

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Commerce
Major(s)	Marketing and Information Systems
Exchange Institution	Penn State University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 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	\$100 (you can hire select books at the school bookstore and on Amazon.com)
Accommodation	\$2500
Return Airfare	\$1800
Local Transportation	Most buses on campus are free, others going to off campus locations are \$2 per ride
Meals	\$2000 (no meal plan)
Visa	\$480 (plus travel and accommodation in Auckland if necessary)
Health & Insurance	\$600
Personal Spending	\$3000-4000 (including travel during and after the semester)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$60 per month for a prepaid plan
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Flying out of the local airport (University Park Airport) was extremely expensive at almost double the price of any other ticket, so if I wanted to go somewhere I had to fly from Philadelphia or Pittsburg which are only 2-3 hours away but you have to account for the bus ticket or rental car to get there. It was still cheaper than flying out of UP airport but added a little more than necessary on the ticket price.

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

It was pretty much what I expected having travelled to the US before.

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

I used an Air New Zealand Onesmart card. I arrived in the US and Canada for a couple of months before starting school so I needed this anyway so it made sense to keep using it. I definitely recommend using Onesmart over Cash Passport (I used this last time I travelled) as the app is much easier to use and funds transfer much faster. The best option is to get a PNC bank card, which you can set up at orientation and is an American bank account that you have through Penn State. I was a bit lazy and didn't bother doing this but it is definitely worth it as the fees are no more than a currency card. I would still get a currency card to take as well for travel before and afterwards (and as an emergency back up).

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

Expect to spend a lot on travelling during the semester. You'll make other international friends who will want to travel on the weekends. I was away visiting a different place every second weekend.

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

\$1.50 USD

**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?**

Yes I needed a J-1 exchange visitor visa. The process is a little long and tedious but it is not difficult as long as you follow the instructions well. The application and interview booking part can be done all in one day. You have to fill out a form online and pay two fees (MRV and SEVIS), and then you can book your appointment at the consulate in Auckland. If possible you want to do this at least a week before you leave as it can take up to 4 days to get your passport back after the interview.

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

If possible you want to book your interview for at least one week (the earlier the better) before you leave as it can take up to 4 days to get your passport back after the interview. Make sure you have all the required paperwork with you and a spare passport style photo in case yours didn't upload properly. Don't be nervous for the interview, it is only a couple of minutes long and they only ask you questions like where are you going and when do you plan on returning, so it isn't difficult.

**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?**

Penn State has a mandatory medical insurance requirement and you can pay extra fees if you don't get a plan as soon you get there so don't leave it. Penn State's medical insurance plan is Aetna and it costs around \$1500 for one semester. They have a waiver option however it is very difficult to find insurance companies that meet this waiver requirement. There was one plan that did meet the insurance waiver called ISO and was only about \$500 which is what I got. However I believe they may be getting rid of this plan to make Aetna your only option but it is still worth checking out. Although Aetna is expensive, it covers you extremely well so you won't be paying anything extra if anything happened to you medically.

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

I used ISO which I purchased online and got waived by the Health Centre but as mentioned above I think it may not meet waiver requirements anymore so will need to be checked.

## 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/YEAR 2016</b>					
COMM 168 – American Journalism	English	100 level elective	15	1	Very simple and pretty interesting class. Attendance was mandatory and the lectures weren't hugely engaging but the material for exams was very simple and the weekly homework was usually interesting and easy. Good class to take if you are doing some difficult ones towards your major.
COMM 150 – The Art of Cinema	English	100 level elective	15	2	Great class if you enjoy film studies. Starts with old black and white films and works towards more recent ones. Easy if you actually watch the films and read the slides before doing an exam.
MKTG 342 – Marketing Research	English	MARK 203	15	3	This class is broken into many different projects and exams, so some are very easy to get credit for and some a little more difficult. A little tedious at times and has a heavy focus on statistics but generally not hard.

