

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 Arts
Major(s)	International Relations and Development Studies
Exchange Institution	EAFIT
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2014 Tri 2, 2015 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	\$30 p/semester
Accommodation	>\$70 p/week
Return Airfare	\$2600
Local Transportation	>\$10 p/week (20 min x 2 p/day)
Meals	\$110 p/week
Visa	>\$70 p/semester
Health & Insurance	\$390 p/semester
Personal Spending	>\$50 p/week
Communications (phone, etc.)	>\$20 p/month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	

My financial expenses were less than expected. I was actually able to save \$50 of my student allowance sometimes to go on weekend excursions. I would withdraw \$390NZD each fortnight through my Kiwibank Visa debit card which charged me \$6NZD each time but I think it was the most appropriate option. There was no way I could receive my student allowance directly into my Colombian account and international money transfers cost \$25 each transaction which if I were to do weekly would have cost me a ton. Plus my Colombian account (which I never ended up using) only allowed 3 free withdrawals each month therefore incurring additional fees so I was never going to go with the weekly INTL money transfer option.

A bottle of Coke cost around 70c and I would advise never to carry more than 50 thousand pesos on you at any time in case being robbed.

C: Visas & Insurance

All exchange students must obtain a TP3 visa. It cost > \$80NZD. The process was ultimately quite simple for

me but I heard it was very difficult and frustrating for the other two Vic exchange students that got theirs before I did. I was communicating through email with the consulate general of Colombia named Pablo Ebolledo based in Auckland for two weeks before organizing a compulsory interview at the consulate 3 days before I flew to Colombia in which I gained the visa with no real problems.

I would advise to get the visa as soon as you get your letter of acceptance to avoid any potential last minute dramas.

Insurance is obligatory for all exchange students at EAFIT and cost roughly \$390 per semester with Southern Cross. Although I never made a claim I would recommend Southern Cross as I've used them in my previous travelling endeavors and they're the cheapest.

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 2015					
Area Studies: Europe	English	Elective	15	3.5	
International Relations	English	Elective	15	3	
Conflict Management	Spanish	Elective	15	N/A	
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR 2014					
Geopolitics 2	Spanish	Elective	15	4.5	
Intercultural Management	English	GEO312	15	3.5	
Area Studies: Latin America	English	3 rd year DEV paper	15	3	
Social Revolutions	Spanish	Elective	15	N/A	

Course Registration/Enrolment

The international office gave all instructions for enrolling into courses that made things easier. However when selecting courses online you had to type in the exact name of the course otherwise an error message would appear. With all the course names being in Spanish this took more time than intended.

At EAFIT once classes start you cannot change any courses like you can during the first two weeks at Vic. In my second semester I tried to combat this by selecting 5 courses with the intention of dropping 3 (at this stage I only needed 1 course to finish my degree) but this backfired because EAFIT only allow a student to drop up to 50% of their already chosen courses. So when I went to drop 3 courses around the mid-semester period I was told I could only drop 2 and unfortunately at that point I had only been attending 2 of the 5 courses and couldn't re-sit any of the exams or lately submit any essays that had already passed their due dates. So unfortunately in the end what will show on my academic record for the 2nd semester is "2 classes passed and 1 class failed" (the only one of my academic life due to ignorance of the system and my own complacency!).

Academic Experience

Most of my classes had less than 30 people in them and the large majority of students are 17-19 years old. Latin American Studies had a ton of readings and I never managed to complete them all.

In several of the verbal tests I remember being asked such specific questions which included remembering dates, specific events, and actions of certain historical figures when I was expecting questions based more on key concepts and ideas.

I found some teachers were extremely lenient because they really wanted you to pass e.g in a verbal test which consisted of 3 questions and worth 50% of the final grade I didn't know the answer to one of the questions so he let me answer a different one. This happened on two separate occasions.

All the courses I took I enjoyed but my favorite would have been "Area Studies: Europe" due to the "small class, constant open discussion" vibe, the teacher's amazing knowledge of Europe, and the range of tasks allocated e.g. it included verbal and written tests, an essay, a presentation, and an evaluation of another students presentation.

4-5 courses would be the equivalent to 3 at Vic but if you take 2-3 courses it leaves a lot more space for weekend travel.

The computer facilities were sufficient but very often dozens of computers would be out of service. I had wifi and a computer at home (I wasn't aware of any exchange students that didn't) so this was never a big

problem... more just an inconvenience.

I had taken two 1st year and one 2nd Spanish paper at Vic prior to arriving in Colombia but I learnt more in my first 2 months at EAFIT than my whole time at Vic. EAFIT also offered 40 free hours of lessons which helped (but keep in mind they don't tell you that you have to pay for it if you fail it! It's easy though and the teachers all try make you pass). The biggest barrier to learning Spanish that I saw amongst the foreign exchange student group was 'a fear of speaking' – the fear of making mistakes and therefore being exposed as a bad Spanish speaker.

