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Khazar University Student Ramiz Orujaliyev Shares Memories from Exchange Experience at Koç University

Ramiz Orujaliyev, third-year student majoring in Psychology at Khazar University, studied at Koç University through the Bilateral Student Exchange Program last spring semester and shares his experience:

I think my exchange education adventure during the COVID-19 pandemic will be interesting for you. I would like to talk about my experience of studying at one of the best universities in Turkey, my student life there and my memories of Istanbul.

In fact, my application to Koç University was unexpected. Thus, when I went to the international office with a few groupmates to be interested in exchange programs at the end of the first semester, I became aware of such an opportunity. When I found out that Koç University, Turkey's top university with high performance in the Global Rankings, had a partnership agreement with Khazar University, I made sure I chose the right path by studying at such an educational institution in our country. Of course, I could not miss this opportunity and I applied to the program without wasting time. My high academic and social performance raised my hopes of acceptance. After the day I applied, I started looking forward to the day when I would be officially admitted. Finally, I received an e-mail from Koç University regarding my admission. I can't express in words how my family and I felt on that eve. I still remember that moment. The opportunity to study at such a university, where I dreamed of, with high academic performance for one semester ... it was just a great feeling.

Istanbul is a large city hosting the Bosphorus which connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara and separates Europe from Asia (with a population of around fifteen million). The memories of the mixed urban infrastructure which is visited by about 13 million tourists every year, with a rich historical culture, but at the same time symbolizes modernity with its magnificent skyscrapers and buildings became the most memorable part of my life. I must admit that the city is not as simple as Baku. Sometimes I used to get lost in such sophisticated urban system, but I enjoyed it because it gave me new experiences of exploring the city. I felt traces of a similar culture in all the places I visited. When the local people revealed that I was Azerbaijani, they treated me with special compassion and sincerity. After staying there for a while, I realized that people are likely to have western culture in the European part of Istanbul, where the University is located. Unlike us, I saw that people here are individualistic and prioritize their desires. This adaptation was difficult for someone from a collectivist society. The social student life of university is so important. Within 2 weeks before the start of the semester, we, as international students, were involved in orientation days. During these days, our mentors introduced us the university, showed educational buildings, the magnificent library of the university, gyms and provided information on activities we could do inside the university in

our spare time. These orientation days also included city tours and fun parties (Istanbul tour (Sultanahmet area), networking activities, breakfasts with mentors, boat party etc.)

Although the University was located in a quiet, forested area away from the city center, all kinds of opportunities were created for students in the dormitory we were staying, which is 10 minutes away from the university. Outside the dormitory there were small cafes, restaurants, bars, large recreation parks and inside there were board and playstation game halls, fitness hall, pool, common kitchen and reading rooms, small library and canteen for students. In short, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the university had everything. There were more than 100 student clubs at the university. I could join one of the clubs from archery to rowing. I was a member of the Psychology Club. The university also had an ice-skating hall and an American football field. I spent most of my days at the Suna Kirac Library, my favorite part of the university. The library consisted of 4 floors. The highlights of the library are individual and common tables for lessons, special rooms for 4-5 people to prepare a joint project, 24/7 open library and opportunity to rent a number of digital devices accessible to everyone during certain days (computer, laptop etc.) One of the reasons I loved the library so much was the single soft, comfortable sofas on the ground floor and students had the chance to take a short nap on these sofas during long breaks. Although this may seem strange at first, sometimes short naps became my favorite activity at university because the student environment here is very comfortable and modern. Students regained their energy here after long tiring lessons. In my spare time, I would spend time with international students, either ice- skate, read a book, or participate in university shows (theater, cinema, events and so on). On my weekends, I would explore Istanbul as a tourist, or I would attend free psychology seminars as a psychology student in other parts of the city. Especially if you are a student of Psychology, I would recommend you to look for and participate in this kind of seminars and trainings during the exchange education, and to network with professionals in our field and use their experience. Gaining such experiences is truly an irreplaceable opportunity in your future career in terms of global relations. I would participate in the experiments as a participant in the laboratories at Koç University and if you had such an opportunity, I would recommend you participate, at least as a participant in terms of experience.

My recommendations for students who intend to study in Turkey, especially in Istanbul, would be mainly in terms of budget. Istanbul is an expensive city. While studying, I would recommend you stay in the university dormitory and use the student transport cards in public transport. To get acquainted with the historical museums and culture of Istanbul, I would recommend you get the discount museum cards for students. Pay attention to the location of your university in the city when you arrive because Istanbul is really a very big city. If you fancy walking, the location of Koç University may disappoint you. However, if education as an exchange student is your main priority and you are satisfied with the opportunities I have listed above, I would advise you to choose Koç University without hesitation and get these experiences as well.

Unfortunately, due to the global pandemic, I had to return to my country in the last two months of my education. Thus, according to the rules, I spent 14 days in quarantine. Then I continued my education online. Although I am disappointed that my exchange education coincided with the eve of such difficult days, no adverse event can affect my pleasant memories there and thoughts on the high level of adaptation of academic education to the new conditions.

If you have read this far, thank you so much...