Merhaba!

On behalf of all the exchange mentors and ISS members, we would like to thank all our exchange students for this excellent time. Koç University truly appreciates your visit, and we hope you leave with wonderful memories.

All of our events would be meaningless without your contribution. When it is time to say goodbye, it is never easy, but we are left with wonderful memories and the opportunity to have known you all.

We love you so much.
Turkey will miss you!
Dalya & Alp
WILLIAM F. ZEMAN

My arrival to Koç University was neither fantastic nor pre-ordained.

I had been living in Ankara that summer, studying Turkish at the Turkish-American Association there. About a month into my visit, I had decided I could not see all Turkey had to offer in just one summer. I elected to stay. The countryside was too vast. My host family's house was covered with too many pictures of fantastic Cappadocian vistas, gorgeous mosques, and pristine beaches—these pictures made the thought of a return to the United States after just three months thoroughly unappealing to me. A weekend visit to Istanbul sealed the deal. This city, with its history, culture, endless passages and bars—I had to return here. I could not resume life in the United States with only an Istanbul weekend under my belt.

My home university informed me of one partnership in Turkey—a place called Koç University. I could stay enrolled at my university, yet spend the next semester there. At dinner the next night, in my broken Turkish, I broached the question.

"Koç University?" I said to my host family. "Do you know anything about it?"

"It's very good," my host father said, an ever-present cigarette dangling from his mouth. "Very expensive, I think, but very good."

My host mother, piling pilav on my plate, chimed in. "It's in Istanbul," she said. "I don't remember where exactly, but it's definitely there somewhere."

So, armed with only this knowledge—Koç was a good university, located somewhere in Istanbul—I enrolled. That September, I departed Ankara with a rucksack heavy on my shoulders and a backpack slug in front. I went to the bus station, found the cheapest ticket to Istanbul, and left Ankara behind me.

A word of advice to future readers—never take the cheapest bus you can find. It took me to Istanbul, yes—but left us passangers stranded alongside a highway outside the city proper. An hour later, I had made it into Istanbul proper. An hour after that, I was making my way to this distant district called "Sarıyer". Finally, several hours after my sleepless bus trip and my abrupt acquaintance with what I would come to know was called a "minibüs" (not a dolmuş, as I first thought), I arrived at the campus of Koç University. Needless to say, I was tired, sweaty, and my back hurt. Not the best state with which to make a pleasant introduction.

Yet I remember my first moments at Koç University with nothing but happy thoughts. The beautiful campus, made better by the lovely vista from which a crisp breeze cooled the sweat of my shoulders, welcomed me to my new academic home. Also, I cannot overstate the grace and inherent worth of Koç's exchange mentors, led by their fearless and ever-cheerful leader, Dalya. They shepherded us through an omnipresent web of paperwork and introduced us to Istanbul's wonders, whether Sarıyer fish restaurants or Beyoğlu's intricate bar network.

I am glad with my choice. Koç, like every institution, is not without faults. Yet, I have come to value even those. My commute from a tiny Şişli apartment, filled with Erasmus students, to Koç's campus each day is long, true—but I have come to enjoy the snapshots of Turkish life only visible on a crowded bus or Metro car, the feeling of locality that comes from blending into a minibüs stop's regular routine. Finally, few feelings offer greater relief than, after going through the security checkpoint and having a gruff security guard inspect my Turkish student ID, spilling out of the crowded minibüs onto the vast domain which is Koç's campus.

I don't know where my life journey will lead next. I don't know if I will return to Turkey, though I hope so every day. If I do, it heartens me to know I have friends here, with couches to sleep on and stories to share.

However, I do know that, for one brief moment of my life, I was a Turkish student, just like any other. I made the same commute, took the same classes, ate the same cheap tavuk döner at the same no-name büfe like every other student I saw on my day's commute. I chatted, flirted, complained, and complimented in a language which was not my own, with friends who were not my countrymen. For one brief moment, I had become part of a culture and life wholly alien to anything I had known before.

This is thanks to Koç University—an institution and student body which welcomed me with open arms, knowing little more than my name and transcript. For that warm generosity, I will always be grateful.
I cannot begin to explain how incredibly happy I was with my choice to study here in Turkey, but there were a few things that I wish I knew before I got here. Here are a few things I would like to share with you to help you get up to speed with life here in Turkey:

The first things that you have to do after arriving to Turkey is pick your football team and pick your cell phone provider. Making the right choice is essential not only simplifying your life but making a life decision. The three clubs you should choose from are: Beşiktaş, Fenerbahçe, or Galatasaray. Picking the wrong team can damage a friendship before it even starts, so choose wisely! When it comes to cell phone providers there are three choices as well: Avea, Turkcell, and Vodafone. After excessive research and my fair share of frustration with Turkcell, I have come to find that Avea is the best choice for visiting students, but make sure that you ask your mentors about any special campaigns by Vodafone to solidify your choice.

The next is the importance of taking Turkish. While the students here may speak English, you are in their home and it is at their convenience to speak to you in English. Not only is it helpful for you to understand Turkish for communicating with the numerous new people you will meet, but it is necessary to understand the culture of the country that you are living in. While it is a challenging language, it is more rewarding to try and learn it than to feel helpless or depend on others to communicate for the extent of your stay.

Turkey is a country literally bursting at the seams with history. Next to the super modern malls, you will find 15th century mosques, old city walls, historical buildings, and customs and traditions that date back to the Ottoman times. Take a trip to the Archeology museum and see history literally stacked on top of itself, or take a tram through Eminönü located on Divan Yolu, and you will get an idea of what I am talking about.

Life in a city that has around 15 million people, Istanbul, can be a little hectic at times, especially with the frequent traffic jams, but like everything in Turkey, there is more than one way to get somewhere or do something. The one word that comes to mind is ‘Yasak’. When you first hear this word and understand that it means 'forbidden', you’ll be immediately surprised by how far from the truth that actually is.

Things in Turkey operate in a different manner and in a different time frame. You’ll do more than survive if you keep an open mind as well as an open stomach; you will live! Don’t know where to go or what to do? All you have to do is ask. Ask your classmates. Ask your Teachers. Ask your friends. Ask your mentors. Just ask and not only will they tell you, but they will take you there! Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and go somewhere or try something new. Even if it doesn’t turn out for the best you will surely have stories to tell, so practice your story telling now.

Just because you are studying in Istanbul doesn’t mean that you have to stay in Istanbul. There are numerous trips planned by student groups that enable you to travel with other students going to explore Turkey. From the warm southern coast to the Arabic East to central Anatolia and even to the Black Sea, Turkey has a great deal to offer anyone who decides to travel here. As a bridge between Europe and Asia, Istanbul has a prime location for being really close to everything including other countries. Where you want to go and what you want to do when you get there is up to you; you just have to be adventurous enough to try!

Neglecting feelings of homesickness, you will embrace the joy that it is to live in a country that has a culture so similar and yet so different to your own. You will gain the respect of your professors and peers and become a valuable part of the community. Your initial thoughts of not fitting in and being ostracized will be swept to the side as wave after wave of generous Turkish hospitality will keep you surrounded with good company.

Looking back at my time here, I have met a significant number of incredible exchange students, but it is the Turkish friends that I have made that I will surely remember the most.

I hope that you enjoy your time in Turkey as much as I did.
Christmas is a holy day that we can’t forget. That’s why I decided to start planning something for that evening. Cassy and Alena were enthusiastic about the idea and, together, we began to plan everything. It took some time but was very worthwhile!

We had a fantastic dinner and a lot of help to prepare.

Again, thank you all!

Together we have created Christmas in Istanbul. And that is the mission of it: bringing people together, regardless of nationality, creed or religion.

Nuno V (From Portugal)
“Istanbul, you will be unforgettable!” :’( 

As the departure-date countdown enters the concluding stage, and with only 5 days left before going back to Pakistan, I finally realize the significance of what happened in my life since September. Trying to wrestle between the joys of going back home but at the same time leaving behind all the incredible friends I have made here makes me sad. My reasons for coming to Istanbul were to experience different cultures and create a network of friends from all parts of the globe; and Koç University helped me achieve this. Going down memory lane and recapping all the experiences I had at Istanbul, I have come to the realization that the last four months were truly one of the most amazing parts of my life.

Attempting to integrate with students from other countries to build a solid group of friends, we immediately started to gel together right from the first day. Each passing day we recap our first day at Istanbul when we arrived in Koç: not knowing where the bus stop is, taking those first few awkward steps onto the colorful dolmus going to places of which we had no clue of, the funny dialogue sessions with taxi drivers in different languages, from Urdu, Polish, German to English, yet the excitement of exploring new places with only the map in hand, made the experiences of our first night unforgettable. As time passed by we grew more into our lives here; going grocery shopping at Sariyer, visiting Taksim for drinks with buddies, and planning trips to discover incredible Turkey. The sights were all amazing, obviously. We explored all of Istanbul, seeing famous landmarks such as Galata Tower, The Famous Topkapi Palace and many archeological museums.

Even though I had many discussions with taxi drivers and shopkeepers but all the efforts of my amazing mentors, who tried to teach me Turkish, went in vein. I ended up learning 5 words only: “Evet”, “Tesekkurler”, “sevgili”, “Merhaba” and “Seni Seviyorum”; not a bad vocabulary for such a short stay. I did learn enough to make my way to all around the city.

I had heard some scary things about how tough universities are in Europe, so I had no idea what to expect when I arrived. I was relieved to find that the education system isn’t really as tough as I anticipated. The main difference was that there were many hopeless assignments. All of my instructors were wonderful, especially Semih Yalim, who with his extraordinary style of teaching, taught one of the best marketing courses. Apart from the outstanding faculty, the campus life is incredible. From not knowing where class is to sleeping during lecture, from daily volleyball flights to snow fights in chilling weather, from crazy Halloween parties to even crazier charismas, from always smiling Yasemin to the dreaded “kütüphane kapanış” voice in the library, I enjoyed every moment of my stay at Koç.

When I say I was bringing home “Istanbul” I did not expect to bring home the Galata Tower, but here I am with a few days to go feeling more and more attached to Turkish people. I don’t really know what the future has in store for me when I return, but what I do know is that I am taking with me very good memories of Turkey. I’m going to miss all my friends here and the nights we’ve spent going to pubs and visiting incredible places. I’m especially going to miss my Turkish friends who’ve welcomed me into their lives with open arms. Although I’m a bit depressed to leave so early, I am sure that my last days here will be lived to the fullest. I have just one thing to say before I leave:

“Istanbul, you will be unforgettable!” :’(

With Love,

From Sajjad
Some of the Koc University Fall '09 exchange students at our first outing to Sultanahmet.

Our welcome party was a night filled with dancing, mingling and good times.

Chilling with the locals in Cappadocia.

We rocked the Koç Halloween Party!!

Nothing beats a beautiful day at Kilyos Beach.

Sipping on Turkish Tea while chatting with the very hospitable restaurant owner in Princess Island.

We had a fun time at a Pajama Party thrown by one of the mentors.

Occasional parties at Odeon are always memorable!

We prepared a full course Thanksgiving feast (Turkey and all) for all of the exchange students!!

A weekend getaway to Ephesus in İzmir was like taking a step into the history books...

A few of us traveled to Antalya during the holidays and cooked a delicious Christmas lunch.

We continue the party in the dolmuş even after our official Farewell Event!

Prepared by Salvin Varghese (Drexel- USA)