

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Conjoint BCOM/BA
Major(s)	Public Policy, Economics, English Literature and Psychology
Exchange Institution	American University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2 (2014) and Trimester 1 (2015)

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	Around \$100 each course, but much cheaper if rented second-hand or through online book renting
Accommodation	Stayed in dorm first semester, approx. \$5500 Second semester stayed in an apartment, rent \$700 a month
Return Airfare	Approx \$1750 NZ
Local Transportation	Metro & Bus – fares about the same as transportation in Wellington when including exchange rate
Meals	First semester – meal plan through the university approx. \$2000 Cooking myself second semester approx. \$40 on groceries per week
Visa	\$200
Health & Insurance	\$1000 (American University insurance)
Personal Spending	Approx. \$3000 (travelling mostly)
Communications (phone, etc.)	Phone plan was around \$60 a month for unlimited calling, texting, data etc.
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Tipping – can be confusing, can be easy to tip too much or too little, especially in situations outside restaurants such as taxis, hairdressers etc.

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

I was originally only meant to stay at American for one semester, but stayed for two – this meant I spent a lot more of my savings than I had expected.

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

I used a kiwibank travel card, which was easy to top up through my online banking, but there are a few places that don't take these, or they don't work. If you are staying for a year I would recommend opening

an American bank account with the bank on campus, as they have dealt with students in the same position as you.

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

Best to save money where you can. With the US it's a very vast country to travel

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

\$1.50 (US)

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 had to apply for a visa, which was approx. \$200, and pay the Servis fee \$180, in order to get a J1 visa and DS2019.

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

The visa process and gathering the relevant documents takes a long time, not to mention having to go to Auckland for the visa interview – I would try and get everything ready well in advance of the departure date!

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, my university had a mandatory insurance, but from my understanding you could try supplement it or replace it by other forms of insurance.

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

I brought the university insurance, but after having to use it when I injured my ankle, found out that it only pays 1/3 of any health costs sustained – my recommendation would be to also buy another travel insurance to supplement 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					
Religious Thought 220	English	Elective	15	4	Taught by my favourite lecturer at American, Professor Greenberg If you are interested at all on the intersections

					of Jewish and Christian thought, it is an interesting course.
LIT-443 Modern Fiction	“	American Literature	15	4	Taught by Professor Rubenstein, who is thoroughly knowledgeable and passionate about modern fiction
LIT 215 – Writers in Print/in Person	“	Elective	15	5	Really interesting course where you read books by contemporary authors who are giving readings at the university during the course of the semester. Very enjoyable.
WGSS -350 History of the LGBT movement	“	Elective	15	4	The course was an overview of the LGBT movement in the United States, really great lecturer and amazing discussions, really different from anything I’ve taken at Vic
	“				

VUW Trimester 2/YEAR

ECON-300 Intermediate Microeconomics	English	ECON 201	15	3	Both ECON 300 and 301 were difficult courses for me personally, and I maybe wouldn’t recommend if you want to spend more time travelling in the weekend etc. However, it is interesting to learn economics from a US perspective.
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ECON-301 Intermediate Macroeconomics	“	ECON 202	15	3	
PHIL-400 – Philosophy of Religion	“	Elective	15	5	Really interesting course (again taught by Professor Greenberg). It is not an easy course, and I would say veers heavily to being a religion course as opposed to philosophy.
LIT-400: Creative Fiction	“	Elective	15	4	A creative writing course of short fiction, each week is a workshop where you critique each other's stories. Great atmosphere in this class.
PSYC-350: Child Psychology	“	PSYC-324: Developmental Psychology	15	5	Easy course, interesting to learn about different stages of child development

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Registration was online, and relatively easy to understand. Once you are in Washington you can liaise with the relevant departments and the abroad at AU office if there are any registration problems.

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 eventually successful at enrolling into classes that I wanted to take, but in the second semester I had to be on a waiting list for the Creative Fiction course, and had to juggle my courses around to accommodate it.

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

At American University, the abroad students are not allowed to enroll for classes until after everyone else has enrolled – this means that a lot of courses will be filled up by the time you can register

Academic Experience

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

I loved my academic experience at American, and it mainly differed from my experience at VUW as learning feels less self-directed, especially as students engage more with their Professors.

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?

The style of teaching is very different, as each class has about 20 students, and you develop more of a relationship with your Professor than at Victoria. Also, there are participation grades, which means that Professors expect you to attend all classes and take attendance (usually you can have 2 or 3 absences in total without affecting your grade).

The workload can be a bit different to VUW, as there is an emphasis on both midterms and finals, which will usually be tests or exams worth the same percentage of the final grade.

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 taking 3-4 courses, it's definitely manageable. If you can, arrange your course schedule to have Friday or Monday off – this will be excellent when planning to travel in the weekends.

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

Engage with the course, participate in discussions, and get to know the other people in your class so you have the opportunity to discuss the material outside of class if necessary.

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

The library, computer facilities and internet access were all fine, library atmosphere was pleasant.

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?

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

First semester, I stayed at Cassell Hall, which is a dorm at the University. It's really new and nice there, the setup of most apartments is 2 bedrooms (2 people in each), a bathroom and shared lounge area.

In the second semester I stayed off-campus with friends in an apartment building about 10-15 minute walk away.

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

The dorms are good because they are on campus (couple of minute walk to classes), but also very expensive. There's also an alcohol ban/no alcohol on campus.

