

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Film, Theatre
Exchange Institution	University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 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	\$200NZD
Accommodation	First semester a shared dorm room (17 weeks) = \$3000USD Second semester in a shared dorm apartment (17 weeks) = \$3500USD Half of summer in a shared dorm room (6 weeks) = \$800USD Half of summer with family in Cali (free)
Return Airfare	\$2400NZD (bought individually and last minute)
Local Transportation	Bus is free with Student ID, spent around \$50 in summer on transport
Meals	10 meals p/week meal plan for both semesters = \$4000USD Additional \$40USD p/week Summer = \$1000
Visa	\$500NZD
Health & Insurance	\$2000NZD
Personal Spending	\$5000NZD over 12 months (including trip to Cali)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$40USD a month
Other fees (specify)	I had an additional course fee of \$200USD for one of my courses
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Eating out is usually \$10-\$15USD which is pretty pricey considering the exchange rate. The rate changed about 11cents throughout the course of the year (Jan-Jan). It was highest in Aug/Sept and then dropped back again. Made it more difficult to stick to a budget and meant that things cost more/less at different times of the year. Keep this in mind and track the dollar daily!

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

I spent probably a third more than I had initially planned for because cost of living is higher than NZ and it was too hard to maintain such a low budget – possible, but I decided it wasn't worth the effort and I'd rather enjoy my time than worry about money! (My parents would disagree..)

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

Opened an account with a local bank (American Savings Bank) and transferred money from NZ account to it on a weekly basis through CurrencyFair and then Transferwise (both apps/websites)

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

Open an account with American Savings because they have a branch on campus and it's free. The banks in Hawai'i are different to the ones on Continent USA. It's easy to wire money internationally with these kinds of apps.

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

Coke \$1, Coffee \$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?

Yes, you are required to get a J-1 visa. It's fairly easy, just give yourself enough time before you go especially if you're not in Auckland since you're required to go to the Consulate not the Embassy. (In NZD) It costs \$240 for the visa fee, \$270 for the SEVIS fee, and I had to pay \$85 to FedEx my DS-160 form from my host university since it didn't arrive on time.

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

It took awhile to get confirmation from my host university and the form never came on time (hence paying to get it re-sent) but don't stress too much. It doesn't take the Consulate long to process it.

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, UH has certain health insurance requirements (in USD \$100k for medical benefits per accident/illness, \$25k repatriation coverage, \$50k medical evacuation to home country, maximum deductible of \$500). The University has their own insurance plans but it's kind of pricey – there are other cheaper local ones where you pay like \$100USD every 3 months or something (don't recall name sorry). They are health insurance plans though so doesn't cover any travel, so if you want that too, you'll have to get a plan in NZ.

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

I bought insurance through STA, their comprehensive plan with Allianz. Would not recommend it because I had to get additional forms signed off to cover the minimums of the university (since the plan was in NZ) and also tried to make a couple of claims and it was just unnecessarily difficult so never went through with any of them. Not worth the \$2000NZD.

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					
HWST107	English/Hawaiian	Elective	15	1	Easy A but still really interesting. Crash course on Hawaiian history, politics, and culture. Important and

					easy to understand coming from NZ.
THEA311	English	THEA 200	15	3	Awesome class on script analysis... Prof. Wessendorf is great. Work can be dense but super useful for any theatre major.
ACM355	English	FILM 200	15	2	Intro class to screenwriting/film adaptations. Light workload for an ACM class.
ACM455	English	FILM 200	15	4	One of the more advanced production courses in ACM but definitely manageable. Great look into indigenous filmmaking, you talk a lot about NZ films too. Lisette is super amazing.
ACM482	English	FILM 200	15	3	Critical studies class about documentaries in the context of American culture (very much universal though). Some great class discussions and a few essays involved.
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
ACM370	English	Elective	15	4	The greatest acting class you'll ever take. Very demanding but it'll change your life.
ACM450	English	FILM 200	15	4	The greatest screenwriting class you'll ever take. You need to do ACM350 though to get it or sell yourself to Joel. Good luck!
THEA323	English	THEA 200	15	1	Basic intro to film/tv acting class. Most people are new so it's good if you're new to the scene. Barely any

					assignments, but you'll be on camera every day.
THEA429	English	THEA 200	15	3	Prof. Wessendorf's devised theatre class. Small class, just like a theatre company, work is challenging but enjoyable. Requires a lot of out of class time. If you're interested in devised theatre at all, I'd highly recommend it.
THEA492D	English	THEA 200	15	3	Was a specialty class on Chekhov acting so may not be offered again. Class itself was easy – you work on one play the entire semester – but Stacy will challenge you as an actor. More of an advanced acting class.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Registration for classes opens towards the end of the previous semester, so you probably don't get to register for your classes as soon as it opens. You are assigned a course advisor in your major who you're supposed to meet with to help you get into the classes you want to be in. I met with mine once who helped me get in contact with the teachers of the courses I wanted to take. Otherwise, you're more or less on your own about getting into the courses you want, especially if you're trying to cross-credit them back.

