



Sarah Linney – Exchange to Oswego State University, USA in 2009

In 2009 I went on international exchange to the State University of New York Oswego for their fall semester. The lead-up to a big overseas trip always seems to go by slowly, but when preparing for an international exchange it can seem like forever. There are the endless applications to fill and the tedious visa interviews. However once all that is completed the effort and time you put into your exchange will be worth it. International exchange is an opportunity to learn and experience new things in an environment and culture different to your own.

Travelling, before and after your exchange, is definitely an important aspect of your trip. Not only do you gain independence and maturity but you also learn how to handle crises and confront problems head-on. In July I left Sydney and flew to London where I met another friend who was on exchange. We did some sight-seeing in London for a week and then we went on a Contiki trip around Europe for two weeks which was amazingly fun. We then had another week in London and went to Brighton for a few days. My aunt also took me to see a "As You Like It" at the Globe Theatre which is definitely a must-see if you're in London during summer. My friend and I then parted ways as I headed by myself to New York City. I spent a week in New York seeing the Empire State Building, Central Park, the Statue of Liberty, Wall St, Times Square and many more quintessentially New York attractions. I then travelled to upstate New York to the small town of Oswego near the border to Canada. This town of eighteen thousand people is where I spent the next four months of my trip.

It was interesting to study in a foreign university that has different customs and methods of learning. In my International Politics subject we did a political simulation exercise that gave students new insight into political conflict resolution. In my Broadcast Performance subject I learnt how to verbally and physically present myself to a camera. I found that while the work was generally easier than CSU the volume of work was much denser. While studying at the State University of New York Oswego I also participated in the on-campus television and radio stations. I was the Sunday night co-anchor for the student-run television news and the world news reporter for the radio news weekly segment. I was also a movie reviewer and opinion columnist for the college newspaper. As a journalism student these experiences were invaluable, particularly due to the fact that these facilities and opportunities are not available at my university at home. These experiences also allowed me to decide what journalism strand to undertake once I returned to Charles Sturt.

Surprisingly, the differences between Australian culture and American culture are quite significant. There are clearly variations in language, style, etiquette and social interactions. However, its not so unfamiliar that you can't connect with people through common interests. The friends you make while on university exchange will ease your homesickness and make the experience ten times more rewarding. When undertaking exchange you will come across a wide-range of people and ideas. In some cases this is eye-opening and informative and in other instances its important to realise the

context and background of the person you're speaking to. As a potential journalist these delicate situations were good training in diplomacy and listening. As an exchange student from a different country a lot of people will have preconceived ideas about you in their mind. This is the idea of exchange, to broaden horizons and challenge stereotypes, so use these experiences as anecdotes or an opportunity to teach a friend about your country. Additionally many of the American students' ideas about Australians were based on Crocodile Dundee and Steve Irwin so it was pretty funny listening to them. As an exchange student you won't have any trouble meeting people and making friends as the Australian accent is an immediate icebreaker.

Another great thing about the State University of New York Oswego is its location. As it's so close to Canada I went on a road trip with three other friends to Montreal for a weekend. Montreal was amazing- a blend of Europe and America as all around us we could hear people speaking French. The exchange students also did a day trip to Niagara Falls. We rode on the Maid of the Mist and wore the iconic blue raincoats that I've seen in countless movies. Additionally, Oswego was only a four hour drive from New York City so I spent five days there over Thanksgiving with five other exchange students. We went ice-skating at Bryant Park, had a Thanksgiving dinner in Greenwich Village and drank many cups of warm apple cider.

I finished my exchange and travelled back to New York City for the third time to spend Christmas and New Years with some other exchange students. The day we caught the Greyhound bus to New York there was a massive snowstorm so we arrived to a New York covered in snow. Though we did get lots of snow in Oswego, which resulted in lots of snow fights and snow angels, there was something extremely cool about being in one of the busiest cities in the world and it being blanketed in the silence of snow. I spent the next two and a half weeks hanging out in New York City and eating a lot of Chinese food. On Christmas Day I had dinner with four other friends in Greenwich Village. For New Years Eve we decided to go to Central Park and watch the fireworks as we had heard that Times Square was too intense to attempt. The only problem with our plan was that it was snowing so while it was beautiful watching it snow while fireworks were going off it was extremely cold. I continued travelling for another 7 weeks visiting Washington DC, London, San Francisco and Los Angeles. That's the great thing about exchange your travelling opportunities seem endless...