

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Commerce
Major(s)	Accounting, Commercial Law and Information Systems
Exchange Institution	Pennsylvania State University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1 & 2 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	\$450
Accommodation	\$10,000 (whole year)
Return Airfare	\$1600
Local Transportation	\$50
Meals	\$5000
Visa	\$500
Health & Insurance	\$1250
Personal Spending	\$5,000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$450
Other fees (specify)	\$50 – gym membership, \$1000 – travel on weekends
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	<i>There is tax and tip when you dine out, so make sure you account for that. I didn't expect health insurance to be so expensive; it's a lot of money especially if you don't end up using it at all on the trip.</i>

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

It was what I expected, I wanted to make the most of every moment so I overestimated costs and personal spending money.

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

I opened up an American bank account; the university promotes a bank with student rates. I used that and a cash passport. However, I recommend opening up a bank account if you are there for a year, it makes transferring money easier and you only have to worry about fees and exchange rates on your first NZD to USD transfer.

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

Overestimate your costs, that way you won't stress over money and can make the most of everything while you're abroad. Also, take into account taxes and tips when you dine at a restaurant.

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

They both would've been roughly around \$1-\$2. Although, 'good' coffee would've been around \$4.

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?

The visa process is smooth as long as you follow the steps and have all the documents required. It should only take around a month to process; however apply well in advance to avoid any stress. You need to apply for the visa online, pay the fees, then book an interview.

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

Double check you have all the required documents and apply well in advance!

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?

There is mandatory insurance costing around \$1000. They recommend Aetna insurance, however that is expensive. They also allow other insurance companies, as long as you can prove it covers certain health insurance requirements. You need to fill out a waiver form and get that approved by the university health services.

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

I used Aetna for the first semester, it covered everything but was very expensive. The second semester I found a cheaper one, costing around \$400. This met their health insurance requirements. However, be aware that most health insurance companies make you pay for the first \$300-\$500 costs before they pay for it.

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
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
ACCTG 471	English	ACCY 231	15	5	I found this difficult as US accounting standards are different to NZ. Although, the lecturer was super helpful and very nice.

ECON 140	English	ECON 141	15	2	Basic Economics, mostly multi choice tests.
FINA 301	English	FINA 201	15	3	This was an online class, the tests were all multi choice. You work at your own pace which was beneficial if you travel a lot on the weekends.
COMMS 150	English	Elective	15	1	This was a fun elective, you basically watch movies and write about them.

VUW Trimester 2/YEAR

SOC 119	English		15	1	Highly recommend this class, it is one of the most popular classes at Penn State. The lecturer is amazing! He has his own TED talks and he has a way of broadening your perspective on social issues. Assignments also include tweets and video blogs. Very easy to pass!
COMMS 168	English		15	1	This was a very mediocre course on American journalism.
MIS 479	English	INFO 376	15	3	This was an interesting course; this class involves group projects and uses the computer program rapid miner.
SCM 301	English	INFO 200 level	15	3	This class heavily focused on supply chain management. The tests were relatively easy and were all multi choice.

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Course Registration/Enrolment

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

You are set up with an advisor to make sure you are enrolled in classes that suit you. They try really hard to get you in to the classes you need or want. I found them super helpful!

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 was lucky enough to get into most of the classes I wanted. Although bear in mind, it is a big university and there are limited seats for classes.

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

Make sure you have plenty of backup classes; seats are limited especially for popular classes. Ensure that you can be flexible with different courses and research as much as you can on each class. There is a website called rate my professors, this gives you a better understanding on what the lecturer and class content is like.

Academic Experience

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

It was similar in many aspects, however there aren't any tutorials so going to class was needed. I found that you were on a more personal level with lecturers. They offer extra test/exam prep sessions and were more than happy to help students during office hours. Also, I found that you had something due or a test every second week. They give you a small load of work every week and spread it out over the semester, unlike Vic which has one mid-term and a couple little assignments every couple weeks.

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?

I thought it was different how almost all of my classes were tested by multi choice. It made it easier, but also harder. Classes were very dependent on the lecturer, they make their own courses and testing requirements. Some had very interactive approaches to teaching, where as others were very plain.

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?

4-5 courses a semester is very doable. EVERYONE MUST TAKE SOC 119! This class will absolutely blow your mind, change your entire perspective on pressing matters and challenge the way you think!!!

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

Keep up with the work and get on top of it so you can travel on the weekends and have time to experience

the American College experience! You need to make the most of everything, so be organized.

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

They are very convenient, open 24 hours and are next to halls and dining commons.

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?

