

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Design Innovation
Major(s)	Industrial Design
Exchange Institution	Carnegie Mellon University, School of Design
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 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	60
Accommodation	4050
Return Airfare	2561
Local Transportation	200 approx (not including travel outside Pittsburgh)
Meals	about 80 per week? no meal plan, cooked for myself.
Visa	507
Health & Insurance	Travel: 450, Southern Cross. CMU Health Insurance: 1115
Personal Spending	not sure
Communications (phone, etc.)	60 per month
Other fees (specify)	CMU compulsory: Technology: 298, Student Activities: 193, Transportation Fee: 94
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Definitely more! CMU invoiced some sneaky costs, then food and mobile plans cost much more than NZ. Also tricky to pay large sums to CMU as they didn't take credit, had to do a special international bank transfer with large conversion fees etc.

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

It definitely cost a lot more than I thought I did, however I had a decent amount of savings to cover me, plus my parents paid for accommodation, insurance, flights and visa fees.

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

As I'm with Kiwibank I used their Loaded for Travel card, I think people with other banks can use it too as it's linked to NZ Post? It operates like a credit card but you top the money up like an eftpos card.

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

Don't get the meal plan, it's expensive and the food's not that great. If you stay at Clyde House the kitchen's great, there's a bus near by which goes to lots of different supermarkets - Giant Eagle is closest but Trader Joes is cheap and better quality. The bus is "free" (covered with transport fee) so it's pretty easy.

I tried to opt out of the Student Health Insurance as it was ridiculously expensive but I couldn't, from hearing other experiences there's not much point in trying.

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

Every coffee shop is a Starbucks... maybe \$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, I had to fly up to Auckland for the day to go to the US Embassy there. It took about a month or so from start to finish. Do this well in advance! From what I can remember there were two separate costs, one for the Visa and one for Homeland Security (SEVIS fee?).

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

Don't stress about the application stuff, it's really unnecessarily complicated but it'll work out. Make sure your flights back are within the visa expiration timeframe, I wish I could have travelled for longer but you have to be out of the country 30 days after classes end.

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.... see financial advice. US has a really annoying healthcare system. 1,115USD not including the travel insurance I bought separately.

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

For travel insurance I used Southern Cross, my parents are members so I got a discount. Was cheaper than STA's travel insurance that you can buy with the ticket.

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					
Products in Systems	Eng	INDN 311 and 341	all added up to 40 equiv.	4	
Adv Digital Prototyping		INDN 311 and 341	all added up to 40 equiv.	4	
Production Prototyping		INDN 311 and 341	all added up to 40 equiv.	5	
Semantics and Aesthetics		INDN 311 and 341	all added up to 40 equiv.	4	
Painting, Drawing and where they intersect		elective		5	CMU offers Fine Arts!! Didn't get into Glass Blowing :(
Pittsburgh Filmmakers: Documentary Production		elective	points too small to cross credit to Vic Film	4	
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Very easy, had a liason called Deborah Wilth who helped me organise it all over email.

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?

It was tricky to tell what courses they were actually going to offer as we do the exchange contract so early. They didn't actually end up offering most of the courses I put on the contract but there were plenty of equivalent ones.

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

Be adventurous! But make sure you cross credit to all your mandatory courses back home. Also try to take the bare minimum of courses, you don't want to miss out on things because you spend your whole time working.

Academic Experience

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

Even though CMU is a top institution in the USA, I found that students were a lot more slack about courses. I think this is because they put a lot more value into extracurricular activities than we do. Also they all get internships in their summer holidays which in the end matters a lot more than their grades so that definitely contributes to that too. They still make some great stuff, it just happened a lot slower than Vic.

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?

Good, I think I chose a good combination of courses because the workload was the same or less mostly. The style of teaching doesn't involve lectures, just studios and tutorials (design!!)

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 had 5 classes a week (technically 6 but the two prototyping courses are half semester ones and are paired together). I would recommend taking a Fine Arts course if you want to do some more artsy stuff for your portfolio. Pittsburgh filmmakers was good too, they were night classes with a tiny amount of students, and they weren't all from CMU.

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

Try hard to work the New Zealand perspective/angle as much as possible. You'll be naturally stronger at some things than the CMU people (ie they're not very good at Solidworks or rendering!) So you can do less work but still look cool, interesting and different. This only works for design though. So maybe don't do something sciencey (or do if you really want!). Remember that your grades overseas don't matter quite as much, as long as you get them high enough for your Exchange Contract.

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

Very nice. Pool, gym, movie theatre. FREE MOVIES!! Don't have as good computers or digital prototyping facilities and the workshop is very small. But you'll end up making foam prototypes so you don't need such a good workshop as Vic anyway.

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?

Student Accommodation, Clyde House.

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

You have to have a roommate, but she was nice. Definitely go with Clyde house because you get kitchenettes (plus a big one downstairs), and ensuites.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Clyde House

How early can you move into accommodation?

Basically a day or so before international orientation in Spring semester.

