Before the Exchange

Visa & Arrival
Preparing for England was pretty simple. You do not have to get a visa if you are going to be there for less than six months. Make sure before you leave you have all the paperwork given to you from Cornell and Harper. I made sure to have it all packed in one folder that way when I got to Customs in England I was able to provide my acceptance letter, financial aid paperwork, information on where I would be staying and the flight I had booked to come home at the end of the semester. I got a stamp in my Passport for flying into England and a stamp for being in the country for less than six months studying abroad.

Packing
I was told before going over that spring weather comes earlier in England so I made sure not to pack too many heavy sweaters or jackets which turned out to be a good plan. The weather was mild there, No snow at all. During my time it was in the 40’s at first but most of the time it was in the 50’s. In April there were a couple 60 degree days. I can’t say there were any items I should have brought that I didn’t. Items I recommend if you go in the spring are a rain coat and umbrella as well as a pair of shoes that are waterproof or can handle the rain. Also there is Paddy’s day ball in the spring so pack a dress or nice outfit.

First Steps in England
Immigration and customs was straightforward. Once off the plane I got through customs and immigration pretty quickly. I was asked for my acceptance letter and paperwork as well as asked a few questions such as where I was staying, how long, how I was going to pay for it and some about my parents. I did not have a buddy assigned by Harper but two different students contacted me before I went over to give me information on how to get to campus from the airport and answer any other questions I had. There was no university orientation when I got to Harper, or at least nothing like Cornell’s orientation. Each morning for the first three days I met with Mitch, the abroad advisor at Harper to organize classes as well as learn about and tour the university.

Academics and Host University:

Classes
Classes at Harper are very different from Cornell. I scheduled mine when I got to Harper. Because of the way the classes are organized, it is easier for Mitch to explain it once you are with him. Most classes meet only once a week for two to three hours. There are a few that have labs or tutorials in addition to lecture. Most days the lecture did not last the full scheduled time. Also even though classes appear to begin and end at the same time, the classes scheduled at 11am really do not begin until 11:15am. Another nice thing about Harper is that everyone (or at least all first and second years) has a break from 1-2pm for lunch. It was nice to come back to the dorm, make food and talk with people.

All the classes I took were Bachelor level classes which were geared toward second year students since third year students are off on placement (job/internship) and fourth year mainly consists of research and only a few classes for these students. In order to fulfill the 15 credits which are transferred back to Cornell you will have to take eight classes at Harper. All eight are worth the same amount of credit and are weighed evenly. Another unique thing about Harper is that all classes run for the entire year. Since I came in the spring I was entering for the second portion of material for all courses I took. While at Harper you are only assessed on the material you learn during you time there. This means that a majority of your grade will come from papers given to you on a topic covered in each course. I had to write seven papers, essentially essays which ranged from 1,000 to 3,000 word limits. In one class I had to take an exam and write a short report. Make sure to ask your module leaders for your assignments as soon as possible so you will have as much time to work
on them as possible. Most of the assignments were not really hard, it just took time to research and find info on the topic. All of the animal science classes (6 of 8) were approved by my advisor to count toward my major. It can be difficult to use classes from Harper to count toward distribution since most are agriculture based.

University
Harper Adams University is located in Newport, England which is in Shropshire county. The campus is actually about a 5-7 minute drive by car from Newport; it is tiny compared to Cornell. It is mostly located on one side of the main road while a few campus buildings are a short walk after crossing the street. Walking from one end of campus to the other would take no more than 15-20 minutes. All the dorms and campus buildings have wifi which can be accessed with your school ID and password. There is one library on campus which has many computers available for student use plus places to sit if you want to bring your own as well as group study rooms.

Two offices which I visited often were Student Services and the International Office. The student services ladies made sure we got our cards to access the dorms, helped us get around campus and answered any questions regarding life at Harper. I also went to the International office often. They planned trips off campus to cities around England as well as Wales. When I wanted to explore a place on my own, they provided maps of cities, looked up information and explained the best way to travel. I would recommend stopping by the international office shortly after getting to Harper.

I arrived on Wednesday morning and classes began the following Monday. The semester consisted of 12 weeks of classes, followed by a four-week Easter break. All of the UK students went home, leaving just the international students and a few. The break was extremely quiet which was nice for getting assignments done, but was also lonely at some points. Once Easter break was over all of my assignments we due to be turned into Mitch before I left campus to fly home.

Newport is easily accessible from Harper, and there are also many activities that occur on campus. There is a social calendar that is given out and posted in all the kitchens. Activities included karaoke, movie nights, a party every Wednesday night and sports games. Most nights there was something going on and, in addition, students would go into town as well to go to stores, bars and the night club.