I think when learning a new language mistakes are essential for progress and you have to accept that there will always be better and worse speakers than yourself. Constantly comparing one's language skills with superior speakers can be disheartening. Pretty much just be yourself and accept your language speaking abilities and be eager to always improve.

The foreign exchange students that gave the most effort and hung out more with Colombians rather than English speaking students learnt and improved the most with their Spanish.

E: Accommodation

Before leaving for Colombia I met a Vic student who had spent one year on exchange at EAFIT the previous year and he introduced me to one of his old Colombian friends who happened to have a spare room going the week I started classes so it was perfect. It was a modern apartment on the 20th floor of a huge complex that consisted of four 22-floor buildings. The complex was equip with 24/7 armed guards, a swimming pool, a tiny gym which held party aerobics classes twice a week for \$2, a car park, and a fully barbed wire fence surrounding the entire site (very common in Colombia). It was a 20-minute bus ride to EAFIT.

Be prepared for crazy bus drivers. They are ruthless on the road. For new students I would recommend finding a flat with Colombians or Spanish speaking people to improve your Spanish. Even better if they're patient and want to improve their English with you as well.

I would also recommend initially staying at Waypoint hostel while looking for a place to live because it's less than a block from EAFIT and it's a great way to meet all the other exchange students.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

I made several Colombian friends but mainly due to their involvement with the buddy system. The only other Colombian student friends I made were from the university rugby team and we got on really well. My flat mate was my best Colombian friend and I made several other Colombian friends through him.

I loved the warm Paisa, Colombian culture. One cultural shock was the crazy Medellin drivers. I must have past at least 30 car collisions in my one year abroad.

I would recommend taking salsa classes either before going or while in Colombia because everyone there dances salsa.

The International Relations Office was friendly and helpful but sometimes they took an age to reply to my emails.

The locals in Medellin are accustomed to seeing a lot of foreigners especially in the more modern areas. They are friendly and helpful but like any big city there are always a few who see you as a walking wallet and will try take advantage of you.

I did not encounter any discrimination at EAFIT. It is a university well equip to cater for students with disabilities but I think being gay would sometimes be difficult particularly for males. In my rugby team they always made jokes against gay people. Furthermore there is currently a hostile discussion going on in Colombia over same sex marriage and whether gay couples should be permitted to adopt orphans. Colombia has a strong Catholic identity and this will always be a difficult barrier for same sex couples there that can't marry. In saying that I would say the majority of people I met are either indifferent or strong advocates for same sex couples.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

I joined the EAFIT rugby team which I really enjoyed. It was a different avenue to learn a different type of Spanish that you don't hear in the classroom and also made several good friends. In general they were excited to have a kiwi in their team. I also attended several basketball trainings but gave it up after a while because it was too exhausting going directly after rugby training.

I took salsa classes with a group of foreign exchange students for about \$80NZD for 15 lessons. It was a great idea because salsa is essential in Colombia plus it was very enjoyable and again another different avenue to learn Spanish.

There is a 'clubs day' at EAFIT where plenty of voluntary work is available, particularly in the poorer areas of Medellin.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Several pairs of shoes because they get smelly in the humid climate.
2	Jandals
3	A lock for your bag
4	Clothes with secure pockets not open loose pockets
5	

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

1	Always when outside of the house or uni environment be aware of your surroundings.
2	Don't flash your smartphone in public.
3	I think getting health shots is a waste of money. Every Colombian student doesn't get them and they live fine. Don't believe in 3 rd world country stereotypes because Colombia is so diverse its like 10 different countries in one. Medellin is a modern city with clean air and water. I would advise buying malaria pills for going to jungle areas like the amazon or Choco but nothing more.
4	Don't open a bank account there – its expensive and a waste of time.
5	Try live close to a supermarket (not Carulla its expensive as!) within walking distance.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Go to the amazon region. I would recommend do it in Ecuador because its almost half the price as in Colombia.
2	Try speak Spanish everyday. I know students who spent 6 months in Colombia and hardly learnt any Spanish because they didn't put themselves outside of their comfort zone.
3	Learn salsa and Merengue
4	Learn how to make some Colombian food e.g. patacones, fried fish, chicharron etc.
5	

H: Personal Experience

Colombia was a wonderful experience in which I will remember forever.

While I am happy to be home it was very sad to leave a lot of good friends and memories behind. One thing I now miss a lot is speaking Spanish everyday and the all year round sun.

It was a blessing living around the new generation of Medellin whose parents' had lived their 20s and 30s in the most dangerous city in the world. They are resilient hard-working people determined to be happy. Of course there is still a lot of poverty and danger in Medellin but nothing like it was 20 years ago.

For Vic students going on exchange I strongly recommend to make the most of it because it goes so fast. I can not believe it's already finished, it seemed like yesterday when the taxi was taking me to my fist hostel in Medellin.

Partywise I recommend going to an area called 'la setenta' which is a change from the foreigner dominated 'Parque Lleras' but that's also a great place too.