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

Meal plans were available for using the on campus eateries. Clyde is a 15 min walk away though and the food on campus isn't flash - low quality, small portions. Clyde has a great kitchen though so cook for yourself! See financial advice.

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

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

CLYDE HOUSE. And make sure you find a good roommate who likes similar living conditions.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Reasonably successful, made friends at Pittsburgh Filmmakers because of the small class size. One of my closest friends in that class took me to see sights and sometimes drove me to get groceries. The other residents at Clyde House were nice, one girl took me to her family's Passover meal and the RA held a teatime every week. Took a while for the students in my CMU classes to warm up as they were already friends with each other but they were reasonably friendly by the end.

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

Strangely I had big issues with my accent, in class no one could understand me unless I spoke really loudly and clearly like a British person. That made those first couple of months quite hard actually, I'm not used to people not understanding me!!

Also the cold really took a toll, I didn't realise it would be snowing for sooo long!! Make sure you are aware that winter can be a bit depressing. Find activities to cheer yourself up.

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

Just be brave?? Money's tricky. Memorise the coins so you're not stuck at a register trying to figure out what money to pay (or use a card...)

BUY LOTS OF WARM CLOTHES!!!

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

MOVIES!! Cute movie theater up the road with cheap tickets, CMU had free movies in their theatre every weekend too.

Actual culture-wise, it was interesting how everyone was much more ready to talk in class, even if they have no idea what they're talking about...

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

Everyone loves a Kiwi, even if they think you're British or Australian, so that helps. The people at the grocery store loved me :P The university staff were great, very helpful and understanding. Don't be afraid to ask them for help if you're confused or struggling.

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?

Pretty easy I think. Lots of lifts and access ramps but I wouldn't know for sure. In regards to LGBTQ+, Pittsburgh can be quite conservative but there were lots of students on campus who were totally accepted.

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

Cat calling in major cities (eg New York, LA) was weird. There's nothing you can really do, ignore it, be careful and adopt an I-am-a-very-important-person-don't-mess-with-me walk. Stay extra safe at night!!

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?

Lots of activities, I didn't end up doing any of them though as they clashed with the two evening classes I had...

In regards to events, there was Confluence, which is a job fair which loads of companies come to. Make an American version of your CV (a one page resume) and go talk to them! They'll mostly be there looking for internships but it's good to make connections and learn.

Spring Carnival is at the end of the semester, there's buggy racing and loads of fun things to get involved in. Societies and clubs create themed "booths" which is really fun to explore. There's a fairground. There's concerts. Go celebrate the sunshine.

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

In Pittsburgh - Phipps conservatory, especially in winter as it's nice to see some nature that isn't dead or covered in snow!! Movie theatres, general exploring, AMAZING museums and art galleries (at least compared to NZ, my european friends weren't so impressed). When it gets warmer there's the cable car and lots of nice parks to walk in.

I went to New York during Spring Break which was amazing, just a whole other level to anywhere else I went. It was museum and art gallery heaven. Weird tip - do the Met museum with the audio tour, use the Directors commentary, best audio tour I've ever used and you can actually cover the whole museum in one day if you can get there early enough. Lots of shopping and typical New York things to do too. Go to a Broadway show!!

After the semester ended I went to Boston (my favourite not incl NY), Washington DC, Orlando (Harry Potter theme parks & Disney), San Francisco, then I flew out from LA. Spent a lot of money, totally worth it. Cheap flights and backpacker accommodation (flights cheaper than NZ but backpackers aren't).

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

You definitely could, I didn't so I don't know. The visa wouldn't let you work off campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

You could have tried getting an internship at the end of the semester but it wouldn't have worked as I would have been late back to Tri 2 in NZ.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Warm clothes for Spring Semester!! Gets down to -20C, -11C.
2	Laptop for study, working at home.
3	Shoes for snow and ice
4	If you're doing design studio - they like drawing. Bring any fancy pens or markers that you already have.
5	Marmite :P

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

1	Don't take excess stuff, it'll be tricky if you want to travel at the end.
2	Practice your drawing skills!!
3	Don't be tempted to eat out all the time? Although the difference in groceries to eating out is much less in the US, sadly.
4	Take advantage of free stuff!!! Busses, museums, films, activities...
5	Be adventurous, say yes to things! But don't forget to take time to relax too, a semester is a long time to always be on the go.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Spring Carnival
2	Confluence
3	Carnegie Mellon Museum & Art Gallery
4	Phipps Conservatory
5	NEW YORK! (not in Pittsburgh, 8 hours bus away but WORTH IT)

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 amazing, I'm so glad I did it. While in this form I might point out a lot of negatives, in reality the positives totally outweighed them. I learned so much about myself, other cultures and how I fit into the world. You meet people from all around the world and it's so interesting how different we all are. Quite early on I met a girl in Clyde House who advised me to just say yes to everything! That definitely gave me the courage to do new things. If you want to know more, find my article, it's a lot longer. Good luck to anyone thinking of going on exchange, you won't regret it!