Living Abroad
Living Costs
While in England I did not really have a budget written out though I did keep track of my account balance. Housing at Harper costs £1800 for the semester plus a £300 deposit, which is given back once you leave, if there are no damages. As for food, I know I spent more than I expected but I was cooking most of my meals each day. Harper provides free shuttles to and from Newport multiple times each day during the semester and a free shuttle on the weekend goes to Telford, a larger city nearby. None of my classes required books. There are many reference and textbooks on all subjects in the library if needed. I did travel around the UK while I was there; I found the most accessible way to do this was by train. If you plan to take it often I would recommend a Young Persons rail card which saves you 30% on all trips and costs £30. If you plan ahead of time, traveling does not have to be expensive. Look at off peak train times, hostels and pack meals to save money.

Language & Culture
Being in England was nice since there was no immediate language barrier. It felt good knowing that from the moment I landed, if I had any issues at least I would be able to speak to someone. Though just because English is spoken in England does not mean that there was never a barrier. It took me a few days to pick up on certain words and phrases which are different. Also there are many accents depending on where a person is from. For me, certain accents were harder to understand then others but overall it was fine.
Communication
In England my cell phone did not work unless I had wifi, then I could email and access the internet. I still had to buy a cheap, simple phone to make phone calls or text. For an extra 10 pounds, I was also able to get 60 minutes of calling time to the US for one month. Most of the time, I skyped home if I wanted to talk to family.

Banking
If you are only going to be at Harper for one semester I don't think it is necessary to open a bank account. There are ATM’s, or cash machines as they call them, everywhere you go. I think it would be too much of a headache to open an account for only 4 months. Some ATM’s had free withdrawal and if not I just made sure to take out larger sums of money each time to prevent charges from adding up.

Housing
Harper Adams arranged housing in the dorms on campus. I was in the international dorm but the majority (11 of 16) of the students on my floor was from the United Kingdom. I lived in a single room which had a bed, desk, wardrobe and storage bin under the bed. The room had an en-suite bathroom, which was very nice. Another unique thing about Harper is that there are cleaners which come each day to vacuum and clean the bathroom. Plus you can have your laundry done for free by the laundry services on campus.

The dorm I stayed in was self-catered, meaning that I was not on a meal plan and was responsible for cooking my own meals. There is a kitchen in every hall which is shared by 8 people and is equipped with two sets of everything, making it easy to cook whenever you wanted to. There was two cafés on campus which had drinks, coffee, pre-made cold items and one had hot food if you wanted to buy a meal instead of make one.

Transportation
Since Harper is not in town but more in the country I did use quite a bit of public transportation. Taxis are easy to get ahold of and use but can be expensive depending on how far you are going. Most students were very nice and were willing to drive me to the grocery store when they were going. There are also two bus routes that go by campus which can be taken to Newport, Telford, Shrewsbury and other towns nearby. The price for the bus depends on how far you are taking it. It may be cheaper to get a day pass for 6 pounds if you are also making the return trip on the bus. You pay for the bus tickets on the bus. Trains are a great way to get to far destinations. The nearest train stations are not that close so it helps to take a taxi with others instead of by yourself to make the cost cheaper. If you don’t have a ton of luggage or bags when going somewhere then you can take the bus to the station. Train fares can be pricey and add up if you take the train a lot, which is why I got the young person railcard. You can go online to find bus schedules as well as train times and prices. I purchased train tickets online if I knew what time I wanted to leave and other times I purchased them at the station. Another place to get more help with transportation and advice on the cheapest way to travel to a specific destination is the International office.

Health & Safety
Harper Adams is a very safe campus. Since it is out in the country almost all the people on campus are students and faculty. I never felt unsafe and was fine walking around at night on campus. Harper owns quite a bit of land surrounding the school so I even went running on the roads leading away from campus and met very nice people.

Harper Adams does have a doctor’s office on campus in case you get sick; appointments can be made there in person or over the phone. I became ill while abroad and was able to see the doctor without paying a fee for the appointment. If you are prescribed a medication then you will have to fill it in Newport but the Rx’s were less expensive in England then in the US.

Overall Experience
I loved spending a semester abroad and was happy I chose to go to England. Even though the language is English I still had to adjust at first and I still gained an interesting cultural experience. It was amazing to visit so many different towns and cities around the UK and see history hundreds of years older then what we have in the US. I was able to travel to Wales twice, spend five days in Scotland and go to Liverpool, Birmingham, London, Stratford-upon-Avon, Bath, Bristol and many more places in England.

One of the hard parts of being at Harper was communication with professors if class times or meeting places changed. Since I was not directly enrolled in their system (similar to our blackboard) the professor would have to remember to add my email separately if they sent out class emails. Also there were many classes which had the module tutor lecture and if
they changed the plan it was not always relayed to me. It was important to make sure I asked or had contact info for my classmates.

I decided to study abroad in order to prove to myself that I could survive on my own and to take animal science classes which are not offered at Cornell. I accomplished both goals successfully and my experience has taught me that I love to travel and see new places. It also reassured me that I am interested in conservation and wildlife, topics on which I gained a new perspective at Harper. Studying abroad is not an easy process or without some rough times. There were moments when I missed my family, became ill and got a little lost in some places but the good memories I made in the United Kingdom outweigh all that and will stay with me forever.