

Winter 2021 International Student Orientation (Student Panel)

Friday, January 8, 2021, 10:30 am MST

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Hi everyone. Thanks for joining us. This is the international orientation student panel. We will get started, but before we jump into things, I'd like to do a territorial acknowledgement.

Territorial Acknowledgement:

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): We acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which consists of the Blackfoot Confederacy, comprising of this Sikasika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations, the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, and the traditional Blackfoot name of this place is "Moh'kins'tsis", which we now call the City of Calgary.

Introduction to Session Format

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): We have a fantastic panel of student leaders and current students from the University of Calgary here to share some of their experiences. At the start of this session, we will go through the questions that many of you submitted with your registration for today's event. We'll start by going to those because there was a lot of common trends in what was submitted. Then, in the second half, we'll use the question and answer system on your screen where you can submit questions to our panelists. We'll go through taking turns and answering some of those questions based on our panelists' experiences, relevant interests, and expertise.

If we haven't already met at orientation event this week, my name is Kirsty and I am one of the advisors at International Student Services (ISS) here at the University of Calgary. My role is to help coordinate events like this for students who are new to the University of Calgary or new to studying remotely if you're not yet here in Calgary. I also organize our mentorship program and many of the international student workshops that will support you in your first few weeks and months as a University of Calgary student. In the coming weeks, if you do encounter any challenges or you're not quite sure who to ask for help, feel free to reach out to myself or the International Student Services team in general. We're happy to get you connected, even if that's just a referral to one of our colleagues across campus.

Additional Orientation Resources

As a quick review, we do have online orientation content for international students on our website. These are helpful pages to go through for some of those more logistical questions, for example about online learning, resources available to support you if you are relocating to Calgary, setting up health care, getting us a Social Insurance Number (SIN).

I also want to remind you that we do have some upcoming webinars as well on specific topics that can really help easier transition to the University of Calgary.

I also strongly advise everyone to sign up for a newsletter or follow our social media accounts.

Panelist Introductions

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): I'm going to introduce our wonderful panelists and we'll start going through the questions that were submitted with your registration. *The panelists are current UCalgary students who have volunteered to share their experiences while studying in-person or remotely.*

Caleb is currently in his last year of chemical and bioengineering with the Schulich School of Engineering. He is completing his degree while in Calgary and he's also working as the Transition Support Program Assistant with International Student Services. Some of his hobbies include outdoor activities, like hiking and snowshoeing in the local Canadian Rocky Mountains.

Florian is a master's student in physics and mathematics, at the Technical University in Vienna. He's also an exchange student at the University of Calgary. Florian is studying remotely from Austria, but he is involved with the University of Calgary through the UGo and USpeak programs. Normally Florian is also part of sports courses at his home institution, though these are currently on pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of his hobbies include skiing, cycling, and reading.

Denise is currently a biological sciences student in her fourth year and an exchange student at the University of Calgary. She's studying from Brazil, her home country, and at her home institution the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina – UFSC, Florianopolis, Brazil. Denise is also working as a teaching assistant for some introductory courses in molecular biology. At the University of Calgary, she is involved with the USpeak Global Program, as well as a participant in the International Student Mentorship Program. Her favorite non-academic hobbies are singing along to her favorite songs.

Anthonia is currently in her second year of her master's in biochemistry and molecular biology. She is currently studying while in Calgary. Anthonia is involved with the University of Calgary in quite a few ways, with the Graduate Student Association, as a learning and technologies production coach with the Taylor Institute, and she's involved on the Council of Foothills Departmental Graduate Student Association. In her spare time, Anthonia's hobbies include blogging and photography.

Pre-submitted Questions

Question 1: Online Classes

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): the first question is: "What are the challenges of studying through online classes compared to traditional in-person classes? And what tips might you have?"

