

10.24.2011 deb

London School of Economics and Political Science – General Course  
London, United Kingdom  
1 full year, September 2010 – June 2011

1. Arrival overseas/on-site orientation:

- a. Upon arrival I went to visit my mom in Plymouth, so I did not stay in London right away. However, most students either arrived the day of move-in into the halls, or arrived early and stayed in the halls before. For students arriving at Heathrow airport the day before and the day of move-in, they had a welcome committee and a free shuttle to the LSE halls, which sounded great. However, if you are coming from the west coast (Seattle), I would recommend arriving early to get over the jet lag before all the activities start up. The hall I was in, High Holborn, offered to have people stay early, you just pay for the extra days you stay, which I would have done if I wanted to be in London.
- b. There was both the general LSE orientation and an orientation for General Course students. The General Course orientation covered how to select classes, and which ones they recommend for study abroad students; the contact information for the different advisors (for classes, departments, halls, etc); and how to adjust to LSE and London. The general LSE orientation helped to welcome students and introduced us to both the academic and social life of LSE. I was able to sign up for sports and societies (clubs) at orientation, as well as meet many of my friends at LSE in the activities they organize in the first week. For the General Course students they organize a bunch of welcome to London activities, and while some may seem corny, I met a bunch of my friends through them, and also got to explore London and act like a tourist. Also, the summer before, they had sign ups for a General Course retreat to the Cumberland Lodge, which I would highly recommend. They have a bunch of speakers, and it was really nice to take some time out of the city and explore the countryside. Also, we were given the opportunity to go to the Royal Chapel, which the Queen attended, and we were able to speak to her afterward!

2. Academics:

- a. The UK university system is very different from the US. The focus is more on individual learning, so there is a lot more initiative on the part of the student, as there are not weekly homework assignments to turn in (except in some econ/finance courses). The structure of the courses and instruction is similar, with weekly lectures and classes (quiz sections), and it is similar to UW in the way that your primary relationship is with the class teacher rather than the professor. The exams are different from UW, and they count for 100% of your grade, however GC students also receive a class grade. There is only one exam at the very end of the year, and it is essay based (except econ/finance/maths based courses). You are expected to write essays with citations to the readings, but you prepare and revise for these throughout the year. The grading is done on a

different scale, where a 70% is a first and considered very good, but LSE converts your grades into US letter grades on your transcript. There is one main library, which has all the books you need for your courses. There are also lots of computers, but in the busy times of the day and year it is often hard to find open ones.

- b. The instruction was very good at LSE, and I feel like I learned a lot in all of my courses and loved all of them. For my Government and IR courses, there were reading lists assigned for each week, which contained more reading that is possible to do. There are required readings, and then it is up to the student to decide which additional readings to do and which are important. Also, when revising for exams, you do not need to cover the whole year; it is better to focus on certain weeks and go into more depth on those topics. For my stat class, there were some weekly assignments with less reading, so more similar to UW.
- c. I really enjoyed my Foreign Policy Analysis course (IR202), and would recommend it to anyone interested in IR. I really liked Simon Hix, one of the professors for my Politics and Government of the European Union course (GV351), and he is one of the leading professors in the EU field and a very good lecturer.
- d. My government courses related to my political science degree, and learning about international relations and the European union in the UK provided a perspective on the topics that I would not have received at UW. I feel like I learned a lot more about the EU that I would have at UW simply because the other students in my class have grown up with it and bring more opinions to the discussions. My stats course was part of my ACMS degree.

### 3. Housing

- a. For housing I was given the option of either the residence halls or finding my own housing in London.
- b. I chose to live in the residence halls primarily for the reason that it is much easier, and I was able to meet other LSE and GC students. I chose High Holborn for its location (near campus and Covent Garden) and because I wanted my own room and access to a kitchen so that I could cook. In High Holborn I had my own room and shared kitchen, toilet, and shower with three other students.
- c. I would recommend the halls, as they are the easiest, and are also the closest location you can get for the price you pay. I also lived in a flat during the summer after my year at LSE, and while I really liked it, it would have been too much work during the year while I was focused on meeting friends, enjoying London and studying. Other popular halls for General Course students were Bankside, Carr Saunders, and Rosebury.

### 4. Program Exchange Site

- a. The campus of LSE is very different from UW, mostly because there isn't really a "campus" feel to it. LSE is located in very central London, so the buildings blend in with the surrounding area. However, the main street on campus does not have cars, so it is filled with primarily LSE students and professors, and the occasional tourist. I liked the LSE campus, and it is very easy to get around. There aren't really any good areas to hang out, other than the Three Tuns (LSE student pub), so most students go off

campus to work and hang out. However they are in the process of building a new student center, which I think will solve this problem. Being in central London is great, as the campus is near so many great places, such as Covent Garden, Waterloo Bridge (my favorite view of the Thames), and the Royal Courts of Justice.

