

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA, LLB
Major(s)	Development Studies
Exchange Institution	EAFIT University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2015-01

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	\$50.00
Accommodation	\$57.00 per week
Return Airfare	\$3600
Local Transportation	\$30 per week
Meals	\$45 per week
Visa	\$150 (including national ID card)
Health & Insurance	\$450
Personal Spending	\$100 per week (including travel)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$2.50 per week
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	More expensive than expected – international flights, cost of national ID card, cellphone rates, technology, cosmetics, drinks at bars, meals at restaurants in El Poblado. Cheaper than expected – most meals, rent, taxis, domestic flights, spa treatments.

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

A little less – I spent about \$10,000 all up, including a month travelling in Mexico and the US.

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

I used my NZ account to withdraw the maximum amount of cash as needed.

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

Colombia is pretty cheap overall – the best cost-saving tip I have is to look outside of Poblado for cheaper housing.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country? 2000 COP or about \$1.00.

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 TP-3 student visa. The NZ Colombian consulate put me in touch with their Honorary Consul in Wellington. I had a short interview with him and my visa was approved almost immediately, although it took a couple of weeks to arrive.

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

When I was applying, the Colombian government had just changed the rules so that it was not necessary to state your university on the visa. Unfortunately, EAFIT wasn't up to date on this, so they told me (and about 5 other students) that we had to immediately get a new visa – a couple of weeks before we were all flying out of our home countries. Luckily, I got in touch with my consulate and they clarified that this was not necessary – so make sure you double-check if there's a problem!

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, insurance is mandatory, but I purchased my own.

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

I used World Nomads, because it was the cheapest option. I didn't have to use it, so I'm not sure how good it is.

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					
NI0294 – Seminar in International Conflict	English		15	3	Because not enough students enrolled for this paper, the lecturer changed it from a seminar to an independent research project. I really enjoyed having the freedom to choose any topic and work on it independently,

					although the requirements were very different to what I'm used to at Vic.
NI0269 – Regional Studies: Latin America	English		15	2	Overall, I enjoyed this paper, although I would have preferred a less economic focus. Like many papers at EAFIT, NI0269 involves many small assessments – some were worth about 3% - and group work.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

I registered online before arriving, and I didn't end up changing any courses, so I didn't need help. However, the ORI (oficina de relaciones internacionales) is there to help with this.

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? Go to the ORI office. If you're unsure about what classes to take, it's a good idea to enroll for all of them, and then drop them as you decide.

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

I had only done 100-level Spanish, so I didn't think I could enroll in any Spanish-language courses – but a few friends were accepted into those courses with zero Spanish, so it's not that strict.

Academic Experience

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

Much more frequent, but smaller, assessments. For example, in a similar Victoria course, I might be expected to write two 3000-word essays and an exam, whereas at EAFIT, I would have to complete three workshops, a research proposal, a group essay draft, a final essay, a written test and an oral exam. I personally prefer the approach at Vic, as it allows you to be more independent.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university?

Due to the amount of assessment, I think the courses are at least equivalent to a 20-point Vic paper – so I'd recommend 3 or 4 courses as a full workload. Make sure you're not doing so much that you have to spend all your time studying in the library!

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

Quite a few of the assignments involve drafting and re-working pieces of writing – so you have many chances to incorporate the teacher’s feedback. If you’re taking courses in Spanish, make sure you talk to your teacher if you’re struggling – they’re often willing to provide alternative work for foreigners to meet the course requirements.

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

Similar to Vic – computer labs, a large central library, and (sometimes dodgy) wifi around the campus.

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?

I completed SPAN111 and SPAN112 at Vic the year before leaving. I also did a lot of DuoLingo, which helped. If you want to learn Spanish, the main thing is to make an effort to get to know native speakers from the beginning of the exchange.

EAFIT provides 40 hours of Spanish lessons at their language school – you can either do them intensively in 2 weeks, or over a month. They’re good, but really expensive to continue with, so look out for private tutors.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in? A shared apartment in Sabaneta (south of Medellín).

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation? Pros – modern, pool, sauna, gym, security, cheap, cool flatmates, nice area. Cons – 20 mins from uni, 30 mins from the main nightlife area.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students? Find an apartment or a house in Sabaneta, Envigado or Laureles – all are safe, not too far, and have a way more homely atmosphere than El Poblado. Don’t stress out about finding somewhere before arriving – most students will stay at a hostel for the first couple of weeks.

