

## **Josie Rollin – Exchange to Oswego State University, USA in 2009**

My name is Josie Rollin and I am currently studying abroad at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Oswego. At Charles Sturt University I am currently at the end of my second year studying a BA Communications Theatre/Media, however here at SUNY Oswego I am a Cinema and Screen Studies, with subjects that are at a junior and senior level (third and fourth year levels). Below is a report I constructed about my Exchange journey thus far, in order to improve and promote the study abroad program. I use the word journey because from the beginning of the process to the end it is indeed a journey with many obstacles that need to be overcome, but with the most awarding benefits.

### ***Pre-Departure***

The pre-departure process is one of the hardest times an exchange student will face, it is also one of the longest of the stages. I personally feel that in order to arrange visa's and flights, the selection process needs to be hastened by moving forward the due dates. I remember a lot of waiting to know whether I have passed the next requirement, to find out that there are more to follow. I personally feel that I may have been able to save money on flights, if I hadn't found out that I was accepted into the program only 2 months before I was due to leave. I believe that this was also due to correspondence with SUNY Oswego, as it seemed part of the waiting was because they were on leave or where on their holidays.

The visa process was considerably easy, expensive, but easy, and after the interview at the consulate, I received my visa with in a week. I did find out something that may help future exchange students. The US representative at the consulate informed me that if I had put down that I was to leave on my British passport, I would not have to pay the \$500 for my visa. Regrettably I was not informed of this until it was too late.

I found that I got excellent support from both CSU and SUNY Oswego before I left, my emails were regularly returned with all my questions answered. However, I did learn that most of the organizing and arrangements had to be done by me, and this is not necessarily a bad thing, as I learnt so much through the whole process and it made me feel confident with the details and with my needs being met.

### ***Travel***

Organizing your travel arrangements is one of the most exciting parts of the exchange. For the exchange student it means that all there hard work and nearly a year of waiting their exchange trip is finally about to happen. We were advised that we should wait till we get our visa's before booking our flights. I really wish I hadn't done this, although I understand the risks involved. As mentioned before it wasn't long till I found out I was accepted to when I had to leave, although I knew there wouldn't be a problem with getting my visa I waited, and therefore I ended up paying more than I know a few other exchange students had paid. This is another reason why I believe the process (if possible) should be much faster, in order to save the university students as much money as possible.

Before I arrived at SUNY Oswego, I had organized to visit a friends in Vancouver Canada for a week. I had pre-arranged a stop over in Vancouver and then elongated it so I could do this. The study abroad program gave me this opportunity to see my friend again, and I know that other exchange students took advantage of the opportunity to travel the world as well. One of the most annoying aspects of traveling such a long distance (17hrs in total) is the plane journey itself. It is such a long time in a confined space, I advise future travelers to take reading material, charge ipods, and to sit back and watch the assortment of television shows and movies the airline has made available for you, but to not stay sitting for too long, take breaks and walk around the aircraft, this will help a thing called Deep Vein thrombosis which can be very painful and cause swelling of the legs, so try to keep your feet moving.

## ***Insurance***

There are of course the normal insurance payments, such as travel insurance (which I suggest to shop around to get the best deal), health insurance, etc. However the strange thing about SUNY Oswego is that we have to get the schools insurance, in order for us to benefit from the medical facilities (which aren't very good...). I don't quite understand the whole insurance part of my exchange program, all I know is that SUNY Oswego's health insurance is a must! Exchange students get a special kind of insurance, that I can't explain, but it has come in very handy! Due to the extreme change in weather, climate and living circumstances, I have found myself being constantly sick with something. I have even had a trip to the hospital, and if it wasn't for the help of the SUNY international staff and the insurance, I would be in a considerable amount of debt. Get the insurance!!

## ***Campus***

The campus here at SUNY Oswego is amazing. It not only has all the necessary facilities for your chosen degree including professional editing suits and recording studios, but there are other facilities that accommodate to the needs of a college student. There is an accessible Starbucks café in the center of campus, an ice hockey rink that regularly holds open skate, every week there are movies shown in the building called the campus center, and there is a beautiful lake where we have spent many nights out with a bonfire, and that is just to name a few.

I live in a residence called Hart Hall, which is a global living center, and in order for us to live here we have to pass the IST course which entails attending a certain number of presentations and discussions to which we have to write a report on as well as 10 hours of community service, in order to get the credit. Many students here at SUNY Oswego, prefer not to live in Hart Hall due to this extra credit. Although yes it is a bit annoying, but it is relatively easy, and it does expand peoples minds about international issues and relations. It is also the best looking out of the residences, it is clean and there are a lot of activities for the students, such as pool and ping pong tables, a movie theatre, and computer labs.

