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

**Pre-departure** include info about visa/passport arrangements, support from partner institution and CSU before you left.

The pre-departure period will feel like forever as you’re getting ready for your exchange. It will seem like there are endless amounts of forms and interviews. However, eventually you will get everything done and once you’re on exchange you’ll realise how worthwhile that entire organisation was. It is extremely important that as soon as you get your information package from your host university you set up your visa interview.

While there were no issues with my visa application it is a lengthy time-consuming process so you’ll want to start as soon as you can. The CSU Global staff is a big help during this process as it’s their job to know about all the forms and intricacies of the various application processes. Don’t be afraid to email or call Louise or any other CSU Global staff member as communicating with them will help you enormously throughout the pre-departure period.

**Travel** flight information eg best deals, flying tips, luggage restrictions or lack of.

I used frequent flyer points to buy an around-the-world ticket. However if you don’t have frequent flyer points at your disposable then an around-the-world ticket is still probably the best option if you plan to travel before and after your exchange. However, if you plan to just go to your host university’s country then a simple return ticket would be the best deal. Make sure you shop around before purchasing your ticket, don’t go to a specific carrier website, and instead go to a “flight compare” website that will list different carriers and their costs.

Luggage restrictions and weight limits will be your biggest enemy on your trip. Remember to pack just the basics and anything you don’t pack can always be bought over there. For some things, such as a hair dryer or winter jacket its better to just buy it over there rather than weighing down your luggage on the flight over there. A tip for girls, check before you bring it that your straightener is the right wattage for your host country as another girl packed a straightener from Australia and then realised when she was over here that it didn’t even work.

**Insurance** travel insurance, health insurance, medical tests/forms to be aware of

Insurance is extremely important- check before you buy your travel insurance whether your host university has mandatory health insurance. My university has compulsory health insurance so I didn’t worry so much about the health benefits for my travel insurance; instead I focused on their policy in regards to lost items and accidents. Also, you will probably need to get a plethora of vaccinations so make sure you start that process early as many vaccines have time restrictions and multiple shots.

**Campus** accommodation & meals recommendations, campus layout, accessibility

SUNY Oswego’s accommodation is really good - their dining halls have a pretty good range and while there is a lot of fatty food there is also vegetables and fruit provided with every meal. If you’re an exchange student you’ll want to be in Hart Hall. Not only is it in the middle of campus so it’s got a convenient location when the weather’s bad but it also houses all the other exchange students. While it is a little goody-goody, you can’t have any alcohol in Hart Hall unless you’re 21, it’s good if you’re underage and not allowed to have alcohol anyway. I recommend if you come to SUNY Oswego that you get the unlimited dining hall plan as then you can have unlimited access to dining hall. It’s too hard to organise food and to cook when you don’t have a car and you only have a barely furnished dorm kitchen.

**course information** subject list, restrictions, comparisons, pre-requisites, study advise

I’m doing a Bachelor of Communication (Journalism) so SUNY Oswego was a great opportunity for me as it has an incredible communications program. Not only does it have a TV station, radio station and newspaper on-campus but it also has lots of other opportunities to expand your media horizons. However, it’s really important that you register for classes
early as a lot of them have small class sizes and pre-requisites. I had a little bit of trouble registering for the classes I wanted as a lot of them were already full by the time I got my email login information.

Make sure you communicate with your exchange representative at your host university as my representative failed to send me my registration information until June when I emailed her wondering how to register. Subjects over here have a larger course-load however the assessments seem to be less strenuous and leniently marked.

**Transport public and around campus**

SUNY Oswego has a really good transport system. They have buses into town, though you could walk which would take around twenty minutes, that run every fifteen minutes or so. They also have buses around the university as the campus is quite sprawling. If you think you'll be using the bus a lot you might want to buy a semester pass which costs $15 or you can pay 75c per ride.