MKTG 497 – Special Topics (Sports Business Marketing)	English	300 level MARK elective	15	2	Extremely easy for a senior marketing paper. Would highly recommend this class to business majors who enjoy sports. There are lots of interesting guest speakers that you get credit for attending. All exams had content from only 5 lectures each so very easy to study for. Group projects were generally fun and interesting.
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### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

The only thing in terms of classes I did before arriving at Penn State was fill out a form stating the major classes I wanted to take and the back ups to these classes. There is a website where you can research the classes and work out if it'll fit in a schedule ok. This is all explained to you through email. The real registration happens when you arrive at Penn State with an appointment set up by your adviser. The adviser will sort your timetable and have alternatives to any classes you didn't get in to if they were full.

#### 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?

Unfortunately exchange students are generally admitted last into classes so if anything is full it is unlikely you would get into that class. I only got into one of my original chosen classes, however everyone gets a meeting with a course adviser who helps sort it out for you. My adviser had found alternatives that worked for me which was very helpful.

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

If there is a class you desperately want to get into but is full, you can go on a waitlist online that is open for a few days after classes begin, as students constantly drop in and out of classes. The waitlist puts you into the class as soon as someone drops out which is very handy.

Also if you are able to take some elective classes that don't apply to your major, definitely do something that isn't offered at home as Penn State has hundreds of courses that you would never think of doing!

### Academic Experience

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

In the classes I did at Penn State I found the content of work significantly easier than the work at Victoria. The workload was heavier in terms of small assignments and weekly homework but these were generally very easy and did not take up a lot of time.

**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 was expecting the content of the classes to be a lot more difficult than my classes at Victoria but it was actually significantly easier. Most classes are pretty intimate with only 40 ish students in the class so you can get to know your professor really well which is quite nice. Class discussions are a lot more common as well.

**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 only took four classes but I regret not taking at least one more elective as it would have been good to get some more points to credit back. Unlike Victoria where the recommended course load for one semester is four courses, it is not uncommon for Penn State students to take between 5 and 7. If you are planning on doing a solid amount of travelling during the semester then it is probably a good idea to stick to 4 classes.

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

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

There are computer labs and several library spaces throughout the campus that all have decent internet access. A lot of classes heavily focus on participation and attendance so if you have a class that does don't take this for granted and not turn up as this is easy credit that you may regret passing on when it comes to your final exams.

**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?**

Off campus - University Terrace Apartments. It is unusual for this to happen but on campus housing was full so many exchange students were not offered this.

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

Pros were that this was a lot cheaper than on campus and it was very nice to have a whole apartment to call your own as opposed to just a room. I shared a room with a friend I already knew from home, but we also had two other American flat mates so we still had the experience of living with Americans. Also I did

not have to purchase the compulsory on campus meal plan that is extremely expensive, although it was sometimes a bit of a drag having to cook!!

Cons were that it wasn't downtown so I had to travel to get to places, although it was less than a 30 minute walk to get to any of my classes, and a free bus pass came with the accommodation (most off campus housing places have their own bus). I was originally upset that I wouldn't have the true "American college dorm" experience, but upon arriving, my friends who lived on campus said that it wasn't all they thought it would be anyway as students weren't that social on their floor. Also the students who live on campus are predominantly first years so a little younger.

### **What accommodation would you recommend to future students?**

It really depends on what kind of experience you are looking for and what your financial situation is. Off campus housing can be cheaper but you are also responsible for paying bills, deposits and finding it yourself which can be difficult, especially for one semester. If you opted to stay off campus definitely do some research and ask past students if the location is worth it.

If you opt to stay on campus, South Halls and Pollock Halls are the best location in my opinion as they are right in the center of downtown. West and East Halls aren't bad either but are a little further to some places.

### **How early can you move into accommodation?**

On campus is only a couple of days before classes start which is a pain as orientation is for at least one week so you may have to pay for other accommodation before you can move in. Off campus depends on when your lease begins but most begin at the beginning of the month (January or August depending on the semester) so it would usually be available when you get there.