Every student is given an option regarding food. Meals are not required for where you live. There are several meal plans you can choose from, depending how much you eat, and how much you don't want to eat. It does appear that the more meals you choose the more worthwhile it is for your money. I have chosen, along with most people I know, the unlimited meal plan, this is 19 meals per week (including weekends) or as many meals as you like during the 5 dining halls operating hours. I recommend the unlimited plan, as it is only around \$20 more expensive than the option below it, however due to classing schedules this can often come in very handy.

As a film major, I have been amazed with the facilities that allow me to produce whatever I want. We are able to sign out professional filming equipment, including HD cameras, tripod's, wireless and boom microphones, as well as a professionally equipped editing suite where all the computers are installed with the latest editing software, and staff on hand that are all committed to helping you create your project to the best of your ability.

I have found that the lecture halls here, are stereotypically American, they are exactly what you see in movies and are fully equipped with the latest software to maximize the students learning.

It is a great campus!

## ***Transport***

Transport around Oswego is pretty simple. Unfortunately there are only buses as Oswego does not have a train station. There is a main bus stop outside the campus centre, the buses can take you around campus, into town, or even Syracuse (approximately 1.5hr ride – 45 if you drive). These buses are usually pretty frequent, and there are timetables posted all around campus. For holidays SUNY Oswego organizes buses to New York City and Long

Island, as many of its students comes from there, these however fill up really quickly and only run on a certain day. If you want to go to NYC for the weekend, you either have to catch a bus to Syracuse and catch a coach from there, or catch a plane from Syracuse. Unfortunately Oswego is a pretty isolated town, if you want to go anyway it does take a lot of time and planning.

### ***Course Information***

The course I study here is one of the reasons why I have loved this experience so much. I was warned before I came here that it was unlikely that I would get into all the subjects I wanted. I found that this was certainly not the case. As an exchange student, and particularly from Australia (as Americans - the ones I have met love Australians) I had professors offering me subjects that were not available to every student. The professors eagerly and easily put me into their 'full' or 'pre-requisite' classes with no hesitation. This was fantastic, but at the same time very daunting, as a Theatre/Media student back at CSU, little attention is given to the filming aspect, and I regarded myself as a beginner, I informed my professors of this, however they still put me into junior and senior level classes.

I attend BRC 465 Dramatic Film Production, BRC 445 Advanced Television Production, CAS 391 Practicum Applied Filmmaking and ENG 386 The Cinema. With only 1 theory class, a lot of my classmates think I am insane undergoing 3 practical classes, and yes most times I agree. My professors wanted to bombard me with practical classes so I can get the most out of this experience. It has been hard to keep up to date with work, but the professors have been very sympathetic towards my situation, and it is all going well.

Although it is very stressful, I could not imagine doing only 2 or even 1 practical class, as I have been given this opportunity to learn what I went to university to learn, and I am very great full that the professors have put so much faith in me, that I have been determined and driven to show them what I am made out of, and I feel that what I have learnt here I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

### ***Expenses***

When regarding that you are spending you Australia money, it does feel that you have to spend a lot here. Thankfully we only have to pay for the subjects that we would be paying for if we were doing them in Australia, so I regard it as saving money, I am getting the same education as the American students, but they have to pay a lot more. The majority of expenses are for the accommodation, which amounts to more for 1 semester here, than a whole year back home, and also for the plane ticket. I saved for a year to be able to afford all of this, and am so great full for the help of a scholarship, which really is a load off the shoulders. I am unable to find the exact price, but it ended up costing me around \$9000 Australian, which includes accommodation, meal plans, IT Levy, laundry level, and more.

Prices on course books are also very expensive and at the beginning of the semester they are hard to come by as they are often sold out. A way around this is to talk to your professor and explain this situation. I did this with one of my professors, and explained my finances as well as having to take them home due to the plane's weight limit to my professor, and she lent be the 2 books needed for this course for the whole semester. I recommend doing this as it saved me a few hundred dollars just for those 2 books.

Personal expenses are harder to think about. There is of course money for alcohol, food (if you're not on an unlimited meal plan), coffee, bus/taxi into town, entry into clubs and bars etc. I have found that booking accommodation in NYC is very expensive and you must save for this as well as transportation, food is also very expensive for when you visit the city. The best prices... I have to say Walmart, although this is a small town and there aren't any fashionable clothes stores or supermarkets, you can basically get everything cheaper anyway from Walmart. Money saving tips, although yes we are here to have fun and enjoy this experience, but you do have to keep an eye on what you are spending your money on. Looking back, I don't know how I have spent the money I have, but that is one of the reasons why I saved for so long.

