



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



אוניברסיטת תל אביב
TAU Recanati

The Leon Recanati Graduate School of Business Administration
Student Exchange Program

Thursday, December 30, 2010

Expectations

Hi everyone,

My name is Shahar Tal, I'm 27 from Israel – I study at the Recanati School of Business (Tel Aviv University). I will be spending the upcoming spring semester as an exchange student at UNC, and will try sharing some of the experiences here. Feel free to comment and ask about anything, nothing too official over here ☺

I first realized this was an option back in July while reading a publication on the Recanati web site – advertising the student exchange program. I was interested and went to meet with our program manager, Sharon Shaked – who explained about the program and told me that she still had openings for spring 2011. I pretty much instantly knew I wanted to go to the US - I have been there before and enjoyed the culture and general scenery. There were many excellent schools on the list, but I was very happy to get assigned to UNC – I read that Chapel Hill is a great place to live in, with lots of student life and sports going on. Works for me ☺

So, after getting the final approval, I started with the formal Application process, which is explained with great detail at the UNC MBA Exchange web site. Generally, you need to get your Visa, supported by all sorts of documents – not a big deal, but start EARLY, as unexpected delays with processes you're unfamiliar with are a certainty. Most of the information was very clear with simple instructions to follow, however not everything was flawless (had some issues with health insurance registration, course management). Patricia, the exchange coordinator, has been (and is) very helpful with any question and/or request throughout the months leading up until now.

All incoming exchangers were given the option to either register for UNC housing or find an apartment out in any of the city's many apartment complexes. I will be staying on-campus at the Baity-Hill style building on Odum Village, I guess I could tell you what it's like when I'm there...

My journey began just a couple of days ago, when I arrived at New York City, for a week of fun and meetings with old friends (and, of course, some New Year's partying to come), and so far it's been awesome. I can't wait to arrive at Chapel Hill – will it live to my expectations? Wait around and see ☺

Happy New Year!

Thursday, January 6, 2011

First Days

It all happened so fast, the past few days really flew right by, with so many events and people and experiences – this spring is going to be a hoot.

We started the week off with a Campus Tour, guided by our ever-so-kind exchange coordinator Patricia – which, spite a sore ankle, lead us through all the important spots, sharing interesting historical facts along the way and explaining the available services at each building.

The tour was also the first time the exchange students met as a group (or, at least, two-thirds of us). Smiles were abundant, as the group started forming and getting to know each other.

We walked all the way to Franklin Street's "noodles & company", where we had a very nice lunch, and completed the tour.

I posted many of the photos on a facebook album under my profile (Shahar Tal). However, for all of you who are not friends with me on facebook (yet!) or not at all on facebook (god forbid), all the tour photos and then some are available in higher quality in this Picasa web album: <http://picasaweb.google.com/qwerty123456/FirstDayInChapelHill>

The next day we had an orientation session, which included some greetings (by the MBA program director) and formalities, but mainly calories.

Tim Flood tried introducing us to American culture with words and explanations, but for some of us, the two boxes of colorful doughnuts, chicken sandwiches, alongside the chocolate-coated pretzels and almonds, were explanatory enough.

We moved on to some immigration guidelines and form fill-outs, got some legal advice from a friendly lawyer, and listened to basic needs and travel tips – all of which were relevant.

After the formal orientation session ended, we joined the final four presentations in a class-wide case competition, suggesting strategies for the American Hershey's company, which were all very interesting and impressive.

Almost an hour and a half later, we had a declared winning group, and went out of the auditorium for a small party with plenty of food and drinks to go around, meeting with the full-time MBAs and starting to familiarize with their faces. Alas, the pleasantries had to be cut short, as practically most of us needed to rush out and go shopping for our poorly-equipped and grocery-deficient new apartments.

The very next morning classes had officially begun, relieving 95% of our waitlist worries – we all pretty much got into all the classes we wanted. Yes, Patricia said it would be like that all along, but still, we had all this stress associated with the uncertainty.

Classes were interesting, both in terms of their subjects as well as watching and understanding the dynamics of classes and discussions. The exchange students were usually pretty quiet and packed together, which is, I guess, natural for newcomers and non-native speakers. Hopefully, we will show more and more active class participation as the mod progresses.

In between class days, yesterday night some of us went to Quiz night at "Top of the Hill", which is apparently a popular hang-out spot here on Franklin, and while most of the trivia questions were based around American culture, which we know little about, we just had a nice time socializing and getting to know some more people.

So again, playing around with my new cool camera, I got a whole lot of photos from these events in my Picasa web album: <http://picasaweb.google.com/qwerty123456/OrientationSessionAndQuizNight> (some of them will also get posted to facebook later.)

A busy weekend ahead of us, and an amazing semester,
It's gonna be a hoot :)

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

Accommodations

Almost halfway into Module 3, I think we're just beginning to understand our routine here: when do you wake up, how do you get to school and back, what you prepare for class, where do you do your shopping...

While many of us might have very different perspectives of this, I'll try describing mine.

I'm staying at 1101 Mason Farm Rd., which is a 'Baity Hill style' building belonging to the Odum Village community (yeah, it was confusing at the beginning, Baity Hill is also a community, and our building looks exactly like theirs). The building is mostly inhabited by Business & Law school graduate students on exchange, and around a third of our exchange group lives there.