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

I lived in an apartment with a fully furnished kitchen so I had the freedom to cook. There are lots of good eating-places around State College and on campus as well. The dining halls were very expensive whether you were on a meal plan or not so I didn't eat there at all.

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

There are several facebook pages that have listings of open rooms and apartments. I found my room on this page through a girl who had signed on for the year but needed to sublet the first semester. If you are only going for the fall semester (tri 2 Vic) it is quite hard to find a room that is only a sign on for one semester and you may be told that if you sign on for a whole year you'll find someone to take over your lease for the second semester, however I had some friends who did this and they really struggled to find someone to take over and they lost a month's rent or so over it. Signing on in the Spring semester means you'll probably have to pay for the Summer months too so it is kind of luck if you get a place that only makes you pay for the months you are there. Just make sure you do proper research of the building and ask lots of questions to your sub letter.

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

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

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

Making local friends was easiest through joining clubs or sports teams. I have to admit that most of my friends were international but I also made some good American friends through clubs. Classes were not as easy to make friends in unless you are really out there.

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

I had been to America before so had no problems. You are taught a lot of American customs during orientation so don't worry.

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

N/A

**What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?**

Most people are really friendly and interested in people from other countries, especially us Kiwis!

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

Just like anyone else. Teachers and students were usually pretty interested in me and my 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 is pretty diverse and I never witnessed any racial or sexual discrimination. In saying this, Pennsylvania is a pretty conservative state so going outside of State College may be different.

**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 was a club for anything and everything at Penn State. Everything from beekeeping to quidditch to coffee club...and every sport! Just get out there and try something new. Clubs are the easiest ways for you to meet new people so join as many as you can.

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

If you are there for the fall semester (tri 2 vuw) you have to go to at least one Penn State football game at Beaver Stadium. This stadium is one of the biggest in the country and the student atmosphere is indescribable. There is a car hire place downtown that waives an under 25 fee so it is very affordable to hire a car for the weekend or even day. My friends and I hired a car to go to places such as Philadelphia, Toronto, Pittsburg, New York and DC. Just make sure you get insurance and know how to drive on the other side of the road (it's easier than it looks). Domestic flights are pretty affordable too for Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

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

International students are only allowed to work on campus and for a maximum of 20 hours per week. Most jobs require you to work at least one weekend day, which is why I didn't get a job as I wanted to experience as much as possible on the weekends. If I was there for a whole year I may have considered it.

### **What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?**

You'll notice a lot of internship opportunities for domestic students during the semester. A couple of my international friends organized internships in other cities before they arrived but I'm not sure how they went about this. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities especially in the Spring semester for THON.

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

<b>1</b>	Lots and lots and lots of chocolate (their chocolate is gross)
<b>2</b>	No expectations (just roll with it)
<b>3</b>	Photos of home for your bedroom wall
<b>4</b>	Not too much luggage as it is a pain to travel with afterwards and you'll buy heaps as clothes etc are cheap (and you'll want Penn State merch!)
<b>5</b>	Little gifts from New Zealand that you could give to someone you make really good friends with/stay with over holidays.

## Top 5 Things to do

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

<b>1</b>	Go to a football game at Beaver Stadium
<b>2</b>	See a concert or game at Bryce Jordan Center
<b>3</b>	Hire a car for weekend trips away, petrol is really cheap and daily hire usually cheaper than as a bus if you fill the car and split it (21+ can hire with no extra fees in State College)
<b>4</b>	If you like Tennis and are there for Tri 2 go to the US Open in NY you can get reasonably priced tickets on 3 <sup>rd</sup> party sites (ie I paid \$30 to see a quarterfinal match)
<b>5</b>	

## H: Personal Experience

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

My exchange experience was most definitely the best time I have ever had since I started university. American education is so different but really interesting and fun and there are so many opportunities for things you have never done or may never get the chance to do. I got to travel to so many cool places and see amazing things, before, during and after the semester. I recommend doing an exchange to everyone whether it is to America or any other country as it really gives you a broad perspective of what education and life is like outside of New Zealand.