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): Hello everyone. It's really fun to be here. One of the challenges, at least for me, the biggest challenge, was to plan. I recommend to really plan your schedule so you have time to deal with everything and not leave things really to the last minute. The planning was a big challenge for me, but a tip for that is I made a spreadsheet with all of the things that I had to do. I would put like an hour for them and even for my leisure activities, which really helped me to, I'm not going to stress and feel like I wasn't being productive even when it was relaxing. So this really helped.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): First of all I'm happy to be here. Probably the biggest challenge for me was to stay focused when watching the lecture instead of being physically in the lecture hall. For me, it sometimes felt like I was watching some funny videos and so I found myself in this, I guess all of you know, that "brain off" mode. And so I catch only the every third word of the lecture and without thinking much about it. And so 15 minutes late I thought, oh my

god, what did we do in the last quarter hour? And I have no clue. So of course, there are two ways we can proceed. First of all, accept the situation which probably is not the smartest, because one day there will be an exam and you'd have to know that topic from the lecture. The second one, if you're lucky, the lecture was recorded. That's one of the advantages we have now, but trust me, it's very time consuming to re-watch the lectures you already watched once.

So, after this long explanation of the problem I would come to my hint. So, the first one, and I think it's obvious, put your mobile phone away. It's the main source of distraction and I think it's even easier to get distracted by a mobile phone now because it's not even considered impolite typing on your phone when someone is giving a lecture because, yeah, the person doesn't see you. And watch the lecture full-screen, because then there aren't icons and other tabs that can draw your attention on them. And second, even if the lecture's recorded then you can, in principle rewatch it. And even if there are great lecture notes provided, try to take notes. It helps to speak at the topic and think about what's being covered in the lecture. So, the reason for making notes probably is not only to provide yourself information for later, but also just to push yourself to stick to [understanding/engaging with] a topic. And, probably 80% of you won't agree with this because most of my friends say that's the big advantage of this pandemic situation—you can watch lectures from your bed. [For me,] that's not good because it's a straight way to get into this “brain off” mode because the bed is the place where you're relaxed and at least for me, it doesn't work. I have to sit at my desk and yeah, I think this posture of sitting and being at the place where you're supposed to work, is that makes you productive and that's, in fact, that's the job of a student when attending a lecture.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): Thank you for the introduction and thank you everyone for being here from your various locations. I think Florian more or less covered a lot of what I was going to say. Personally, I didn't have to take any classes during the online learning period, but I did have to attend a lot of meetings, both with my student groups and with supervisors and as well lab meetings and a journal clubs. One thing I also found in common once again with Florian, was that I was very easily distracted. I also lacked a lot of motivation with constantly meeting after meeting, after meeting. The one thing I found that was very helpful was to break up my days. So if I found that I had a lot of meetings to work through, I would schedule them with breaks in between wherever I could and in cases where I couldn't, I used a reward system to tell myself, okay, if I sit through two two-hour meetings, I can spend 30 minutes watching TV or cooking, which I really like to do, or something else. I think in the same way if you're in classes, you can tell yourself, okay, if I sit through three hours of lecture this morning, I'm going to spend maybe an hour outside walking around or doing something that you really like.

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): One of the biggest challenges that I found compared to my first three years' in-class experiences was the communications. So, I struggle a lot with communicating with my friends. So, for example, [in the past classroom environments], if you don't understand a concept, you can easily catch up with your friends right after class or during class to talk about it. But in this scenario, when everything is setting up remotely, you kind of have to set up a meeting or try to find a friend who kind of got an idea of what's going on in-class and chat with them. And the same thing with the professor as well. So sometimes it's just scary to chat with the professor one-on-one via the Zoom call. Sometime [in the past during in-person studies] we'd have a few friends together to go with it, trying to go into the professor's office to ask questions. But that cannot happen easily in the remote setting. So my tip is that, you know, just try to keep an open communication with

your friends as much as possible. So, if you don't understand a concept, you know, don't be afraid to ask during class, during the lectures, even though it's kind of scary to raise a question when only the professor's talking to the rest of the class. And yeah, just try to remember, especially if you don't want to say anything because there's a lot of people, that they want to help you, your friends, your professors. So, don't be afraid to ask questions.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): That's a lot of helpful information. Like Florian mentioned his suggestions might differ a little bit from what his friends found to be helpful. And so again, it's important to talk with and listen to multiple perspectives—that really helps everyone figure out what might work best for them. And, you might not know that at the start too. I think for a lot of us, whether we're working, studying, researching, or connecting with others remotely, it is a bit of a trial and error to see what works best for us. So try to stay positive along the way too, as you try out different strategies to see what works for you and what doesn't.

