year so you get half of it back at the end of the semester if you choose to buy one.

Even though the exchange rate is not very good I would not let that stop you from experiencing and seeing things you want to see or going out at night because you are not going to have a good time here if you are constantly worrying about money. Going out is a big part of the student life here at Leicester and if you are not really into that this may not be the best school choice for you. Also, if you want to travel my advice would be to book the trips as far in advance as possible because you will then get really good deals- book trips using www.ryanair.com or www.easyjet.com and www.hostelworld.com for hostel booking. Even though I have spent most of my weekends away from Leicester traveling I have still been able to experience and enjoy what the city of Leicester has to offer. Throughout the week there is always something going on either with the halls of residence or at the student union. Definitely go out and see what they are like. There is a lot more going on throughout the week in terms of going out at night than there is back in the States. My personal favorite is a pub called the *Loaded Dog* which is located on London Road. They also have good drink deals so share a pitcher with some friends!

I would definitely suggest studying abroad at the University of Leicester if you want to come to England even though it is not in London; London is only an hour and a half train ride away. This semester has absolutely flown by so don't waste any time doing and seeing everything that you want to because before you know it you are going to be getting ready to head back home while at the same time wishing that you could stay just a longer.

University of Leicester, England
Spring 2008
Reflection #3

I attended the University of Leicester, England in the Spring 2008 semester. I really did not know what to expect of the experience as I had not met anyone who did it and there was little to no information on the internet about study abroad programs or experiences there. I chose the program because it was an exchange so I would still be paying in-state tuition as money was a big factor in determining whether I could study abroad or not. After looking at the exchange options JMU offers, I decided Leicester was the most fitting to my needs.

As a German minor, I really would have preferred to study abroad in a German-speaking country. However, after looking over the courses available at Leicester (you could take any courses they offer) I realized I would still be able to work on my German minor while I was there. It actually seems like their German department is more extensive than that of JMU. They offer a broad range of classes in many topics and the great thing is you are not limited because they are all taught in English anyway! I had some initial courses approved at JMU before I left but once I got there, I ended up choosing completely different ones.

Arriving in London was kind of daunting because they hadn't given us much direction about where and when to meet. I luckily saw someone with a Leicester guide so I knew they must be in the same crowd. I however was the only one from JMU! We waited for a few hours at the airport for everyone to arrive and then took a coach bus to Leicester. Of course everyone was kind of uneasy and nervous at first but all was well in no time!

The American exchange students did not all live together as one would expect. We had the choice of living in catered or non-catered accommodations. Ninety-nine percent of us chose catered but we still did not live in the same buildings. I lived in Beaumont Hall which is a hall-style accommodation right next to a lovely botanical

garden. My floor consisted of about one-third American students and two-thirds British students. It was a two-floor dorm where girls live on the second floor and guys on the first (although the first floor is considered zero in Europe). It was definitely daunting to arrive because they just kind of threw us in our room and said to meet up later that night. Everyone was really friendly and immediately introduced themselves but it was still hard to brush off the feeling of homesickness right off the bat.

The catered halls offer breakfast until 10 and dinner between 5:30 and 7:00. It was very limiting compared to the ease and variety offered at JMU but we adjusted quickly. Everyone goes to dinner together and you sit in a Harry-Potter style dining hall. The food was honestly kind of disgusting and there was not a lot of variety. The breakfast was very English—fried eggs, sausage, etc. Not being a huge fan of that, I was kind of annoyed with the lack of variety. Not only that, they only served hot breakfast until 9 when no one was ever awake!

Signing up for classes was a GRUELING process. Apparently Leicester still lives in ancient times and does not have online registration. Basically you had to get a form signed for each class you are taking by the head of the department (they had certain times you could go to each one). Half the time the teacher was not available or there was some kind of difficulty with the schedule or class. I ended up taking completely different classes than the ones I originally intended for. Their credit system is also different—they have 10 or 20 credit classes. Ten credit classes equate to three U.S. credits and 20 credit classes are 5 U.S. credits. Most people took 3 20 credit classes but I took 3 10 credit classes and one 20 credit class. Everyone was really stressed about the process at first and there was a lot of running around campus to get things done. Eventually it all comes together though.

England has a completely different style of schooling. They focus more on individual learning than class time. I took 4 classes but I only had a few hours of class time per week. The exchange students also do not take final exams or any tests or quizzes! Most students had to do a few essays but it was a lot easier than taking a few tests per class. They are also very lax and accommodating with exchange students in general, which was really nice.

The British are definitely really into partying. We went out at least 3-4 times per week. The funny thing is we would go to the Student Center on campus to “go out.” They had 1 big dance/club style place and one big bar. It was strange to go back on campus at night to go out. However, it was nice because the drinks are cheaper and everyone went to the same place. I’m sure you will be introduced to Strongbow, an alcoholic cider, within days of being there (so delicious). Also, it was strange because they went out more during the week than the weekend. Thursday and Saturday nights were considered calm/quiet nights.

Another great part of Leicester was we got a five week Spring break. This was what I really considered to be the “study abroad” portion of the semester because I don’t find England to have too much culture compared to America. Since it was kind of a pain

to do weekend trips, most people saved their travels for the Spring break. Definitely get a Eurail pass! If you want to do weekend trips, use Ryanair or book train tickets FAR in advance to avoid hiked up fees. I didn't realize they had a few trips organized for study abroad students to places within England and also Edinburgh, Scotland which were a great deal and I was really bummed to miss out on them.

Overall, Leicester was a good experience. Try to make friends with as many people as possible at the beginning and you will be fine. It can be tough the first week, but it turns out to be a lot of fun and definitely worth your while. Make sure you save enough spending money beforehand because the Pound and Euro are killer on the wallet. Other than that, have a great experience and enjoy the more laid-back schooling in England. Also, travel as much as possible. Even if you have to go somewhere alone, it is so worth it to be able to experience all the different cultures available!