

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	LLB/BA
Major(s)	Sociology and Political Science
Exchange Institution	Tilburg University, The Netherlands
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2016 Tri 1

## 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	160
Accommodation	3300
Return Airfare	2300
Local Transportation	N/A (very expensive, but you bike everywhere)
Meals	400
Visa	80
Health & Insurance	430
Personal Spending	10,000 (I did a lot travel over eight months)
Communications (phone, etc.)	N/A
Other fees (specify)	N/A
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	N/A

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

Everything is more expensive in Europe than NZ, which is not helped by the fact that the NZD is weaker than the Euro. I saved a lot before my exchange and ended up spending a lot more than I intended. This was annoying but I wanted to make sure I was as active as possible while on exchange. Your exchange does not have to be as expensive as mine was, but I came to Europe specifically to do a lot of travel.

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

I just used a Westpac debit card. It meant that I had to pay about a \$16 withdrawal fee each time I used it, but I just never set up a Dutch account. It is easy to set up a bank account over here and I would

recommend doing so at the start of your exchange.

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

The NZD is really weak, so don't be surprised if you are constantly low on cash! Both myself and the other exchange student from VUW have had difficulty with being low on money, but you find ways to make it work and overall travelling with not lot of money is a fun and challenging experience.

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

1 Euro

**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?

Applying for a visa was pretty easy. You have to fill out a form and scan it back to the Dutch Immigration authority, then when you arrive to The Netherlands you make a trip to a nearby town and complete the application process.

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

Get your application done early! There was a small problem with my visa and I had to try sort it out while travelling, which was not as easy as if I had sorted the process earlier.

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, health insurance is mandatory in The Netherlands, but there was no requirement for a specific provider.

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

Eight months coverage cost me about \$430 with Southern Cross Travel Insurance. Very easy to use and a the SCTI support team are very helpful.

## **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 1/YEAR</b>					
Political Psychology	English	POLS 211 – Popular Voting Behaviour	12	2	Not very well taught, content was very basic and the psychology aspect of the course was not clear.
Social Cognition	English	PSYC 326 – Discourse and Social Psychology	12	1	Very difficult to follow, each lecture had an average of 60-90 slides, which made it very hard to follow the course. The final exam was also brutal.
Contemporary Sociology	English	SOSC 305 – Social Organisation	12	2	Interesting but not well administrated and assessment expectations were unclear/difficult to meet.
Classical and Modern Sociology	English	SOSC 319 – Knowledge, Power and Understanding	12	3	Interesting lecturer and content, but again the course administration was very difficult to follow and examination expectations were unclear.
Political Organisation and Association Studies	English	LAWS 214 – Public Law	12	5	Fantastic lecturer and very interesting content! This was one of the best POLS papers I have taken.

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

The registration process is difficult. You have to prepare an initial study plan when applying to Tilburg University, listing the courses you are proposing to take while on exchange. This requires you to use the University website which I found to be very difficult. It takes a while to get used to the way everything is

listed online and where to find it, so allow yourself a couple of hours to get your study plan sorted.

Once you get to the university you are run through a computer lab where they show you how to use blackboard and how to add/drop courses. This part is very helpful because often the classes/tutorial clash and this is the time to sort it out.

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 took most of the classes I originally applied for. Don't worry if you have clashes because this is very common and it is a lot easier to sort out courses once you are here than to do it back in NZ. The University was helpful and overall the process was not difficult.

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

The University website is very hard to use, so don't over do it. Pick good courses but be ready to change them upon arrival. Also, Tilburg University divides the semester in two, so chances are you will take several courses for the first six weeks and then new courses for the remainder.

A lot of people try and arrange their courses so they that don't have class Monday/Friday. This makes travelling a lot easier but is not make or break. Also, it's not a bad idea to avoid Wednesday morning classes because Tuesday night is student night.

Classes here also get cancelled and rescheduled a lot, so regardless of what courses you choose you will need to be flexible.

### **Academic Experience**

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

In all honesty I much prefer VUW. Both my exchange friends and I have found the administration at Tilburg University very difficult and intransparent. Lecturers do not clearly outline their assessment expectations, making the exams very difficult to study for. The facilities here are also not as comprehensive as back at VUW, for example blackboard is used but lecturers often do not upload readings and you have to spend a fair amount of time looking for them online.

I have loved my time here at Tilburg, but the university has been difficult to adjust to.

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 did not find the quality of the lecturers to be as high as back at VUW. Lectures were often difficult to follow (because the information was not well presented) and the courses themselves were often not as interesting/specific as the courses back at VUW.

For example, papers here are often purely theoretical, so you learn a lot of new information but you will not be given any examples of practical applications. This cheapens the quality of the lectures because it makes the content less interesting (in my experience). Also, the workload is a lot bigger. One of my papers assigned between 2-5 chapters of a book per week on top of tutorial readings and weekly assignments. This has made studying for exams difficult.

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 would recommend 5 papers which you can split between the two halves of the trimester. There are no courses I would specifically recommend, although Intro to Dutch would have been interesting.