Question 2: Making Connections during Covid-19

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Our next question is “how to socialize during the current Covid-19 pandemic and public health restrictions. How can I meet people or make friends in Calgary or remotely? What strategies have been helpful?”

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): So, what I usually do with my friends to have social activities is to play online board games. And just to make sure that, because during lectures, none of us turn on our screen [video/webcam], so [during these virtual games] we make sure that we're doing okay or not breaking down during the semester [since we have fewer opportunities to chat during a remote lecture]. About meeting new people, I attend many social events organized by the Leadership and Student Engagement Office, Unwind events. Well, especially because I'm also an international student, I live alone. So having no one to talk to for a long period of time is really intimidating. So yeah, attend social activities organized by various offices on campus is a really great way to go.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): I think that the Graduate Students Association (GSA) and even your departmental graduate association, go a very long way in helping you connect with other students through their social events. So, they actually just had an event last night where we gathered online and we played a really fun game for an hour. I think as new students, you can go a step further from that. Introduce yourself to a specific person and say, “hey, I'm an international student and I moved to the university.” They might be in the same position as you are. Go ahead and ask them, “is it okay if we keep in touch and check in on each other maybe once a week?” It might not work out, but that's perfectly fine. Guess what? Sometimes it might work out. And then you have a friend there that you can continue to check in with back and forth. And if they do that, if they do that with somebody else, then you have three people on your circle can grow from there.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): As I mentioned, I wasn't able to come to Calgary due to the pandemic. So, I don't know how to meet people in Calgary, but I can reply to the first question. I think I will dedicate this question to all the introverts out there because I think that's a question asked by introverts and I think I count myself as one. So, in fact, this pandemic time is your time now because—if it's an awkward situation when speaking to someone—just

text someone, write an email, probably arrange some online meeting. And it's easy to get connected to your classmates because you're in the same situation, at a new university, you are in the same course, you have some, some topics like, for example, lecture or things that weren't 100% clear in the lecture, probably have some assignment problems that were hard, not only for you but also for other ones. So these are some topics you can start connecting and then it keeps going. So be brave and just try it. The worst thing is that you don't get the replies. There is, in fact, nothing to lose and many friends out there to win.

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): I think there were many great suggestions already. I would like to add that the thing about the emails is very true. Me and Florian were in the UGo Program. We're both exchange students. And he actually did send me an email and we got together through Zoom and we're friends now. And I was so glad that he [sent me that email]. So, maybe people are only waiting for this, I guess everyone's waiting for this right now. So it's really nice to connect. And another tip that I was going to give is you can get involved with some other programs like USpeak Global is one really nice brought by ISS—you can share knowledge in languages. So, if you're interested in that and different cultures, you can get into that. And I made really good friends in this program to so, so I guess also a nice way to connect.

Question 3: Life in Calgary

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Our next question is “What is life like in Calgary? What are some fun things to do? How do you manage when the winter weather is so cold?”

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): Life in Calgary is honestly amazing. I think that there's so much to see and so much to do. Unfortunately, with the current pandemic situation we've had to switch up a little bit. I don't think anything has wound down or closed entirely, but there are ways to get around that. I think on the online platforms, you can find ways to learn new skills. So this can be anything from cooking to—I recently learned how to macramé, which is a very cool weaving technique—so you can find things to do online. You can actually access a lot of digital museums from around Canada and not just Calgary alone through online platforms. There's a lot of fun things to do that way. Managing the winter, when it's so cold. That's an interesting one. I think I stay indoors quite a little bit, which is probably just a trait of my personality. But there are different ways that you can find to still have fun in the winter. This includes doing different winter activities. You can go sledding, tobogganning, and skiing.

