

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and semester for exchange**

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2023/2024

Exchange university

University Of Washington

Degree programme

Computer Science

Joining The Husky Pack at the University of Washington

Before departure

Ever since starting university I knew I wanted to study abroad as the peak of COVID-19 pandemic made it hard to consider travel. While I knew I wanted to conduct an exchange I was never certain as to where. I considered several options like the prestigious Lausanne or ETH but ultimately I wanted to experience American culture and opted to apply to several universities in the US with the University of Washington (UW) as my first choice. I chose UW for many reasons, first and foremost due to the good reputation of its computer science department. UW also had the most classes that I was personally interested in, containing many courses covering fundamental required subjects as well as more niche and specialised topics! One course that really defined a great deal of my time during my exchange was the Animation Capstone Course, which required an early application with a portfolio in June. This course lasted the entire year of my exchange where students were tasked with ideating, planning and finishing an animated short-film after learning the pipeline!

Before departing the most arduous process by far was applying for the J1-visa and DS-2019 documents required for the exchange program. My biggest piece of advice for those wishing to undergo this process for any university in the US is to be as attentive as possible in every step of the visa process as documents may take a while to be processed from the US so it is important to fill out and send them well in advance. The university also required attending students to have proof of Measles, Mumps, and Meningococcal (MMR) vaccinations. This can be done after arriving in Seattle but it is easier (and cheaper) to get the shots before leaving Sweden. I also made sure to obtain an international driver's licence so that I would be able to drive in the US and Canada.

Upon arrival

I arrived in Seattle on the 19th of September, the earliest date to move into my on-campus housing. It was also possible to apply for an early move-in time but the default date still allowed me to participate in a lot of "dawg-daze" events. These were a huge collection of activities that students could participate in that went on from the 18th-27th of September, ending when course classes properly start. This meant that I had a little over a week to get acclimated with Seattle and the campus before jumping into studies! I would also strongly recommend international students to take a look at "FIUTS" which is an organisation that arranges events for incoming and existing international students. These events were a great way to explore both the Seattle city, bay area and mountains via hikes, scavenger hunts and other activities during my first few months at UW!

Financials

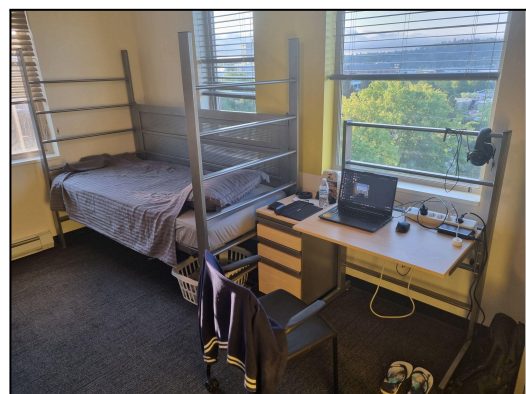
Studying abroad in America is expensive, there is no real way around that. I received two scholarships from KTH to help with funding my exchange studies. The first covered a portion of the flight costs, however as Seattle is very far from Sweden the flight costs exceeded the given amount. The second scholarship was a general scholarship for students studying computer science and helped offset costs in a small way. As I decided to live on campus, accommodation and living expenses were covered by a

single payment and I was unable to save money by cooking for myself. I would recommend students that want to save money to seek housing outside the university campus. That option is made more feasible as all students are also required to pay fees for the privilege of unlimited public transportation within the Seattle area. In the end I was able to fund my own living expenses through CSN as well as money that I had saved up (totalling around ~170.000 kr for living expenses for the full year).

Accommodation

I had applied for on-campus housing to avoid having to worry about housing before arriving in Seattle. Overall, barring the high costs, my experience living with campus housing at the University of Washington was positive. It took me most of my stay to eventually get bored of the cafeteria food, and the amenities you are given access to like gyms, maker-spaces and study-rooms are well maintained. Applications for on campus housing were done by ranking 3 choices for where to live on campus and then being assigned them based on availability.

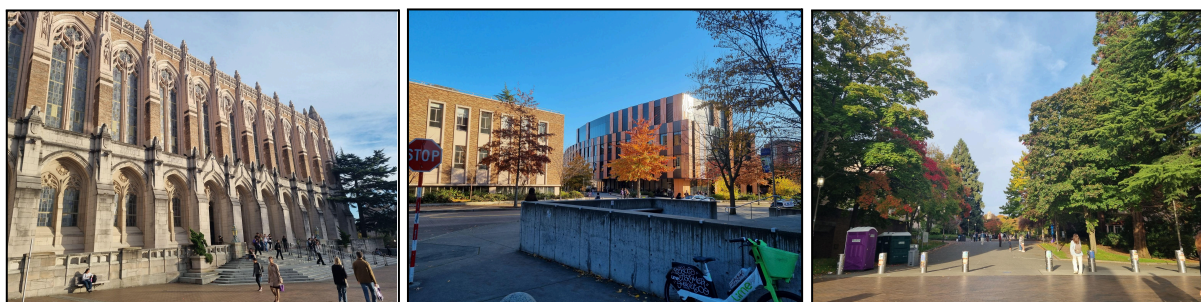
I did not get my first preference, and instead got my second which was a “double” (a room with one other roommate) in Maple Hall, a fairly new building located on the West-side of the campus. I chose this in part for the reduction in costs and because I wanted the traditional American college roommate experience. The primary differences between the dorms are location and age. Dorms located on West campus feel more as if you are living in the city, but are still only a 10-15 minute walk to anywhere on campus. North campus dorms are completely embedded into the campus and feel more like a “bubble”, a bit safer in addition to being very far away from any regular stores or shops.