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

Same advice as back home, keep on top of your readings and study smart. I would recommend that you talk to your lecturers a lot about their expectations. As I mentioned earlier, often the course information will not be presented clearly, so it is worth taking a couple of minutes at the end of class to clarify what the lecturer expects of you. This was especially useful for assessment information.

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

Not very comprehensive. The library is not very big meaning that it is often crowded and difficult to find a spot. There are however plenty of computer labs throughout the university and a lot of great places to eat! Internet is accessible wirelessly throughout the university.

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?

Amazingly, pretty much everyone here speaks in English. The courses are all in English and all Dutch students I have worked with have spoken English fluently.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in the student accommodation, Professor Verbernelaan. You have an individual room which is a great size and well heated. You share a kitchen/bathroom with either 5 or 17 other people depending what floor you are on. I was on a 6 person floor which I loved, but I have friends on 18 person floors and they had a great time too.

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

Verbs is fantastic! The facilities are a bit basic but the building is very close to the university, a supermarket and the uni gym. It's about a 15min from the center of town, but because everything you need is around Verbs you don't head into town all that often.

Verbs is also great because you are with other exchange students. My flat mates became my close friends and having flat parties was a highlight of my exchange. I would definitely recommend applying to Verbs. Also, the heating is included in the rent which is amazing in winter!

Some cons are the size of the facilities. The kitchen and bathroom are both quite small, so if you have messy flat mates things can get dirty. If this doesn't phase you, then definitely apply to Verbs.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Verbs!! All of my friends are from Verbs and living in town is not the same experience. I have some friends that live in town and they constantly have to bike to Verbs to see their friends.

How early can you move into accommodation?

There is a move in date about a week before the university starts (same as first year halls in NZ). I do not think that there is an option to move in early.

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

Meal plans were not available but the cooking facilities are standard. My kitchen was small, but overall it hasn't been much of a problem. Sometimes you have to wait to use the kitchen, but if you're patient this is not an issue.

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

N/A

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

The applications go live at around 2am NZ time, and make sure you apply straight away! It's a lot like applying for tutorials, you need to apply ASAP or the rooms will all be taken

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

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

Living at Verbs made making friends very easy! There is an orientation week when you arrive in The Netherlands and during this time the Exchange Student Organisation runs a lot of events, meaning that meeting new people very easy. I made good friends within the first few weeks and had a great time.

Outside of Verbs/exchange students I did not meet a lot of Dutch people. There were some Dutch students in my classes and I worked with a few in group projects, but exchange students are more on the same wavelength (i.e. travelling etc.) meaning that they are easier to make friends with. Although it's a bit disappointing to move to The Netherlands and not make many Dutch friends, meeting exchanges students from different countries is a great experience.

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

I had no problems adjusting. The Dutch are friendly and the setup at Verbs made it very easy to adjust to the new lifestyle. If you're concerned about the adjustment, make sure to keep an open mind and enjoy how The Netherlands is different from NZ.

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?

The Dutch are really direct because they think that sugarcoating anything is rude. A lot of people find this quite disconcerting, but I liked it a lot. It made group projects a lot easier because you know what to expect.

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

No issues, everyone thus far has been friendly.

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?

As far as I could tell there were facilities for students with disabilities, but ultimately I'm not sure. As for LGBT individuals, the Dutch are very open minded and if you are concerned about being a minority travelling to The Netherlands, they are very tolerant people.

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

N/A

### **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 a lot of extra-curricular activities here, but most people don't get involved. The uni gym is very cheap and is located right next to Verbs. It's a bit small but worth how much you pay for it.

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

Travel around The Netherlands. Dutch public transport is very expensive, meaning that weekend travel isn't cheap, but it's a lot of fun!

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

N/A.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

N/A.

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

<b>1</b>	<b>WARM CLOTHING</b>
<b>2</b>	A European power adapter.
<b>3</b>	Comfortable shoes for travel.
<b>4</b>	Photos from home.
<b>5</b>	A good travel backpack.

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

1	Enjoy yourself! You are here on exchange to have fun, so embrace all the opportunities that are presented to you and do as much as possible.
2	Put yourself out there and meet as many new people as possible. The people who have the best time on exchange are the ones that are the most outgoing and try to meet lots of new people.
3	Don't worry if there are times where you are overwhelmed and just want to watch TV. Travel is tiring, as is meeting new people and moving half way around the world. Sometimes you need a break.
4	Chill out! Sometimes things go wrong and it's really hard to deal with when you are so far away from home. Everything works itself out in the end, so don't worry.
5	Don't overthink everything!!! Don't over-plan your travel or what your exchange you will be like. The best part of the exchange has been the spontaneous trips and all of the things I didn't think I would do.

## Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Have a big blow-out weekend in Amsterdam. It'll cost a fortune but it's a must.
2	Try a coffeeshop.
3	Invest in a good bike and a good lock!
4	Embrace the casual Verbs lifestyle and enjoy living with your friends.
5	There are the most amazing woods on the other side of the university, they are a must see!

## 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 has been the best time of my university experience so far! I have loved living with my friends at Verbs, doing loads of travel and trying something new. Although I'm not a fan of Tilburg University, the social side of Verbs is phenomenal and I would highly recommend applying to Tilburg. Choosing to do an exchange was the best idea I've made.