**Expenses University associated fees, personal expenses, exchange rates, where to shop, best prices, and money saving tips**

Most of the money you'll have to spend at university will be upfront fees like accommodation, meal plans and an internet fee. Throughout the semester you'll probably spend around $15 per week - depending on your spending habits. Weekend trips will also add to your expenses—though they’re definitely worth it. The exchange office here organised a few trips, one of the Thousand Islands and one to Niagara Falls, both of which I would recommend you do. The exchange rate at the moment is pretty good, the Australian dollar is pretty strong however it will have changed by the time you go on your exchange. When you get to Oswego go to Walmart to get all the little things for your dorm room, such as a lamp and washing detergent, as that’s where you’ll get the cheapest prices.

**Holiday travel destination ideas, tips**

I went to Europe before going on exchange to the USA. I thought that while I’m in the Northern Hemisphere I might as well travel. You’ll also have the opportunity to travel throughout your exchange on the weekends. I’ve been to Niagara Falls which was amazing and I also went on a road trip to Montreal. If you come to Oswego, Montreal is only four hours away and it is really worth the trip. Everyone speaks French and the Latin Quarter is amazing at night.

**Social activities university clubs, international student activities, sports**

SUNY Oswego has a lot of clubs that you can join, there’s a club fair at the beginning of term where you can see the variety of clubs. I didn’t join any clubs as I got involved in the student-run TV station, radio station and newspaper. However there are lots of opportunities to get involved at SUNY Oswego.

**Cultural information culture shock, language barriers (if any), do’s and don’ts**

I experienced more of a culture shock than I expected when I came to the US. I thought that since our television shows, music and movies were basically the same that I wouldn’t experience culture shock. However, there are a lot of little things that will remind you of how Australia is different to the US. Different names, phrases and social norms will surprise you.

For example the drinking culture is different here. Not only in terms of the legal drinking age and its ramifications but there’s also less casual social drinking in bars. There’s no bar on-campus here so the only options are house parties or an underage club downtown. Depending on your age and your preferences the social culture can be a bit monotonous. However, it can also be a lot of fun.
Weather what to prepare for, how to cope with extremes

The weather can get quite cold in Oswego. Up till November the weather is cold but manageable - you'll be able to survive with a few jumpers (hoodies are good as they also double as an umbrella). However it quickly gets extremely cold and it snows a lot. You'll need to purchase snow boots and a heavy winter jacket when you get here. It's also extremely windy as the wind comes off the lake that the university sits beside, it is important to layer as all the buildings are heated. Therefore pack a lot of t-shirts and long-sleeved t-shirts so that you can layer effectively.

What to bring from home/what not to bring luxuries to keep homesickness at bay, unnecessary items bought from home

What to bring:

- t-shirts and long-sleeved t-shirts
- jumpers
- a hooded jumper
- sheets and a towel (if your travelling beforehand - however you can buy them here from Walmart)
- scarfs
- beanie
- gloves
- jeans (a few pairs)
- pyjamas
- jacket
- toiletries
- shoes (boots are good for colder weather)
- girls - you'll only need one pair of heels as parties are very casual here.
- Laptop
- Camera
- Plug adapters
- Treats to remind you of home (Vegemite, Tim Tams etc)
- An Australian flag is always a nice reminder
- Photos - easier/cheaper to get from home if you want to pin them on your wall.
- Internet cable

What not to bring:

- alarm clock
- Unnecessary clothes (stuff you don’t wear on a daily basis).
- Hair dryer
- Hair straightener
- Mobile phone - you can just get a disposable cheap phone here
- Lamp
- Posters
- Pillow

What you may need to buy - accommodation needs (blankets, irons etc), clothing

- Sheets
- Towel
- Pillow case/Pillow
- Doona/duvet
- Posters
- Mobile phone
- Coat hangers
- Alarm clock
**Relationships** leaving old friends/making new, homesickness etc

Leaving friends and family is extremely hard but Skype is a miracle. It allows you to talk via video chat for free to anyone with a Skype account. Definitely download Skype before you leave Australia. You will get homesick but the time really flies by so it’ll seem like you weren’t here for very long at all before you’ll be flying home. Additionally it’s really easy to make new friends because the Australian exchange student status is a great conversation starter.