

## **Exchange Report – Spring 2019**

### **University of Maryland, College Park**



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## **Monthly Activity Log**

### January

I arrived Washington, DC a few days before the orientation for international students to visit my relatives. The weather was very cold, it was snowing a lot. I am glad I got a big down jacket prepared in advance. At the orientation, I met a lot of other exchange students from all around the world. The exchange program included a trip to DC where we visited the United States Capitol and the Washington Monument. Although the weather was very cold, there was some sunshine and it was nice to walk around in the day. One interesting thing was that there was a government shutdown at that time, so all the museums which are originally free to enter were closed to the public for three weeks. It made me realize the impact that political events could have on the wider society, and tourism in particular.



### February

I went to my first inter-university basketball match. Although I don't usually watch sports, it was really fun to watch the teams play in live, in the lavish xfinity center built just for UMD Terrapins basketball teams. As one of the Big 10 schools, athletics are a big deal within the UMD Terps community. This can be seen by the well-rehearsed marching band, big television screens starring the team members as if they were real star athletics, and the massive cheering student audience who would still make time for the games despite their busy schedules to show their support to the athletic teams. The entertainments in the intervals between games were particularly interesting; there were mascots and costumed characters and live interaction with the audience. The atmosphere was so full of energy that it would cheer you up on any ordinary day.



Despite the cold, freezing weather, I joined an adventure trip to the Appalachian Trail for winter backpacking. It was fun to trek in the snow with like-minded students from UMD, and to spend a night together around a warm campfire in the wilderness, with freshly wrapped burritos. Definitely a memorable experience.





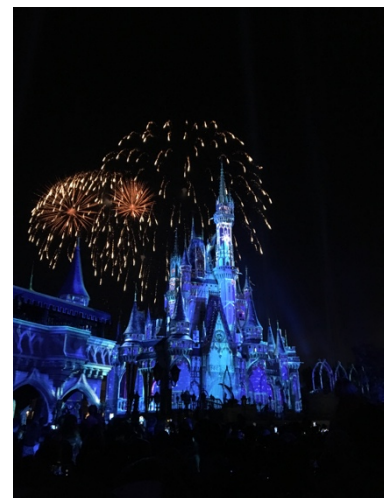
## March

I went to San Francisco for a week to interview for an internship. During that time, I met up with my cousins who are living there. It was good to leave Maryland for a while and experience a different city. I visited Stanford University and the Golden Gate Bridge. Fisherman Wharf was also really nice, I spent a night walking along the coast and around the shops, having seafood



and experiencing the San Francisco cable car system, which is the world's last manually operated system. It was really fun to go down the steep roads while enjoying the beautiful night view on the side.

School was busier the two weeks before spring break, with more assignments and tests, but it was still a lot better than semesters at HKUST in my opinion. During spring break, I went to Orlando in Florida. I spent a day at Celebration, but it wasn't that fun because people there are mostly elderly, retired people, and there weren't much to do. However, Disney Springs in the evening was fun. There was live music in the bars, and a hot air balloon ride that you could take. However, when I went the weather was too bad so I missed out on that experience. The next days I went to Disney World and Universal Studios with some other exchange students. Disney World had a surprisingly large number of kids visiting, which made it more like a playground for children, however, if you ever dreamt of being a prince or princess you should still visit, it did feel quite magical, particularly during the fireworks show at night which made me cry because it was really touching and beautiful! Disney World is a place where dreams can come true, and where goodness and purity always win.



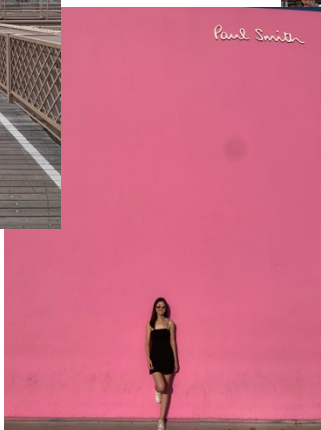
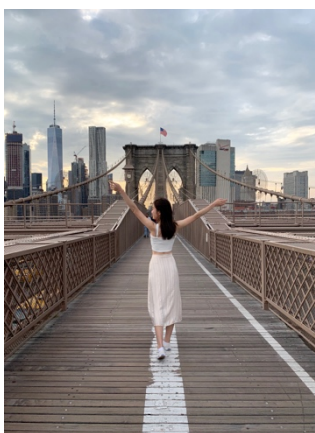
## April

School was less busy in the weeks right after mid-term, and it took some time before things started to pick up again. A highlight of the month was definitely the spring cherry blossoms in Washington DC, they were so beautiful and perfect for nice photos! It is a must-go. If you want to avoid the crowds, try going early in the morning and avoid weekends. Towards the end of the month, my friend visited me and we toured around DC together. I really enjoyed riding the e-scooters, they were fun as they could go very fast, but be careful of the traffic!