## ***Holiday Travel***

Sometimes as night if you are standing at the lake looking at the horizon you can see the glow of lights from Canada. Canada is so close to us. Some friends and I traveled to Montreal for a weekend, which was only a 5 hour drive. It is a beautiful individualistic city, it made me feel that I not only left America but I arrived in France. The city hasn't been made to look 'new', there are cobbled streets and little alleyways that make you feel that you have stepped into another world; as well that everyone there speaks French. Montreal is definitely a destination must.

New York City is an obvious choice, although I have not spent much time there myself, I am spending 2 weeks there, and from what I have seen in the 2 days that I was there, 2 weeks does not seem to be a long enough time.

A tip for future exchange students, don't get carried away with wanting to go everywhere, remember that it is expensive to travel and is hard with you are luggage, and to fit it around school makes catching up very difficult.

## ***Social Activities***

SUNY Oswego provides its students with many social activities through out the semester. The college provides its students with carnivals, movie nights, ice-skating, masquerade balls, and clubs where students can get to know other students with the same interests. The most stereotypically American social club is of course the Greek system, where American and international students can either join a Fraternity or a Sorority.

Joining the Greeks is a time consuming commitment, and it is not recommended for an exchange student who is only studying here for one semester, as pledging (a mandatory program that takes away every minute of free time, and even time to sleep, to demonstrate your commitment to your sorority) can go for a few months. Although it is a very good way to meet new people and make new friends, there really isn't a point in joining as you will have to leave soon after being initiated and won't be able to wreak the benefits of being a brother or sister.

Pledging became a priority for me whilst I was joining Omicron Xi, a local sorority, but unfortunately academics had to come first due to my obligations for Charles Sturt University. I found that the sisters took the news well and understood why I could not continue pledging. Unlike an American student who de-pledges and become an outcast from the Greek system, I was and still am welcome to attend to their mixers and events and through this I have definitely made some close friends. Once again being an international student has its advantages.

The Hart Hall residence often creates events for the international students, we have had competitions for the best dinner dish, to disco's and parties where the staff have gone out and bought international food to make it feel like home. The staff at Hart Hall has really gone out of their way to make us international students feel as welcome and as at home as possible.

There are also a diverse range of religious groups that everyone is welcome to join, and within these there are camps and other events created for bonding.

Ice Hockey is the main sport here at SUNY Oswego, and going to the home games is a huge social activity where everyone gets together to support Team Lakers.

## ***Weather***

When arriving in the fall semester you are arriving after summer and so it is still quite warm and humid but it is nothing compared to an Australian summer. The winter however, is a lot colder from what I am used to. As the campus is situated on the lake there is a constant breeze that can make the cold weather seem unbearable. Oswego is also prone to snow, so warm clothes such as scarfs, gloves, beanies, coats, thermals are a must, as well as

gumboots so you can walk freely around campus. To cope with the extreme cold, all buildings are equipped with heating so it really isn't that bad, until you have to go outside.

### ***What to bring/what to buy***

Sorting out what you need and want to bring is a very difficult process, especially with the airlines luggage weight limit and with your financial situation. I wasn't sure what I would be able to afford for when I got here, especially after paying for accommodation so I brought with me pillows and bed sheets, that I plan to throw out before my departure. I suggest future students who plan to come to SUNY Oswego to pack clothes for summer, as they weigh lighter and you can send them home when the seasons change, I suggest for students to buy winter clothes here, as they are designed to withstand the winter season here.

An important thing for future exchange students to remember is the difference in the power wattage. Not only do you need to buy power converters, but due to the difference in wattage, some electronics such as hair dryer, hair straighteners and external hard drives will not work. As for personal luxuries, I suggest for exchange students to bring photos of friends and family, not only to keep them close to you, but they will come useful as room decorations. As for that, anything that you want to bring with you, you can, or you can buy everything you need here.

### ***Relationships***

The relationships that I have developed whilst being here at SUNY Oswego are one of the reasons why this experience has been so amazing! Everyone is so friendly, not only do you make friends with Americans, but one of the perks of living in an international building, you make friends with people from all over the world. I would say it is harder to leave the friends you have made here than when leaving Australia, as there is the unknowing of when you are going to see them again, but you know when you will be returning to Australia.