

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA
Major(s)	Film, Theatre and International Relations
Exchange Institution	American University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 2 2015 and Tri 1 2016

## B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	\$120 per semester, depending on classes
Accommodation	\$6885 per semester on-campus accommodation – traditional double room
Return Airfare	\$2500
Local Transportation	Around \$10 a week for metro depending on how much you use it (for next year this is included in student fees, so free?). \$10 for an uber for a night out.
Meals	\$2550 per semester for AU 125 meal swipes. Plus extra for meals out, breakfasts etc.
Visa	N/A
Health & Insurance	\$790 travel insurance, \$2461 for AU health insurance - year (essential unless you have another American-based insurance plan)
Personal Spending	\$4000 – eating out, travel, souvenirs, room supplies, etc.
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$30 a month for talk and text (no data), \$5 sim card
Other fees (specify)	Spring break travel - \$600, AU deposit - \$600
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	AU Health Insurance (see above) and medical fees (insurance is only partial coverage).

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

I spend a little more than I expected – particularly on meals out, as that is a really common social thing.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc.)?

I had a few hundred dollars in US cash with me when I went over. In the first few days I set up a Wells Fargo account in the US and wire transferred all the money I needed for the year from my NZ to my US account. Having a US account works really well because you can pay with your debit (eftpos) card anywhere with basically no fees. Using a NZ card would cost international usage fees I think?

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

DC is an expensive place to live, so be aware of that. Look out for the free meals on campus – they happen often and are a good way to save a buck. Go for a lower meal plan than you think you need (I reduced from 175 to 125 in my second semester) and eat breakfast in your room. I would say the best use of your money is to travel! Do weekend trips – look into busing to nearby cities (cheaper than flights or trains), using Airbnb and Couchsurfers for cheap travel.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

\$2-3

**C: Visas & Insurance** *\*Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

I am a US citizen so I didn't need to do this.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

N/A - get on to it early and plan for a trip up to Auckland, from others' experiences.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

Yes. It could be waived if you had a comprehensive medical insurance with an US based branch/office (pretty unlikely coming from NZ I think, so I got it). NZD\$2461 for the year. Keep in mind that I think they initially charge you a full year even if you stay just one semester, and then you have to apply for a semester's refund before you leave.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

I got my travel insurance from Southern Cross Travel Insurance. I made no claims so can't comment on how good they were, but I think they are generally well regarded.

## D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 2/2015</b>					
GOVT-396 - Inequality	English	200 level POLS class	20	5	Professor Thomas Merrill – not a great professor. This was a hard class, and also not really what I was expecting. Totally focused on economic inequality

					(not gender, race etc.) and lots of political philosophy. Wouldn't really recommend.
ARTS 235 – Artist's Perspective: Video Art	English	200 level FILM class	20	4	Professor Naoko Wowsugi – a hilarious and quirky professor. This class was very hands on – I learned lots about using DSLR cameras and editing software. Lots of work, but a great class. Definitely be prepared for making crazy art films.
AMST 320 - American Cultural History: Civil Rights in the United States	English	Elective	20	3	Professor Aaron Bell – great professor, so much knowledge and super creative ways of teaching. This was a great class – lots of readings, but all very interesting, movies, activities etc. included in class. Also really interesting assignments. Not too much hard work, just lots of time to wade through the readings.
PERF 251 – Fundamentals of Acting I	English	200 level THEA course	20	4	Professor Caleen Jennings – an absolutely wonderful professor. This was a fantastic class. Very full on – almost completely practical work. Challenging but I learned so much.
VUW Trimester 1/2016					
COMM 414 - History of Cross Cultural	English	300 level FILM course	20	3	Professor Patricia Aufderheide – very full on, but a great professor

Film/Video: Representation, Identity and Memory					with lots of knowledge, and very accommodating. Really great class – you had to watch a film, do some readings and write a summary every week, but those were the only assignments apart from an exam. I loved this class and would highly recommend.
LIT 326 – The Coen Brothers, In Context	English	300 level FILM course	20	3	Professor Erik Dussere – great professor. Definitely a literature style class. I surprisingly learned lots about post-modernism and the history of cinema. Weekly quizzes on readings, but apart from that, not too much work.
PERF 355 – Voice and Speech	English	300 level THEA course	20	5	Professor Caleen Jennings – love her. Really great class. Very very full on, and lots of work. You really need to be committed to get the most out of this class. But I learned an incredible amount. Highly recommend.
SISU 310 – Gender and Peace-building	English	300 level INTP course	20	4	Professor Barbara Wien – an amazing women – so knowledgeable, well connected and experienced. This class was fantastic, I learned so much. Lots of readings, but so interesting and informative.