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): Well, unfortunately, I wasn't able to come to Calgary. So I unfortunately can't speak about life in Calgary, but I can imagine that it's really great. Actually, I've never even seen snow because I live in a tropical country. I really don't know what the experience is like in a snow setting that is really cold. But I guess that connecting with people remotely was, for me, my experience was mainly by sending e-mails like Florian said and I also participated and many, many of the Unwind events and played some boardgames to. It's really fun and I really encourage anyone to do that if they are in a remote setting and want you know people from Calgary.

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): I think Calgary is like a really perfect city if you are a person who is into nature, like I am. This city is located perfectly right on the spot near so many famous landscape. So, heading East, you can go to [the town and surrounding region]

Drumheller, which basically looks like a mini version of the Grand Canyon. And many people find dinosaur bones there, that's pretty cool. And if you are heading West, so obviously you're going to hit one of the most beautiful mountain ranges in the world, the Canadian Rockies. And obviously you can do so much there—you can go hiking during the summer, you can go snowshoeing during the winter. Talking about the cold, so I'm originally from a tropical country as well. So obviously the first year the cold was really intimidating to me. But, as long as you dress warm, in layers, you should be fine. And there are a lot of fun activities for outdoors as well, such as skiing, ice skating, and that's some really Canadian thing that you can pick it up. So hopefully the pandemic will be done soon so that you have an opportunity to come to Calgary and experience all of those like I had.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): For anybody looking for tips and tricks on living in Canada, we're actually having an event on January the 21st, which is a Thursday, called "Tips and Tricks on living in Canada". We'll share a lot more about how to socialize, get through the winter, and really get into the culture here in Calgary.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): That event is run by NISS, the Newcomers and International Student Subcommittee, through the Graduate Student Association (GSA). NISS run a lot of fantastic stuff as well, like Anthonia mentioned. You can benefit from attending things like that where you'll hear lots of different perspectives and get lots of different advice. Additionally, the International Student Services team has resources related to preparing for winter weather. So, keep an eye on our newsletter. We do tend to send out helpful reminders about strategies to use. You know, if you're needing to navigate Calgary using public transit and it's wintertime and it's a bit icy, what that could look like. We also do some posts on our social media accounts as well that tend to be timely related to, weather if we get a big cold snap. So stay in touch with us.

Question 4: What did you wish you knew sooner?

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): The last question that was submitted in advance is "What is one thing you wish someone had told you when you were starting your studies at the University of Calgary?"

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): If I could, I would tell myself this one thing before I started—to have leisure time that is not on a screen, because we spend so much time in front of screens now because everything's online. If I have, as my leisure time, watching Netflix, well your eyes start to get so tired. I also will get headaches watching so many things for a long period of time. So, I guess one thing I would tell myself is find hobbies that did not involve a screen so we can

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): Start early, because everything moves really fast in Canada, especially at university. So, I guess preparing a plan ahead. If you have midterms and finals, don't delay preparing or procrastinate until the last minute.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): First of all, I'd like to double underline, what Denise said, that was a great point that also I think it's very important, but we come to another point. I thought a lot about this question and I think the one advice I would like to give to my younger self--it's not connected to this pandemic situation because my first semester was before the pandemic—would be, don't let yourself be bound, scared, or even demotivated by comparing yourself too much to other students. Let's give an example. In the first weeks of my studies, I sat in the