We are located a convenient 8-minute walk from school, and a reasonable 20-minute walk from

Franklin street. Basically, Chapel Hill is small enough to not really care about distances when you're out in town.

Getting out of town, however, is not really difficult. It took us a couple of weeks to figure out the buses around here, which ones take you where and when. The issues with these are the frequency and evening/night availability.

The first bus you should know around here when you're going out is the P2P – it's basically a line touring around Chapel Hill running until very late at night, designed to pick up students from their on-campus housing to the popular spots and back. If you're not on the route, you can call the dispatch and have them pick you up! How sweet is that?

Chapel Hill transit operates several lines (P2P included), which will take you around town for free (yes, free), while Triangle Transit buses are 2\$ and will take you to other popular (and important) spots like shopping malls (Streets of Southpoint, or the University Mall) – as well as the neighboring cities.

But so many good people around here are nice enough to offer you a ride to the mall and back (really, I was surprised with how many offers I got), which can be very comfortable.

Anyway, back to the building: our apartments are very spacious and comfortable (wall-to-wall carpets, nice kitchen and showers), but missing some elementary essentials, like a microwave or an electric kettle – we purchased our own.

In other news, we have cable TV with tons of channels, but no TV to watch them on. Also, my room is really big, but I have no furniture to put in it, so the extra room is pretty useless.

However, most of the time we just lay on the couches with our laptops and our course readings, and that's good enough.

We usually go out together, walking the 5 minutes to the bus stop and waiting for the next bus to arrive. We also got to know and connect with some of the law students, which share similar adventures to ours.

Classes are pretty different from what I'm used to in Israel, and I believe a lot of others share my feelings about this – the professors put much more emphasis on class participation (which can consist 30%-60% of your grade), so you really have to prepare at home and know what you're talking about in class. This also adds to the challenge for us, non-native speakers, not only having to read and process relatively large English articles, but also trying to be articulate and convey our thoughts on the matters currently being discussed. The professors are very supportive, though, and are really offering their help whenever they can.

Parties are all around. The school will usually have an 'official' event every week, which is organized by one of the student clubs, and sponsored by the school (It's still hard for me to grasp the concept of school-sponsored beer, but it's definitely there). There are also many other spots (usually on or around Franklin) where you can go to anytime.

This week we had a chili cook-off contest, where many students had prepared their own chili casseroles and put them up for the judges (3 professors) liking. Again, I uploaded a whole lot of photos I amateurishly took with my new camera that night

to: <http://picasaweb.google.com/qwerty123456/MBACHiliCookOff#>

Cheers,
Shahar

Tuesday, March 15, 2011

Back to routine

Oh wow, the second module just started, time flies so fast around here...

The semester is broken up into two academically independent "modules" - some of the exchange students were here just for one module - we already miss the ones who left. The last couple of weeks of Module III were kind of busy, with papers and group

assignments to hand in for each course, but it was all very manageable. Most courses, actually, will have you submit a paper instead of a final exam - which I find refreshing.

Having finished our academic obligations, we all set out on different adventures for spring break (two and a half weeks of vacation between modules). Some groups were formed, while we spread out over the USA and across some borders :)
Myself, I met two friends from back home who joined me for some road tripping and general partying along 13 (!) US states on the way, which has been one of the best vacations of my life, with so many different experiences. I just took it all in, for life-lasting memories.

Having my friends over for a couple of days here in Chapel Hill, I gave them the local tour (unintentionally, it was very similar to the tour Patricia took us on our first day here) and found out I was a reasonable guide around town - which made me feel kind of proud about my immersion and connection with the place.
In other news, March Madness is upon us (American people are crazy about following college sports, and this is the main NCAA basketball tournament of the year), with our very own Tar Heels in the brackets - we all support the team, some of us really follow games and stats up closely - which is a significant and inseparable part of the UNC Chapel Hill experience.

We all returned to school yesterday, and were happy to see everyone's (now tan) faces again and share our spring break stories, making me realize the good friends I had made here in just over two months.

So it's back to routine, I guess (which is not half bad around here), reading cases and preparing for classes, hanging out on Franklin, partying on weekends...

Oh, I'm going to miss life in Chapel Hill.

Sunday, March 20, 2011

Impressions

Hey Guys,

I created a new, more general album of photos taken here in Chapel Hill throughout the last couple of months, that may serve as a newcomer's first introduction to town and school, and give you some impressions of the general atmosphere :)

<https://picasaweb.google.com/mbaexchangeunc/KenanFlaglerChapelHill#>

Have fun (I know I am :)),
Shahar

Monday, May 9, 2011

Envy

So that was it.

A wonderful experience that was a semester at UNC Chapel Hill has come to an end, and wonderful it was indeed.

A day before I left Chapel Hill, I walked around town one last time, and it occurred to me that I never once used the map on my smartphone (which I admit to regularly using throughout the months), such a home feeling.

The last week was one with many goodbye's, as people were leaving one by one, inviting their best friends and study partners in the past 5 months for visits at their home countries. I know I will see many of them again.

I have earned a lot of things out of this exchange experience, but more than anything, it is the memories of this disconnecting experience I am most thankful for.

Would have done it all over again exactly the way it was :)

I want to thank all the friends that made the experience what it was, and one last thank you to Patricia, whose consistent caring and spirit greatly contributed and hangs over all aspects of the exchange term.

I envy you, future exchangers.