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?

The first semester, I took only one class that I had initially planned to take. However, I spoke to the department head who helped me choose even better alternatives to the ones I wanted to take. I had to get permission from the teachers first to actually register in the system, but it's fairly easy especially after meeting them in person first. Second semester I knew the departments well and so I was able to register for any class I wanted. A lot of these classes have low-level prerequisite courses, but it's super easy to get an override from the teacher if you email/meet them directly. A lot of them advise coming to their first class and then talking to them afterwards and they'll probably give you an override, especially if the class isn't full. The teachers are a lot more flexible and course planning is way different, so don't stress too much if you're not getting in the classes you want (even if you have to get your VUW teachers to sign off on different courses it's easier than you think).

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

The courses in the departments I was in (Academy of Creative Media, Theatre, Hawaiian Studies) are very different to the ones at VUW. Classes are between 8 and 30 people so it's a lot more intimate. I originally had my whole year planned, especially because I have a tight schedule (I have 2 majors and a minor that I'm trying to do in 3 years), and so was worried that I wouldn't be able to take the courses I had pre-approved. However, once you get there, there's no guarantee that you'll get into any of them, especially if they're full or if the teacher is not willing to give you an override, so you just have to be flexible and hope that there will be someone in the department willing to vouch for you or at least help you out. If you're just taking electives, there are some pretty amazing courses that aren't offered at home so try them all! Even the 1 or 2 credit classes! If you end up in classes that you haven't approved, you'll be able to convince your VUW head to give you the credits, just remind them that it's a different kind of education and a great opportunity, etc. Your UH teachers will be super accommodating too – they'll probably offer to write you a letter of recommendation.

Academic Experience

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

I found the education system quite a lot different to VUW. Since the classes are small, it's more like 3-hour tutorials without lectures. You get to know the teacher and your classmates quite well, which I really enjoyed, especially because class discussion is a huge part of the learning process. It definitely exceeded my expectations and I didn't think I would enjoy and learn as much as I did.

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?

There's definitely more of a focus on individual interpretation than sourcing research (at least in the classes I took). The workload on average is huge – you have constant homework – but the grading is a lot easier even though the rubric looks insane. I would say that a VUW B+ would get you an A at UH (in most cases) but you are always handing in work. It took me awhile to find the balance but since your grades don't cross-credit anyway, there's no point in stressing over them.

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?

15 credits in a semester is definitely manageable. I only needed the 12 but I wanted to make the most of the different classes so took an extra course each semester. If you're not worried about credits or taking new courses, 12 credits is super easy and gives you plenty of time to enjoy the island. I'd recommend taking any Hawaiian Studies class since it's good to give yourself an understanding of where you are (especially since they love people from Aotearoa and know so much about us!). I can only recommend the courses I took if you're a film/theatre major, but I'd say most classes at UH are pretty awesome anyway.

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

My GPA at VUW is an 8.7 and I'd say I try very hard to keep it up. I had a perfect 4.0 GPA at UH for both semesters and that was with a lot less effort so basically, don't worry too much about trying to 'succeed academically'. If you're enjoying the work and doing it, you'll do well. You get to know the teachers personally also, so they kind of have an idea of what sort of student you are, so it's not as scary as you would think!

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

Similar to VUW. They have wifi all over the university and there's also a 24 hour library.

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?

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E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I lived in 3 different dorms.

Hale Kahawai – on-campus, shared bedroom with one person, bathroom shared with a floor, other communal facilities.

YMCA Atherton – same as above but not UH-affiliated – across the road though

Hale Noelani – amongst the other dorms right off-campus, shared apartment with 3 other people, bedroom shared with one.

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

Hale Kahawai was close to class, a little far from the cafeterias. Like living in the halls but sharing a room and way more chill – all events are optional and the RAs let you do what you want.

Atherton – cheap, a lot of international students, but you don't get to make friends as easily as in the dorms.