lecture hall and many other students were asking quite specific questions about very advanced topics where I thought, okay, I have no idea about these topics and they are asking questions about this. And it wasn't connected to the lecture, it was, I think, just for interest. But my self-confidence dropped to zero immediately because I thought, "oh my God, I must be in a room with at least ten future Nobel Prize laureates." And yeah, so I thought I should know all these things—and that's not true. So, it's only one particular interest of one particular student and okay, they are interested in this specific topic. Probably they have some pre-knowledge, but that doesn't mean that everyone here is so smart in this specific area. So there are many, many topics and many, many things where you'll probably know more than them. Just by statistics, it's very likely that someone in the room is better in one particular part of your studies than you are. So, don't compare it. Don't waste your time comparing yourself too much to others because it's not about being the best. The journey from starting your university career and learning and improving your knowledge and your skills—that's what is the most important thing. Comparing yourself just makes you unhappy and doesn't help you.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): I think one thing I would tell my first-year self would be to take advantage. As students, we're privileged to have access to so many resources, funds, pools of money, opportunities, that once you're no longer a student, they all go away or diminish drastically. So, whether it's an opportunity to apply to a scholarship, even if you see your peers being more eligible than you are, go for it anyways. If it's a chance to learn something new, attend a workshop or attend a conference. Go for it anyways, if it's, for example, the health and dental plan, there's so much coverage available there. Take advantage of that because once you are done being a student, you won't have access to that anymore.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Thank you panelists for sharing some of your insights. For those of you attending, I'm sure you'll also find something that you wish you had known earlier along the way. That's normal to feel like, "I wish I'd done this earlier". So again, stay positive and like Anthonia recommended, use the resources available to you, don't be scared to ask questions. There's a lot of peers that are happy to share their experience and be helpful resources for you—and then there's a lot of professional staff, myself and the rest of the ISS team. We're very friendly and happy to help too, so please do reach out to us.

We'll now answer questions submitted live through the Question & Answer feature.

Live Question & Answers

"What's it like living in Calgary during the pandemic? What's open? Can we go to stores or do shopping for winter clothes and groceries?"

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): I can speak on the grocery stuff. Yes, the grocery stores are still open, but there are quite a few restrictions. For example, you have to wear a mask in the grocery store obviously. And now you have to follow one-way lanes in the grocery store. There are also some stores that have restrictions based on the number of people in the store at a time. So, make sure that you dress warm in case you have to line up to get into the store because sometime during the winter it gets really cold. You don't want to freeze while waiting to get into the grocery store.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): So, the shopping malls and clothing stores pretty much work the same way. You do have to enter with your mask on. And as well, the

capacity is reduced to, I think about it's less than 20%, probably 15% now. So, depending on the time you go, if the store is more busy, you'll have to line up outside. But everything for the most part is open and available. Things like salons where you can get a haircut or do your nails—those are currently not open at the moment. Gym facilities where you work out and get your exercise, those are not open either.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): I want to add with the situation in Calgary, how the pandemic affects a lot of those logistical things you need to do in order to live your life—the experiences also can change. So currently right now there are quite a few restrictions in place, but those restrictions could be ending in a few weeks or they may be extending again in a few weeks. And so one of the challenges that we're all dealing with is adapting to these changes based on where we are located. Make sure you are staying informed about what is currently open, allowed, or what guidance is being provided through the public health authorities locally, because rules can change. So, even were finding with traveling to Canada, there are updates on what that looks like in terms of testing you need to complete prior to your arrival, quarantine procedures, and things like that. So please do stay in touch with our team and check our ISS Covid-19 FAQ page.

“How does the semester system work at the University of Calgary?”

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): So the semester system at the University of Calgary works in, I guess, two main parts. You can have the fall and winter semesters, which are approximately four months long. And then you have the spring and summer semester. So starting from the beginning of the year, we're currently in January, so that's the winter semester. The winter semester will run from January to April. Then the spring semester starts from May to June. The summer semester starts from July to August, and then the fall semester will run from September to December.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): I think it can be confusing for people when we talk about a term/semester and it's tied to a season, since those can be very different depending on where you're located globally. It's helpful to know about the formal resources you can access. The academic calendars if you're a grad student or an undergrad student, those help to find some of those words or academic terms that are new to you. Use a search function to look through the digital academic calendars. You can Google “UCalgary academic calendar” to find them and as long as you are looking at the one for the current academic year, it would be up-to-date.