First semester on campus, the second semester in an apartment.

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

Living on campus was fun! You are constantly surrounded by friends and have something to do. Although, my dorm room was small and the bathrooms were old and small. However, the cleaners were in there almost every day!

Living off campus was also the best, you weren't as restricted and had the freedom to blast music if you wanted. I had American flat mates which was a blast. I became really immersed in the culture and made friends in the apartment building.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

If you are living on campus get South or Pollock halls! If you are living off campus, try to get a place downtown on College or Beaver Ave!

How early can you move into accommodation?

I could move into my apartment whenever I wanted as the contract started on my terms. For the dorms we got to move in the weekend before classes started.

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

I stayed in Beaver Hall which is in Pollock. It had its own kitchen and fridge in the common room, however I had a meal plan and mostly ate there. Beaver hall is right next to the South dining commons which was super convenient. However, the food can get a bit boring after a month!

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

Thoroughly research the place and read over the contract so you don't get stuck into a 1 year lease if you are there for one semester. It was easier finding off campus housing in the Fall as it is technically the beginning of the school year for them, so new leases are opened up.

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

South and Pollock halls are the best and most convenient!

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 easy, just put yourself out there, get out of your comfort zone and join clubs. People will probably end up loving you because of your accent.

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

There wasn't much of a culture shock, just like anywhere there are some really lovely people and some not so friendly. Don't take it to heart, as some Americans are very straight up.

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

There weren't many cultural differences, other than tips and tax. That took a lot of getting used to.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I loved how welcoming they were. I also appreciated how extravagant and grand everything was, such as their facilities, food and events.

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

Everyone was very intrigued by New Zealand and absolutely loved the accent.

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?

Penn State are very accepting of different people, there is a lot of diversity within the university. They also provide facilities and help to assist people with disabilities.

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

No

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?

There are plenty of clubs at Penn State ranging from sports, music, cultural to Harry Potter club, you name it and they will probably have it. Join as many as you want. I found that it was the best way to make friends

and get immersed in the American culture. I joined a couple dance teams, a global ambassadors club and a social volleyball team. It was super fun!

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

There are plenty of events going on in the weekends, including fundraiser events to football games. You will have no trouble finding something to do on the weekends. Cities like New York and Philadelphia are close by. It's definitely worth a visit! Also, make American friends that way you can experience holidays we don't usually celebrate like Thanksgiving with them, or you can plan trips in Spring Break together.

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

You can only work on-campus as a restriction of the J-1 visa. I didn't work, although one my friends worked and he found it very easy to apply.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

It's kind of difficult to find internship opportunities; you have to do a lot of research into it to find one.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	A winter coat, beanie, a scarf and gloves! Prepare your bodies for the cold!!
2	Whittakers Chocolate – my American friends loved it and man Hershey's choc gets old real fast!
3	Camera to capture the memories
4	Multi Plug so you can plug that into your adaptor and not have to charge one thing at a time
5	Clothes for every season/occasion – you might attend a formal!

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

1	Don't let ANYTHING hold you back from this amazing experience
2	Join clubs!!!
3	Really put yourself out there to make friends, this will definitely enhance your experience
4	Plan weekends away, keep an eye out for car rentals, cheap buses or flights (use skiplagged)
5	Fresher Fifteen hits you like a sack of bricks

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 to a Penn State football game (especially because we are now BIG 10 Champs!!)
2	Enjoy every type of food that you would never find in any other country

3	Get a picture with the Nittany Lion Mascot
4	Go to THON (Pediatric Cancer Fundraiser)
5	Go to a concert at BJC (We saw Fetty Wap, Lil Wayne, Kanye West, Bryson Tiller, Nelly, Amy Schumer)

H: Personal Experience

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

This exchange was the most life changing and uplifting experience of my life. The opportunity to attend Penn State was incredible. The university is everything and more, it is the epitome of all American Colleges. Aside from the grand scale of facilities and interesting courses that aren't offered back home, I really appreciated the unity and pride shown by the students. Everyone is Penn State proud and it was amazing to be a part of it. I especially liked the work hard, play hard environment at the university. Students were driven and focused, however also knew how to have a good time through clubs and activities. It was particularly refreshing to be surrounded by so many people in the same stage of life with you, going through the same experiences and issues.

I really learnt a lot about myself, how I dealt with uncomfortable situations and it forced me to step outside of my comfort zone. The university really allows students to grow, experience and make connections. The best part about this exchange was making friends from Penn State and all over the world. I loved learning about different cultures and coming across different personalities. I've made the best of friends and memories that will last a lifetime.