How early can you move into accommodation? As soon as you find it!

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food? We had a kitchen. Bear in mind that a lot of NZ appliances aren’t common here – our apartment doesn’t have a microwave, toaster or oven, but it hasn’t been a problem.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus? There isn’t any on-campus accommodation at EAFIT.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation? If you want to practice Spanish, try to avoid living only with other gringos!

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students? It's much easier making friends with international students, because you (almost all) speak English, and are there to have fun and travel. However, Colombians are super friendly, so do make an effort to meet some around uni or going out.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university? The culture isn't as different as I expected – especially in El Poblado, it's easy to forget you're in Colombia.

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

The main issue I found was street harassment – if you're a woman, and especially a blonde, tall woman who wears shorts or skirts, you'll get a lot of attention.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate? Colombians are known for being warm, friendly, and up for a good time – all true!

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students? No problems!

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?

Colombia is much more conservative than NZ, and Colombians tend to be a lot less sensitive regarding minority issues. However, I have been told that Colombians are non-confrontational, so (for example) gay couples won't get harassed in the same way that they might in other conservative countries.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students? I didn't have any issues with friends or people at university. However, street harassment is an issue here – in some areas, if you're out without a man, men will step into your path and hiss in your ears, etc. It happens a lot less when you're out with male friends or more covered up, take it or leave it.

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? Most students are involved in a sports club. However, there's a lot less student-organized activities than my experience at Victoria.

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

Take advantage of long weekends and holidays to visit other areas of Colombia. My favourite area is the Caribbean Coast – Cartagena is like a fairytale, Santa Marta is lovely and full of history, Parque Tayrona and the beaches around it are a great place to chill, and La Ciudad Perdida is a great trek. Also recommended: a weekend trip to Bogotá for some culture, Cali for salsa, San Andrés for island time, and the Amazonas for an adventure. If you've got a week or more, consider a trip to Panamá, Ecuador, México, or Peru – you can get cheap flights to all of them with VivaColombia. There's way too much to do!

On ordinary weekends, there's heaps to do in Medellín. I love visiting the different barrios – Laureles for great cafes, Comuna 13 for amazing street art and outdoor escalators, Santo Domingo for the metrocable and great views, Parque Envigado or Sabaneta to people watch, and El Centro for street stalls and a bit of chaos.

If you want to get out of the city, make sure you head to the rock and the cute little town at Guatapé, or camp at Rio Claro. Also, fincas (parties at holiday houses) are a great way to see the Antioquia countryside

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus? Not sure – I didn't work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students? I found it difficult to find volunteer opportunities during term time, but the Colombian government funds an English teaching programme – you teach for 5 months in Colombian public schools, so consider that if you'd like to stay longer.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Camera
2	Umbrella – for those tropical Medellín thunderstorms
3	Summer clothes – it's always warm!
4	Yellow fever vaccination document
5	Money and time – so that you can see as much as possible

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

1	No dar papayas – Colombia is a lot safer than you'd expect, but it's still much more dangerous than NZ, so make sure you don't take any unnecessary risks.
2	Pack light – the weather doesn't change much here and exchange students are pretty casual, so leave your winter boots and heels at home.
3	Travel, travel, travel – 5 months is much shorter than you'd expect, so make sure you get out there and enjoy the region!
4	Find out about Colombia's history – living here, it's easy to forget that Medellín was the murder

capital of the world in the 90s, but it's so important in order to understand the city.

5 Tell people about Colombia – there are so many misconceptions about the country, so help change that.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1 Trip to the Coast

2 Finca party

3 Backpack north through Central America or south to Peru

4 Salsa in La Setenta!

5 Learn Spanish!

H: Personal Experience

There's an awesome sculpture in the city center which symbolises Medellín for me. It's called the Tree of Life: at first glance, it's a tree; at second, it's a group of dancing women; but when you look closely, you realize it's made from the blades of tens of thousands of gang knives, confiscated by police from the most dangerous areas in the city. In other words, it reflects how the local people have transformed their city – from one of the most dangerous in the world, 20 years ago, to one of the most innovative and creative, today.

Living in Medellín has been an absolute privilege – it's a vibrant, beautiful and modern city. At the risk of sounding like a cheesy tourist campaign: ven a Colombia – el único riesgo es que querer quedar (come to Colombia – the only risk is wanting to stay).