What's your best advice for taking care of your mental health?

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): I think one of the things for me that really took a toll on my mental health was being at home all the time, since this really gets you in a sense of isolation and sometimes talking to your friends virtually doesn't cut it, so it can be stressful. One of the things that's really simple and really helped me was going out for a walk, with a mask and distancing from other people. A short stroll around your block just to get breathing fresh air really helped when I was getting really stressed. I used to think back and say, oh, it's been like eight days since I've left my house, I need to breathe fresh air! So, for me it's done wonders.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): First of all, I would like to emphasize the thing with going out for me too. It was really helpful to do some sports because it helps you to release all these endorphins that probably you miss now because we are locked inside. The

second thing is connected to what I think we already said, try to connect with other people that are in the same situation because it's the small things that help. Ask, how are you? How are you doing? Do you want to talk? And if you have some friends or a little group that keeps connected in this way, it helps. If one of them doesn't feel good at the certain time, then it's great to know that there's somewhere that you can help and on the other side that will help you if you are in this situation. I think there's also events hosted by ISS probably and Student Wellness Services sent. I think it's a great way that the university supports people to stay mentally healthy.

“How can I get around in Calgary? Does public transit work well?”

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): So, first about the transit system saw Calgary has pretty good transit system in my opinion. It is run by Calgary Transit transistors; we have a system of busses and a light rail transit system, so trains that can help you to get from one side of town to the other. I think most of you are full-time students, you normally have access to public transit with your UPASS, which is unfortunately suspended for this semester. Talking about moving around the regions surrounding Calgary, most of the time people rent a car to get to different tourist attractions outside Calgary. There is a bus system to get to the Rocky Mountains and Banff as well to explore.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): I would add, related to public transit, it will really depend on where you're coming from whether you think the Calgary system is good or not. You'll need to get used to what works and what doesn't. So, you'll want to start off giving yourself lots of time and dressing for the weather, as if you'll be waiting a long time. You'll get to know what's most efficient and whether you need to get to a bus stop super early or whether your route tends to be pretty predictable. There are lots of apps that you can use to plan your travel.

“Are people studying remotely from other countries because of visa delays? Should I travel to Canada for the upcoming term?”

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): I think people are studying remotely for various reasons. Some might have traveled back to their home countries after the school year ended in April of last year and they just decided to stay there due to the continuation of online learning. So, there are a variety of reasons that students are studying from other countries.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): I can't say whether it makes sense for you to travel or not, but I can tell you why I couldn't travel. I'm an exchange student and my yeah, my ticket to Canada was combined with a scholarship I got and they decided that they won't pay out the scholarship if there are only online classes. So they emphasized, it will only get paid out if there is some exchange experience for me, that includes the opportunity to meet people physically and not online classes. I didn't even get into the visa process because I got the notification that there circumstances made no way for me.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): I just want to add to that currently there are travel restrictions in place to travel to Canada. Even if you really want to be studying here, you do need to be meeting the exemption for those. So if you're not familiar with what those travel restrictions currently are, please review the ISS Covid-19 FAQ page. If you have uncertainty, please contact our immigration advisors. I may mean for now it's best that you study remotely and hopefully plan for future arrival in Calgary with all your immigration documents in order. We can't give one answer that fits all unfortunately at this time and we can't predict the future. The university will make announcements formally about the plans for

spring/summer terms and the future (Fall 2021). Reminder to carefully read any communication you do get from the university.

“What are your suggestions for not being homesick once in Calgary?”

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Panelists, think about a time when they maybe have been away from home or in a different culture, even if that means studying remotely and you're missing studying in-person. What strategies are you using to still stay happy and connected?