## May

In the first week of May I made a short trip to New Orleans. I loved the city so much! It has a very special culture, from the architecture to the food to the famous street canal, and of course also the vibrant night life at Bourbon Street and Frenchman Quarter. If you like culture and music, you should visit. It was one of my most favourite trips in the US. After the trip, I had to start preparing for the final examinations, which took place in mid-May. I didn't spend too much time studying as I found the exams quite easy to handle. After my exams I travelled for a couple of weeks in the US before coming back to Hong Kong. I had the best time of my life.





## **General Exchange Information**

### **1. Visa Procedures**

A J-1 Visa is usually required to complete the exchange program in the US. You can go to UMD's website to find out detailed instructions on how to apply for the visa. Basically, once you have received your login information to iTerp, you have to apply for a DS-2019 form. Then you have to make the SEVIS payment online, and make a visa appointment at the U.S. embassy. The whole process would take 1-2 months so start the application process earlier.

### **2. Orientation Activities**

There was a 3-day orientation for exchange students the week before semester started. The talks tell you everything you need to know about being an exchange student at UMD, including campus and class information, health insurance, course registration etc. You also get to meet other exchange students and make some friends before classes start. There were also optional tours to DC and IKEA.

### **3. International Services & Activities**

If you have any questions regarding your visa application and exchange in general, you may contact Aileen Evans, who is the exchange coordinator. For questions related to registration of BMGT courses, you may contact Greg Rafal. The ISSS is also a good place to enquire about any issues relating to being an international student, for instance your eligibility for on-campus employment.

### **4. Accommodation**

There are different types of accommodation at UMD, each with different prices. You can find detailed information with photos on the UMD website. I stayed in a single room in an apartment in Leonardtown Hall, shared two other students. We also have quite a big kitchen to ourselves. Leonardtown Hall is a little bit far from the business school but it is very quiet. The only downside is you cannot choose your flatmates, so how good your experience turns out really depends on who your flatmates are. Although you cannot choose which type of accommodation to have, you can express your preference through sending an e-mail in advance. I did that and they allocated me the exact type of room I wanted. They will most likely do so if you ask in advance.

### **5. Course Registration**

For business courses, you would need to enroll through the business school advisor. For common core courses, you would have to enroll yourself. You will get an e-mail from UMD about course registration after you are admitted, and they will give you the instructions on how to enroll in the courses. Just make sure you check your e-mails. There is also an add-drop period like at HKUST, but something that's different is that you can still withdraw from a course way after the add-drop period (in April). The grades for that course would not be included in your CGA calculation, but a "W" will be shown on your transcript for that course.

### **6. Teaching & Assessment Methods**

Course	Information
BMGT404 Essential Data Skills for Business Analytics	Equivalent Course: ISOM3400 Instructor: Wei Chen Workload: 6 individual assignments, 1 team project, 2 midterm exams Difficulty: 5/10

		<p>This is essentially an introduction to Python course. It teaches you the basics of programming through the Python language. The professor teaches at a very slow pace so it was easy to follow in class. The assignments are alright, with a mix of straightforward and more tricky questions. The content in the first half of the course is very easy and doesn't require much work but the second half is a bit more difficult. For the team project the professor is quite lenient so it's not hard to get a good grade.</p>
BMGT454 Marketing	Global	<p>Equivalent Course: MARK3430 Instructor: Bagher Fardanesh Workload: 2 exams, 1 group project, 1 individual write-up assignment, 1 quiz Difficulty: 1/10</p> <p>This course teaches you marketing concepts on a global level. The professor is very lenient and quite relaxed, and likes to chat about different things. The classes are very easy to follow and I found the exams very easy too. The whole atmosphere of the class is just very chill.</p>
PSYC353 Psychopathology	Adult	<p>Equivalent Course: SOSC2970 Instructor: Jack J. Blanchard Workload: 4 exams, 1 individual critique paper Difficulty: 4/10</p> <p>I chose this course purely out of interest. It teaches you about various mental disorders appearing in adults, including the symptoms, science behind and treatment methods. The exams are easy, you can get a good grade just by memorizing the content. The teaching is not that interesting and the professor basically just elaborates on the slides.</p>
SPAN103 Elementary Spanish	Intensive	<p>Equivalent Course: LANG1330 Instructor: Katherin Solano Workload: Graded exercises on My Spanish Lab everyday, 2 projects, 3 compositions, 6 quizzes, oral interview, occasional homework Difficulty: 5/10</p> <p>This course teaches the basics of the Spanish language, with training in speaking, writing, reading and listening. It has four classes per week and attendance is taken in every class so if you take this course you would not be able to have long weekends, if that is what you want. The professor is quite chill and classes can be fun sometimes. There is quite a heavy workload, but the written assignments are generally easy. The speaking assignments were the hardest as the professor expects you to speak naturally even though you are just a beginner.</p>

## 7. Sports & Recreation Facilities

There are two main gyms, Eppley's and Ritchie Coliseum. The former is the big one where you can do all kinds of sports, from running on treadmills to weight-lifting training to basketball/badminton to swimming. There are also fitness classes you could sign up for. The latter is a much smaller gym, with only treadmills and weight-lifting equipment, but the location is more convenient for me as it was a lot closer to Leonardtown.