I enjoyed staying off-campus in second semester because it gives you greater freedom, although in winter the walk could be a bit annoying.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would recommend staying in a dorm if you are in your 1st or 2nd year at VUW – but if you are over 21 or

value being independent, cooking your own meals etc. then I would recommend living off-campus. It is also a lot quieter to live off-campus.

How early can you move into accommodation?

With dorms there are set dates, usually the week or so before classes start they are open. With apartments, move-in/out dates are more negotiable.

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

You can buy meal plans such as 100, 200 meals, I had the 175 meal plan (lowest plan I was allowed to buy), but this was still too many meals for one semester. As an exchange student I found myself going out a lot and eating off-campus. I would recommend if you are going to buy a meal plan, you should buy the smallest one possible.

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

My friend found our off-campus apartment on craigslist, but there are facebook groups available for student off-campus housing – I would recommend asking the Abroad at AU office for the details or links to these facebook groups.

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

If you are off-campus, to meet Americans you'll probably have to make more effort by talking to people in your classes.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

I met some really great Americans and made a lot of close friends, but it's definitely easy to get caught-up and only hang out with other exchange students, you do need to put yourself out there in the first month or so. Americans are really interested to hear about other countries, and are probably as eager to be friends with you as you are with them.

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

Compared to other countries, I'm sure it was less of a culture shock, but there are a few different ways of doing things that you eventually adjust to.

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

American University is a politically active university, and many of the students want to work for the government etc. This culture does contrast with the more laid-back environment of New Zealand, and can seem very stuffy at first, until you get to know people better.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I really liked the friendly nature of most Americans.

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

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?

American University is a liberal university, and accordingly, it is a safe school for those who are LGBT or of minority status. I am ethnically of Indian descent, and never personally felt unsafe at American University or discriminated against.

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

I did not face issues of discrimination while in America, but I'm sure any student coming to America will be aware of the underlying racial tensions that exist there.

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 were many clubs and activities available to students, I had friends who played sports such as hockey, or that went to events and seminars organised by the school. I took photos for the American University chapter of Spoon (a food blog), which was cool, and I met some nice people through this.

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

I recommend taking the most of your opportunity to travel! From Washington, New York, Philadelphia and Boston are accessible by bus, and I would definitely spend at least a weekend in each. Other close destinations are Baltimore and Virginia Beach.

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

I didn't work while I was in Washington, but I know some students were able to work on-campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There are volunteer opportunities available, but I would research those soon after arriving in order to make the most of your time/ability to help. I did a day helping cut vegetables for a soup kitchen in DC, an event that was organised by the Abroad at AU office.

5 things to take to your host country or region

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| 1 | Chocolate! And Pineapple Lumps! You'll miss NZ's great chocolate, and it's nice to share with people too. |
| 2 | Any medicines or pharmaceuticals that you require – you may not be able to buy them while in the States. |
| 3 | Cellphone with map capabilities – I used google maps numerous times on my phone to navigate around foreign cities |
| 4 | Washington winters are cold! If you are going for the Spring semester (Jan-May) bring a good jacket, boots you can wear in the snow, or have plans to buy them when you arrive |
| 5 | Photos from home are nice to personalise your living space 😊 |

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

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| 1 | In the first month, make an effort to meet as many people as possible and accept every invitation given to you, so you can figure out not only who wants to be friends with you, but also who you |
|---|---|

	would like to be friends with
2	As much as your budget allows, travel. At American it's hard because you can't really take extra days off university, but use your weekends and strategically plan trips away around public holidays.
3	Go to as many of the Smithsonian museums as you can!
4	Don't worry if you find it difficult to balance schoolwork, social activities and travel – that's normal, and you'll get through it, even if it takes a lot of coffee.
5	The social atmosphere will be different than what you are used to, but you'll find your people!

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	New Orleans was one of my favourite cities – I didn't go for Mardi Gras but I can imagine that would be so amazing, the city was even lively when I went there in winter break.
2	The Grand Canyon was unbelievably stunning and should be high on the to-do list – I stayed at the South Rim for a couple of days, which is the best way to see multiple views of the canyon and gives you time to travel/do some walking around there.
3	In Washington itself, there are many beautiful places. Visit Meridian Hill park, go dance in U st, walk around Georgetown, go to Washington National Cathedral (really close to American Uni), walk the National Mall at night, at sunset, in the snow, and get to know the bus system! Way cheaper than the metro and sometimes more convenient.
4	Stay with as many of the American friends you've made as you can – it's awesome to get to see smaller town America, and to experience the places your friends have grown up.
5	If you're in America for Christmas, go and enjoy all the lights and festivities. For Halloween, make sure you walk Embassy Row.

H: Personal Experience

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

I spent two semesters in Washington, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience! I met some wonderful people, both Americans and other international exchange students, and made some great close friendships that I really treasure. I definitely was nervous when I left, but looking back on everything now I'm so glad to have left and have taken the opportunity! Everyone always remarks on how diverse America is, but until you travel it you don't know how much truth there is to that statement – I travelled parts of the West Coast, the South and the East Coast, and it was amazing to see and experience first-hand. I loved getting to know Washington DC, and being able to navigate its streets like a pro – it's walkable, and a perfect starter city in the US for a student. Being away from home for 10 months was difficult and challenging at times, but overall engaging with a different culture and meeting people from all backgrounds has made me eager for more travelling and given me more perspective in my own life.