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### **Course Registration/Enrolment**

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

You are given a date and time where registration where classes become available to register for. It was all done online. All classes are pretty small, so defiantly go on and register as soon as you can. But also, if you can above 7<sup>th</sup> on the waitlist, you have a pretty good chance of getting in, so don't be discouraged. There is lots of movement in the first few weeks. The Abroad at AU staff are pretty helpful, and they encourage you to go through them if you have any questions for the professors.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

I ended up doing almost none of the classes I first got approved to do at AU. But there are so many great courses that this is not a huge issue. Be willing to be flexible and have lots of classes you are interested in. Also, if you want to do a class that is shut to exchange students, you can sometimes go and chat to people once you are there, and they will let you in anyway – not a guarantee but worth a try!

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Be flexible but also go for what you want – for example, I had a meeting with a dean in SIS and ended up getting into a 300 level SIS class they originally said I couldn't do. Most of the staff are very accessible and willing to talk to you, so take advantage of that.

### **Academic Experience**

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

The work levels were as hard as Victoria, or a little easier, as far as the actual difficulty of the content. However, the classes were more work – many classes had a reading summary/quiz etc. due every week, so the work was more consistently busy. You also can't really get away with not doing your readings to the same extent that you can at Vic. There was also lots less leeway to miss class – generally you could only miss 3 or 4 classes a semester or you failed.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

All the classes were lots smaller – tutorial sizes (and so there were also no tutorials). This meant that it was much more discussion based, and most classes would have 10-20% of your mark based on participation. I really liked the style of teaching. The professors were generally really invested in their students. They were very accessible and encouraged you to come to office hours.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

I took only four classes both semester, though most AU students take five. I found this gave me more time to travel and explore the US. I loved doing the AMST course that I did, because it really gave me a great insight into some US history, and is something I could never have taken at Vic. If you are doing theatre, I adore Caleen Jennings, and would do any class with her – truly an amazing teacher (I did Fundamentals of Acting I, and Voice and Speech with her). Also, for SIS, Barbara Wien is incredible, and I loved the class I did with her (Gender and Peacebuilding). Aside from the Govt class I took, I would recommend all the classes I did at AU.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Get into a schedule and try and work pretty solidly throughout the week. That way you keep on top of everything and can have the weekends to explore. Even more than at Victoria, it is important to chip away at things, and don't leave things til the last minute. Go talk to your professors! They are generally really helpful and love you coming in to talk. The librarians are also pretty great, and can be helpful.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

Free wifi throughout campus (generally pretty good). The library is quite small and gets crowded especially round exams, but there are generally lots of other buildings open for study spots – I personally liked Katzen and McKinley. You can hire laptops and lots of other technology from the library, and they also have heaps of desktops throughout the library, and computer labs in other buildings to. Well stocked library and AU has a consortium with lots of other nearby uni libraries, so if AU doesn't have it, they can generally get it for you in a few days – such a great service.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

N/A

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

On- campus halls of residence.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

Pros: living on campus so you are so close to classes. Also, if you get a dining hall meal plan, meals are very easy and good. Also the dining room is a bit of a social hub, and a cool place to see everyone. Living on campus you feel much more connected to the community and are really close to lots of your friends. At AU, students of all levels live in campus, so it's not just a first year thing like at Vic. Rooms are super warm in the winter, and good air con in the summer. I think it's probably a bit easier to meet other Americans while living on campus too. There is a free shuttle from campus to the Tenleytown metro, so easy access to public transport.

Cons: you will probably have a roommate (or two). This was no issue for me, but could be if you like lots of privacy. It's expensive and rooms are pretty small. AU is a totally dry campus, so no alcohol (even if you're 21+).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I loved living on campus, and I would highly recommend it to anyone. It is really great as far as really getting the full campus experience. However, I also had friends off campus who a great time too.

How early can you move into accommodation?

The day before Abroad at AU orientation I think – so about a week before class starts. However, you can apply for early move in (costs extra).

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

Some of the campus housing is apartment style and has a kitchen included (Nebraska and Cassel). I was in a traditional hall so I just had a bedroom, and then a common area on each floor with oven/stovetop, microwave, and sink. You can also hire a mini-fridge for your room, which I did. I ate porridge for breakfast in the common area, and then had lunch and dinner at TDR (the on-campus dining room) I had a 175 meal plan the first semester, and a 125 plan the second. The food at TDR is pretty good – lots of variety and they cater well for dietary requirements. There is also a Freshii and Subway on campus that accept meal swipes. And several other cafes that don't, but do take Eagle bucks or Dining Dollars (\$200 of each is included in most meal plans). You can get a meal plan even if you don't live on campus, and I would recommend it even if it's just a small one.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

I tried to find a place to live off-campus, before I was offered on-campus housing at the last minute. I found it quite hard to find a place – I would recommend checking housing facebook page lots. As far as places to live, The Berkshire and The Avalon are really close to campus, and lots of students live there, so they are good places to try.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Don't count on living on campus! I got a space right at the last minute, but it is pretty unlikely with Vic students, because we have an exchange program that doesn't include housing. Housing in DC is pretty expensive so be prepared.

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

It was a little hard – Americans are very friendly, but making real friends was a little harder. Having said that, I met some fantastic people in my classes, and also through a campus ministry called Chi Alpha. I think that joining a club or a sports team is a great way to meet Americans. And I highly recommend it – it's easy to stick with the exchange students, but making friends with Americans is a different and great experience.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

It's not a hugely different culture. I think the longer you are there, the more you notice little things that are different. Even towards at end of my year, I was noticing subtly different social norms. Americans are generally a little more straight up, which is sometimes a bit of a surprise.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

This maybe sounds weird, but the process of making friends is actually very different in the US. I don't know if there is a way to be prepared, it's just something to be aware of! AU especially is very driven, and a type A personality kind of place – so just remember to chill out sometimes!

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Everyone is so friendly and open. People are very vocal about problems and things that need to be changed, which is super refreshing. People are incredibly generous and helpful – even strangers you meet around town are generally very willing to help you out. The culture at AU is also very ambitious and politically active which is really cool.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Everyone was really friendly, to me, and interested in New Zealand. Staff and faculty were great and very understanding of anything I didn't get, given that I didn't grown up in the US.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

There was a great disability services center at AU (Academic Support and Access Centre). I have a learning disability and they were great about getting me note-takers and exam arrangements. There was some racism, as there is everywhere, but it was managed better than other places. All sexual orientations were pretty well accepted, similar to Vic. AU is generally very liberal, and people are aware and accepting of minorities.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

No – there wasn't a huge amount of knowledge about New Zealand, but people were open and interested.

## **G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Chi Alpha Christian campus ministry – super friendly people and made great friends

Crew – briefly – I loved this, but quit because it was so time consuming and early morning practices

Inter-dialogue group – so so so recommend!!

Abroad at AU events – great fun, do as many as you can!

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Bus to: Philadelphia, Baltimore, Annapolis, Old Alexandria, New York

Elsewhere in US: Charleston, New Orleans, LA and San Francisco were all great. I also heard Chicago is great

I spent Spring Break in Guadeloupe – amazing

There are so many museums and monuments downtown DC – you can spend so much time there

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

It depends on your visa, but there are lots of on-campus jobs if your visa allows.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There are also lots of great opportunities to intern on the hill, or in government agencies etc. (most are unpaid though). I think they can sometimes be quite competitive though. As far as volunteering, I did DC Reads – tutoring kids through the District which was great and a cool way to see different parts of DC. There are generally lots of opportunities for both – people come to AU because of its proximity to the Capitol and the opportunities that provides.

### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

1	A camera/good phone camera
2	Warm clothes if you are there for winter
3	A good patriotic piece of clothing so you can rep NZ
4	Conversion plug
5	Passport

### **5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university**

1	Be open and friendly to everyone – especially in the first few weeks – that’s your prime time for making friends
2	Get to know the metro and the bus system
3	Take advantage of the weeks and holidays – it’s easy to stay on campus but go into town or travel! Go with other exchange students or by yourself!
4	Get involved on campus in clubs, sports and events
5	Get to know your professors – one of my favorite things about AU was how great my professors were and how invested they were in you.

### **Top 5 Things to do**

What are your ‘Top 5 Things To Do’ future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Go see the Smithsonians and the Newsuem
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2	If you are there for Spring Semester, go to the Founders Day Ball
3	Hang out in Georgetown and get cupcakes from Baked and Wired
4	Go to New York!
5	Go to a frat party

## H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to the exchange office!!

I had an amazing time at AU, and would highly recommend it to anyone. I met so many amazing people, and made friends for life. I also had so many great experiences, and did some great travel. The classes were so so great, and I have professors I know I will keep in touch with. I learned so much, both in and outside the classroom. Living in another country is hard, but I learnt so much about myself, America, and New Zealand too. Going on exchange is lots of organising, hard work and paper work. It can be frustrating, but it is so worth it. Not only did I meet Americans, but I made friends from people all over the world. It was an incredible adventure that I will never forget. If you are tossing up whether to go on exchange (as I was) - go for it!