To reiterate, if you are trying to save money, do not go for on-campus housing but other than that the process of moving in and out is largely painless. Just remember to pay close attention during checkout and inspection as it is easy to get fined for missing steps!

University and studies

As UW is located in the USA all of the courses were naturally given in English. The university is huge with over four times the number of enrolled students compared to KTH. Apart from the year being segmented into 3 quarters instead of 2 terms, courses were largely carried out the same as they were in KTH. “Canvas” is also used by UW so the transition over was easy. Furthermore, similar to KTH, many professors record their lectures so many courses can be taken asynchronously.



UW’s campus is also very large and wonderful to get lost in. It has a lot of vegetation, beautiful architecture and is well-lit at night. On your way between classes you are bound to see many squirrels, ducks, rabbits and even some coyotes so you will never truly feel alone. There are also often events going on in the main courtyards (Red Square, Quad or HUB), as well as a number of great places to study such as the Suzallo and Allen libraries. Before going on the exchange I had not given much consideration to the campus but it was definitely a highlight and should not be overlooked!

Courses

During my time at UW I found that 3 courses per quarter (~13 local credits) with 2 being more technically oriented provided an adequate workload. The courses I chose were based on personal interest as well as those that fulfilled requirements for my degree at KTH.

My favourite experience from my exchange was definitely my time at the Animation Capstone, which consisted of three courses CSE 458, 460 and 464 that were applied to separately in June. Each course is taught during each of the three quarters with the end goal of being able to complete an animated short-film. You get access to a computer lab all year round and get to experience something extremely close to the pipeline used during actual animation production. This includes everything from conceptualizing, storyboarding, 3d-modelling, rigging, lighting and animation, all culminating in a final screening of the short film. Through this course I managed to make a lot of close friends and really experience a line of work that I would otherwise not see myself engaging with.



I took a number of other interesting courses during my time at UW. CSE 484, Computer Security, was an engaging course covering a broad range of topics with a lot of exercises on performing offensive attacks a.k.a “hacking”. CSE 455, Computer Vision, covered various methods used in computer vision and image processing. Both of these courses were great and not overly challenging so they worked well being paired with more intensive courses such as CSE 446 Machine learning or the Capstone. CSE 446 was a very challenging course that covered a lot of key theoretical concepts surrounding machine learning. I enjoyed the course however a large portion of it was highly theoretical covering various proofs and guarantees for various methods. It is definitely a course I recommend taking for those interested, however it may not be geared towards people who want to learn how to practically and directly use machine learning tools in their own projects. Another course, CSE 473 Artificial Intelligence, was a fun class that covered a number of more traditional AI algorithms in the context of controlling the enemies and player in a pacman game.

Some courses I do not particularly recommend taking are CSE 493x Web Browsers as well as CSE 461 Computer Networks, as large portions of both courses had to do with learning how to interface with systems specifically used for teaching instead of more practical application.

City and country

Compared to Stockholm, Seattle fashion and dress standards were a lot more relaxed. It was common to see people walking around with anything from a dress-shirt and tie to rainbow sweaters and crocs. Before arriving a lot of people had warned me about the “Seattle Freeze” describing how people in Seattle may not be as friendly and amicable towards new people. I did not experience this at all, and was able to make a lot of local friends. I was also happy to see that there was a very large and prevalent LGBTQ+ community in Seattle! The only minor culture shock I experienced was with regards to the expectations surrounding tipping at restaurants as well tax being applied after purchase and not being included in the listed price for most things. Other than that it is often hard to remember that Seattle is over 7 thousand kilometres away from Sweden.

Leisure and social activities

In my spare time I tried to take part in as many events as possible, especially during the first few months. These events included hiking with other exchange students and FIUTs organisation, going to watch american football games (which I would recommend visitors try and experience at least once) as well as kayaking and bowling. The university also hosted quarterly “maker’s-fairs” where students got to sell art that they create, usually located in the husky union building (HUB). I also participated in the board-game club and HGN (husky gaming nation). Outside of campus I did a lot of sightseeing around the city to Pike’s Place, Bellevue, Capitol Hill, International District and the Seattle Space Needle. I also had a lot of fun attending local pop-culture conventions such as Comic-Con and Sakura-Con!



Sustainability

Seattle is one of the few cities in the US where it is feasible to navigate solely via public transportation. The city's underground "light-rail" allows for quick and easy access to all main parts of the city with a large network of buses helping to fill any remaining gaps. However, the city is not very bicycle friendly consisting of many hills with little to no signage. No specific action was taken on the part of UW in promoting sustainability in a meaningful way with the responsibility instead being put on students to take action and try to live sustainably.

Other recommendations and observations

For any prospective exchange be sure to focus on studies but remember to have fun! It is easy to get caught up in trying to get high grades but It is important to make the most of your limited time. Be sure to take the opportunity and travel to other places in the US if you find yourself in an american exchange program. I was able to visit Los Angeles, Las Vegas and New York during breaks and it was a lot of fun!

My trip to Seattle has been an unforgettable experience where I made new friends, fostered new interests and learned a lot and I would wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone intrigued by anything listed in this travel report!