## 8. Finance & Banking

After I arrived in Maryland, I opened a bank account with Bank of America, which is one of the most popular options there. There is also a branch in College Park, of a walking distance to campus.

## 9. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Check out the student club fair at the beginning of the semester. It usually takes place at the Stamp. During the fair you can learn about all the student clubs you could join and sign up immediately to the mailing list. It's similar to the fairs HKUST has in the atrium at the beginning of each semester.

## 10. Health and Safety

There are some vaccinations that you could take at the Health Center before semester starts, if you haven't taken them before. You can also always make appointments online to see a doctor at the Health Center. However, I personally think that the service is not very useful. I have seen the doctor a couple of times but I feel like it's not too helpful. I often just relied on over-the-counter medicine, which you could get at the CVS Pharmacy.

There is also a Student Health Insurance plan that you are required to purchase. I was quite disappointed with the package because it doesn't really include anything. I ended up having to pay to see a dentist and a dermatologist outside of UMD.

## 11. Transportation

Transfer flights between the US and Hong Kong are usually cheaper than direct flights. Because I had many baggages, I took an Uber to my accommodation, but you can easily access the airport by the metro. You can find all the relevant information on the UMD website.

The metro station was quite near to where I lived so it was convenient. There was also a 104 UMD shuttle that goes from behind Leonardtown Hall to the College Park Metro Station. Some people would rent bikes to travel around campus, especially if their housing is far from the main buildings. This is a good idea but bear in mind that it might be too cold or windy for a nice cycling experience on some days/months in Maryland. Uber and Lyft are also popular options to get around places where the Metro doesn't conveniently reach.

You can also download the bus app to get information on the arrival and departure times of the various UMD shuttle buses. They bring you around campus, but the more useful lines only operate after 5pm so I still travelled by foot mostly.

## 12. Communication

I shared a family plan on T-mobile with two other exchange students. It's cheaper to share a family plan than to buy a single plan yourself. Some of my friends used Mint Mobile, which is a

service under T-mobile that offers cheaper plans, but its customers would be second to the main T-mobile customers when it comes to accessing the internet network in more densely populated areas. You can do more research to compare different phone plans.

### 13. Shopping

There is a Target Express near where I live where I will go often to get everything I need, from groceries to toiletries. The location is near but the options are very limited. If you walk a bit further you could get to CVS, which has more options for non-grocery shopping including cosmetics. But for real good grocery shopping, you have to take an uber to Giant, Shoppers, or Whole Foods Market, which has a lot more options. I heard there are some Asian supermarkets too but they are too far so I never made my way there. Sometimes I would pick up some Asian groceries when I visit DC.

For shopping for clothing or shoes, I would sometimes go to Prince George Plaza which is one metro station away from College Park. There you can find a big mall with many shops. But if you want to shop at the big chain brands, you would need to go to DC which has a lot more options.

### 14. Food

For some types of accommodation, it is a requirement for you to purchase the UMD dining plans. I heard that they are expensive and don't serve good food, so I deliberately chose a type of accommodation where it's optional to purchase the dining plans (the apartments). I cooked most meals myself as it's cheaper, healthier and I love cooking. Eating out is generally more expensive but you can still find some cheaper options along the Baltimore Avenue or at The Stamp.

### 15. Climate

The weather in College Park/Maryland is surprisingly unpredictable and dramatic.... I was shocked. It could be snowing one day, raining heavily the next, and bright and sunny the following day. There were many times when I forgot to check the weather forecast before going out, and ended up freezing in snow, soaking in rain or sweating like a pig in a big coat. Make sure to check the weather forecast every day so you can wear the right clothes/shoes/accessories!

### **Items to Bring**

- Important documents (J-1 Visa, Passport, DS-2019, admission letter, immunization form etc.)
- Laptop and cell phone
- Cash
- Personal cleansing products
- Summer and Winter Clothes/Accessories e.g. snow boots/ Big warm coat/gloves/beanies/scarves etc (you can also buy there)
- Adapter (US socket is different from that in HK)

### **Useful Links and Contacts**

<https://www.testudo.umd.edu/>

<https://www.elms.umd.edu/> (canvas)

<http://reslife.umd.edu/>

<https://www.umd.edu/>

<https://www.cscamm.umd.edu/visitors/directions/airports.htm>