#### 5. Health and Safety

- a. As a general Course Student you have a Tier 4 visa, which gives you access to NHS, Britain's health care. You have to register with the LSE medical practice, but then you have free access to the doctors and nurses, and they can write you prescriptions as needed. Free health care was definitely a plus, and I used the service occasionally.
- b. For safety, in central London I generally always felt safe. In the evenings, as it is a city, you have to be smart, but I never felt unsafe, even the occasional time I walked by myself late at night. (This is another reason why I loved the location of my hall High Holborn.) There are areas of London where you have to take more precautions, such as areas south of the Thames and in East London. But the Tube runs until 12.30am, and there are night buses, so there is always public transportation available, as well as tons of cabs.

#### 6. Cultural Aspects

- a. During the Freshers Fair (LSE orientation), I signed up for a couple of clubs, including Rowing, which I think is one of the best decisions I made in the first week. As LSE is not known for being a highly social school, I would highly recommend joining a sports society, as the Athletic Union (AU) is probably the most social group on campus. Also, since I was the only General Course student in the rowing club, it gave me the opportunity to meet regular LSE students, and I really enjoyed it. I also met other students through the halls, mostly those living on my floor, so I suggest doing some of the hall activities at the beginning to get to know who you are living with.
- b. I was told a lot before I left that many people experience culture shock in England, because they assume that the culture and language are exactly the same. So while I was prepared for it, there are some definite differences. Mostly I noticed the language difference, since they use words differently for a bunch of different things. It is helpful to look up a British to American dictionary, to learn a few before you go. There are also a lot of stereotypes for Americans, and you just have to expect them. Mostly I would get asked questions about American life (eg: Do college students really drink out of red plastic cups? What is the Greek life like? Do we watch death row executions on a TV channel? Etc) But everyone is incredibly friendly and I never experienced any negative attitudes toward me. Since London is incredibly international, being American is not really that different, so this helps in allowing you to blend in with the students at LSE.

#### 7. Financial

- a. I opened up a bank account in the UK (Lloyds), and transferred my money three times a year (with my financial aid from UW). To transfer you have to do an international wire, and it takes a few days to process, so I had to make sure to allow time for that before paying tuition and rent. Some

other general course students who went to school on the east coast had HSBC accounts, which they could access in London and didn't get charged a fee to withdraw money. If you are going to travel in Europe, I would recommend opening a UK bank account, because they have cheaper overseas rates for Europe.

- b. Each month during the school year I spent about £900. I was in one of the most expensive halls, so money can be saved if you pick a cheaper hall. However, I also had my own kitchen to cook, and the location meant I did not need to take the tube as much, so I also saved on food and transportation. London is definitely expensive, and generally prices are the same as dollar prices, just with a pound sign in front. I learned to just limit the number of times I went out per week, but just make sure you have enough money so that you don't miss out on the fun things in London.
- c. I did not have any unexpected expenses. However, it does cost a bit more to live in London than I had realistically anticipated, so I got a part-time job, which helped in allowing me to have money to travel and stay over the summer.
- d. There were not any complications with financial aid while I was abroad, but make sure you have everything approved before you leave and set up a direct deposit ahead of time to make sure it goes smoothly. LSE has also been delayed in sending my transcript, so there are more complications for this year than I had while actually abroad.

8. Program/Exchange Administration:

- a. The IP&E office did not administer my program, since I was doing an unaffiliated program.
- b. The program's administration was excellent. LSE is very good about providing information to General Course students, and making sure we had everything before we left and during the year. They also arrange receptions in the states before you leave, but I was unable to attend mine. There is a Dean for the General Course who was available to answer questions, and I never had an issue I wasn't able to resolve with them.

9. Program/Student Type:

- a. The type of student for this program is someone who is more independent and individually motivated. The work at LSE requires more individual incentive to do, and is also more challenging to my coursework at UW. The reading can seem overwhelming at first, so good organization is also key. Compared to other study abroad programs, this one is much more focused on academics, rather than travelling, so the student should not only be interested in experiencing life in London and Europe, but also wanting to participate in the program for academic reasons.

10. Overall Experience:

- a. My expectations of the program were very realistic. I knew it was going to be challenging academically, and that I was participating in a program where the focus was integrating within London and the school, rather than feeling like a tourist travelling around Europe. The only thing that really differed from my expectations was that I thought I would be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered at LSE, such as speakers, academic societies, and research, but the school offers so much that I had

less time to do extra activities than I wanted or thought I would have. However, I loved every second of my year in London, and given the opportunity to do it again I would say yes without a moment's hesitation.