Hale Noelani – so much fun since I was with friends (you can choose who you stay with), still have RAs but basically as close to flatting as it gets. Nosier compared to the other two places because of all the dorm parties but that's hardly a bad thing 😊

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Depending on your budget, I would say that living at the dorms is still probably best than trying off-campus. You make way more friends that way and it's fun to experience the American college dorm life. If you're only there for one semester, I'd say stay at Frear since there's AC and there's a good mix of people there if you don't know anyone. Hale Kahawai/Laulima is ok but people are less social. The apartments (Hale Noelani and Wainani) are definitely the best but bit risky if you don't know who you're going to live with. You can always switch rooms after first few weeks though if you're roommate sucks, and don't worry, it's super common.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Only 2 days before spring semester starts or 4 days before fall. You'll probably have to organize other accommodation for orientation week.

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

If you live in any of the dorms, you have to get a meal plan (unless you're at the apartments). Meal plans are connected to your student ID card (so get that ASAP!) and you can choose how many you get per week. I'd recommend getting 10 since you won't always eat every meal at the café and you don't want to waste it as points. 7 is also good if you like to cook or eat out. I actually found the cafeteria pretty cool – it's buffet style and the food is so much better than the halls. It's pricey but it's easy and you want to make the most of your exchange so just do it.

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 lived off-campus during the breaks but it's quite expensive, especially anywhere close to the University. I originally planned to live off-campus second semester but expect to pay more than the dorms (even if you're flatting with friends!)

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

Do your research... don't always go for the cheapest. AC is life.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

There are a lot of out-of-state students at UH so everyone is always down to make new friends. Since the classes are small, it's very easy to meet people and find your groups of friends through your classes. Living at the dorms will also mean you'll meet new people constantly. Everyone will also be obsessed with your accent so brace yourself!

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

Hawai'i has a similar vibe to NZ. Everyone is pretty chill and the lifestyle is like summer in NZ. The difference is definitely the American influence and you'll learn the ways in which Americans communicate and behave very quickly. It can be amusing and sometimes there'll be some difficulty communicating but you'll soon become part of it!

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

Be patient, you'll find your people!

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Probably the diversity of Hawai'i. So many cultures and it's way less clique-y than NZ.

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

Everyone is super kind and friendly. People are curious but respectful and locals love to show you around!

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?

Same as NZ. Lots of cool groups to join too.

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

I personally never faced any discrimination in Hawai'i but I look local and when people heard me, they were excited about NZ. There is some racial tension, especially with 'haole' people (pakeha) and Micronesians, but that's something you probably won't have to deal with – you'll learn about it though! Just treat people well and you'll be all good.

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?

They have a bunch of clubs to join and extramural sports (social sports since the competitive sports bring in their athletes), as well as dorm activities, UH-hosted activities, concerts, etc. There are always something to

do in Hawai'i, you can never get bored.

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

Get out of Manoa and Waikiki and go see every side and beach on the island. Someone will have a car. There are hikes and secret spots to explore everywhere and there are always people keen.

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

There are jobs on-campus that you can work at without much difficulty. You can work in your field off-campus but it requires a process and I decided against it when the opportunity arose. If you're only there for a semester, I wouldn't recommend getting a job.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I was able to work/volunteer in my field a bunch throughout the year, which was great for networking. There's definitely opportunities available (plenty of unpaid too) in whatever field you're in, just talk to your department/advisors.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Endless supply of togs
2	Hiking shoes
3	Surfboard if you surf/Skateboard if you skate
4	Good phone
5	Lots of energy

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

1	Take whatever class sounds interesting to you, don't worry about VUW approval
2	Say yes to everyone and everything
3	Don't procrastinate...unless you're at the beach... then good luck
4	Every opinion matters in America 😊
5	Find your pono

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Eat poke and acai bowls for breakfast, lunch and dinner
2	Westside is the best side
3	Travel to the other islands on student standby if can
4	If you don't learn how to surf in Hawai'i, what are you even doing with your life
5	Dm austinlaulau on IG and tell him Maiya said to take you around the island. Churr

H: Personal Experience

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

My year abroad was undoubtedly a life-changing experience. I had taken a gap year abroad before Vic and had a blast but even then it was incomparable to my time in Hawai'i. There's something about that island and American college life that will truly get you excited about life. I found my spirituality in the 'āina and met lifelong friends. I also probably learnt more about my field in one year than I could have in 3 years at Vic and now have multiple jobs on offer in the States for when I graduate. It was by far the greatest time of my life and I would have loved to transfer for another few more years if I had the money. I'm really excited for anyone who is planning to go to UH or the States (or do an exchange really), there's no better opportunity to grow in yourself and your degree than doing it. Just put yourself out there and you'll find your place. All the best!



Mini reflection vid since I'm a film major: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOMTfRyRZxA>