

随想

Hard and So Enjoyable

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Student exchange program

Ochanomizu University has exchange partnerships with some universities in Korea, Taiwan, England and Australia. Exchanges enable third and fourth year or graduate students to study abroad at these universities for one year. In many cases the exchange students would be exempt from the international student fees. Subjects studied are often credited towards their Ochanomizu University degree.

As I have been interested in studying overseas, I applied for the program and was accepted as an exchange student to Monash University in Melbourne, Australia for a year starting July, 2001. Two other students were also sent there at the same time. Although the classes and assignments are very difficult, the classes are interesting, which makes it more enjoyable and different from Ochanomizu University. Also, the place where I am staying itself is enjoyable and displaying some interesting dimensions of Australian society.

Monash University

Monash University is one of the largest universities in Australia with eight campuses including those in Malaysia and South Africa. It has ten faculties, and about 7,000 academic and general staff. Over 44,000 students attend Monash, with an international student population of 9,000 coming from more than 100 countries. I am studying at Clayton campus, which is the largest and main campus of Monash.

I belong to the Arts Faculty where the School of Geography and Environmental Science is located. Since the university itself is very large, a wide range of subjects is offered and fortunately exchange students are able to take any of them. I chose some subjects of geography and took some from other areas as well.

The so called 'hand book' which contains all the subjects offered in the year, is not distributed to students. Instead, when the students select the subjects that they take in that year, they should access the university's webpage and check the contents of the subjects. Even the enrollment of subjects are performed and changed online, and the academic

results can be checked in the same way. This system did surprise me a lot because it is totally different from our university. So-called 'IT revolution' might well suppose this kind of convenience.

Usually, one subject taken in a semester counts for 6 credit points and a student take 4 or more subjects in a semester. One subject has one or two lectures (1-2 hours) and one or two tutorials or practical classes a week. Tutorials or practicals are similar to seminars in Japanese universities. The assessment consists of major essays and/or an exam. To give an idea of what the classes are actually like, I will introduce two geography subjects that I took in my first semester.

Australian physical environments. This subject was provided for the first year students of Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science. It provides a basic knowledge of physical geography and environmental sciences as well as related subjects like botany, zoology, ecology, earth sciences and atmospheric science. As widely known, the Australian environment has many distinctive characteristics. In this subject, present Australian landscapes, biota and climate, as well as the paleo-environment and events, were explained. Several areas of physical geography, such as biogeography, climatology, or geomorphology were covered in 26 lectures and some practicals held by 7 lecturers.

A field trip was an especially good opportunity to view the concepts and techniques communicated in the classroom and laboratory in a 'real world' situation. The field camp of this subject was held at a mountain region called Rawson Village in eastern Victoria, which is three to four hour drives from Melbourne. About 100 students traveled in buses driven by the lecturers to the site. We stayed in bunk houses for three nights, in which time we observed and had lectures about the Victorian alpine environment. Most of the activities in the field camp were held outside. Students were divided into some groups and had different activities and excursions of geomorphology, biogeography, and climatology turn by turn.

In excursions of geomorphology, the unique

landforms made by fluvial erosion, weathering, and accumulation of lava were introduced. The site of the field camp was located in Mt. Baw Baw, and had a considerable local relief energy made by the Thomson River meandering through the valley. The river has been dissecting the landform for vast periods of time at various rates. Therefore, the rock which is presently exposed at the valley floor is very old. The students were asked to observe the relief, sketch the valley's cross section, and calculate the rate of fluvial erosion.

After participating in all activities, we had to complete a field paper including not only the summary of observation in each area of study but also some calculations. All the students cooperate with each other to fill all the questions, which was a good opportunity to talk to many people. Overall, this trip provided a great firsthand understanding of Australian physical environment as well as an opportunity to make new friends and to discuss with lecturers.

Applied geography and field studies. This subject was for second and third year students to train the methods for field studies of human geography. The classes were rather small containing less than 30 students, and therefore we were asked to communicate with the lecturer and with each other, both within and outside the classes. In the lectures, characteristics of information, focusing especially on qualitative data rather than quantitative, were introduced. Then in the practicals, which consisted mainly of group work, through completing a series of research, the student learnt skills to collect, deal with, and present geographical information.

Each student firstly chose one of Melbourne's Local Government Areas (LGA's) as one's field and the main topic of the research. The research involved three assignments, 'Data analysis' to analyze census data and find possible issues in the area, 'Delivery of questionnaire' to design and hand out questionnaires, and 'Interview practice' to arrange and practice an interview.

These activities were quite hard for me. First, since I had no idea about the geography of Melbourne, it was not easy to set the field and topic for my research. Then the lecturer kindly suggested Kingston area near the campus. And I set the following two topics according to my interest in the uniqueness of Australian coastal environment:

1. How does its proximity to the beach affect the

residents in Kingston?

2. What does the government of Kingston do about coastal management?

The first assignment to analyze census data was not too hard because I could work on that by myself and for as long time as I wanted using a software package. However, in the second one, questionnaire delivery, I had to go out to the town of Kingston with my group and ask passing strangers to participate in our survey. At that time, since I felt difficulty in oral communication, I was so nervous about the assignment that I regretted having chosen this subject. Yet, with great help from the group mates, I could manage to complete ten questionnaires.

In the next assignment to practice an interview, I had an interview with an executive of Victorian Coastal Government which is one of the institutions of state government. I used emails to arrange the interview, and one of my group mates helped me to call him for confirmation. During the interview, the informant was highly motivated and I could enjoy the interview. However, afterwards, there was time consuming work to transcribe the taped 40 minute interview, distinguishing useful information for my topic.

Overall, the emphasis of this subject was placed on the research methodology rather than the findings. In the methodology, the formal process and ethical consideration were noted: we were asked to provide the informants with a formal letter of explanation signed by the lecturer, and to pay much attention to make them feel comfortable during our research. Although the communication in the activities brought me much stress, all of them resulted in great lesson.

Essays. The grade is determined mainly by the marks of essays and examinations. The essay here seemed rather different from the ones I used to write in Ochanomizu University; it should be a kind of academic writing and there are fixed rules and patterns. Not only the content of the essay but also the form and presentation is strictly marked. Students have to do sufficient research, which is mostly reading, to collect information and evidence, and present their own idea in the proper form.

Although this was not very familiar to me, fortunately the university provides the Language Learning Service which helps students mainly with their essay writings, from choosing relevant references to writing formal English. Furthermore, I could have

individual consultation time with the staff, whom I could ask for some advice and check on my draft. I took great advantage of this system and got all the subjects passed with rather good marks.

Thus, I managed to deal with the classes and assignments in first semester with great help of many people. And finally I could get 24 credits in total. I can hardly believe this, because at first my English ability did not allow me to understand the lecturer's speech giving homework for next week.

Melbourne

Now I am going to introduce the place where I am living. The Clayton campus is located in a suburb of Melbourne, which is one of the biggest cities in Australia. I am staying at the university's on-campus accommodation named as Halls of Residence, which has a number of overseas students mainly from Asian countries including myself. There are chances to recognize that the way of thinking and living varies according to the nationality or background.

The city of Melbourne is one of the best hangouts for students to spend their weekends with their friends. Since Monash University is located in a suburb-Clayton, which is far from the city, people find that it is not so easy to get to the city. We usually go to the city by bus to the station and then by train to the city, which takes about one hour in total. The transportation system in Melbourne is different from the one operated in Tokyo. One of the biggest differences is that trains, trams, and the bus system is totally integrated as one system, which allows passengers to change from trams to trains and then to bus on the one ticket called 'Metcard'. Zone system that divides Melbourne into three zones for public transport is applied and the travel fares depend both on the zone of travel and the amount of time needed for the travel. For instance, when I want to go to the city from the Clayton campus for the whole day, I will only be required to purchase a daily ticket in Zone 1 area (AUD \$5.10, which is equivalent to JPY 357 Yen). This means that I can ride on any of the transportation tools, including buses, trams and trains, unlimitedly within that day for that price. On the contrary, purchasing a ticket from one destination to the other is a 'must' when people want to travel by public transportation in Japan. Let say, if you wanted to travel from Myogadani to Oyama using Marunouchi

line and Tobutojo line, it charges 300 yen via Ikebukuro in just one way. (160 Yen is charged from Myogadani to Ikebukuro; 140 Yen will then be charged from Ikebukuro to Oyama). In comparison, the Melbourne Transportation system sounds more economical and convenient, doesn't it? Travelers have to be aware of the fact that somehow, especially during the holiday, the trains in Melbourne are not as frequent as those in Tokyo. Travelers need to be cautious about this because once they have missed, for instance, a train, they probably need to wait for at least one or even longer to the next one.

Though it sounds pretty complicated to get to the city from Clayton Campus, once you have arrived, the surroundings in the city are attractive enough just to walk along the street, seeing its scenery and the passing people. Walking in the city, or any other part of Melbourne, one can see people of various origins by the appearance. Let me give you a brief about the immigration history:

After World War II, because of the proximity to Asia, a number of immigrants came from Asian countries, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, and so forth. As can also be seen in Japan, there is a Chinatown where the language heard is mainly Chinese.

Although there were some conflicts between the people who originally lived and those who newly came, now it enjoys its diversity as a multicultural society. Here, newcomers, especially those who have different skin or/and hair color, are not regarded as foreigners. However, this concept is not yet common in Japan. The diversity in Australia surprised me a lot since I had expected Australia to be a country of Western people, but, in fact, it is a melting pot.

Like this, having finished a semester, I am fully enjoying the study in Monash University as an exchange student and life in Melbourne. I still have another semester in Monash. I would like to make it fruitful, even more so than the last one so that I will be able to put the experience to good account in the later study back in Ochanomizu University. Finally, if any students are interested in this exchange program, please feel free to contact me.

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