Caleb (Undergraduate Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): Technology makes everything really easy. So I talk with my parents almost every other day, just turn on your iPhone and talk with them via FaceTime or messenger or anything. The second thing is, to be honest, I don't feel like I'm really homesick at all based on my emotions, because I study and then I work. I have tons of friends and tons of people that, even though we are all in isolation right now, they always check in with me. My managers, supervisors—they do care about my mental health. There's been times where they say “Hey, Caleb, do you miss home? You want to set up a meeting to chat a little bit about life or to catch up?”. I don't feel homesick to be honest, but on the other hand, sometimes its really lonely when it's snowing outside and you're alone in an empty room by yourself. I guess just fill it with some activities, so I start reading books this year, which is a thing that I would never do in the first 20 years of my life, I would say. And I also tried to learn new things such as cooking a new recipe or go for a walk, as Denise mentioned earlier, you know, these activities can help you empty your emotions. Most of the time I didn't really feel homesick, which is just my emotions.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Yeah, that's right. Everyone is going to be navigating different experiences and emotions, so what we say here it may not always apply to everybody. Your experience might also go up and down at the start. You might be feeling really homesick and then you're okay once you've built up a network. Or, you might be the total opposite—you might feel awesome. You're in Calgary, you're loving the snow or you're super into the cold weather in winter. That's great. And then you might find, as you're here for a little longer, you start to miss home, familiar food, friends—lots of things. So be kind to yourself.

Denise (Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Brazil): I haven't been to Calgary, but one thing that I am really homesick about right now is missing the in-person learning environment. I really miss going to the library, studying with my friends and just sitting at the corridors and having like small chitchat about life. One of the things that actually really helped me, and it was like actually a tip from a friend, is there are videos on YouTube that actually simulates ambience. So, you have like library two hour sounds, with a fireplace or people humming. You put on this video and you start studying at night—of course, not the same thing, but you can imagine like you are in the library. And this really helped me to feel as if I was in another place and I would put up coffee shop sounds, beach sounds, to feel present in another environment. This really helped me feel less homesick.

Florian (Graduate Exchange Student Panelist; studying remotely from Austria): I also miss meeting with fellow students and discussing things we've learned and solving problems together. What helped me? So of course, you can't replace it equivalently now, but our strategy was to work out the problems and things we had on our element, then meet online and discuss them. Of course, it didn't replace this

experience of solving together and it didn't feel that effective because three brains together work like five on their own, and that can't be replaced, but we can try to make the best out of the situation.

Anthonia (Masters Student Panelist; studying while in Calgary): My family lives here in Calgary, but I'm also from Nigeria. And I think missing home, homesickness, something I can resonate with a lot, but I have found ways to bring a lot of my culture into my space. So, this can be, if I'm feeling homesick, I might go on YouTube and watch videos of people traveling to Nigeria and where they went and sort of reliving that experience with them. It could be playing music, Nigerian music. It could be cooking Nigerian food or going out to a store that sells specialty food from Nigeria and buying from there. I think another thing that could really help would be to distract yourself. Replace that emotion with something else. Not to say that you won't deal with it eventually, but for the time being, just to lift your spirits, you can change up your space, take the energy of the space you're in, that's making you feel homesick, move it elsewhere and get yourself out of that specific environment. So this could be going for walks and things like that.

Kirsty (ISS Advisor/Host): Finally, we do have a lot of really specific webinars coming up as well to address some of those logistical challenges. The one I really want to mention here is a session in collaboration with Wellness Services on Navigating Culture Shock. Whether you're studying remotely or in Calgary, you're going to experience culture shock—those challenges of adapting to a new, unfamiliar environment. I encourage you, if you can, to attend this session because we'll talk about some of the different strategies you can employ and talk about how normal it is to experience challenges as we work through experiences with skills and strategies we learn along the way. You can share and learn from others! Thank you so much for attending and thank you so much to the panelists for sharing your expertise. And I think everybody has learned at least one thing, so that's always a success in my books. I hope everyone has a lovely rest of their day, their evening, wherever you are in the world.