

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	LLB and BA
Major(s)	International Relations and Political Science
Exchange Institution	EAFIT Universidad, Medellin
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 2, 2015 and Trimester 1, 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	200 to 300 NZD (I shared with other exchange students to make it cheaper)
Accommodation	400 NZD per month (between 600 and 800 pesos usually)
Return Airfare	Approx 2200 (booked one way originally as I didn't have a return date to start with)
Local Transportation	Buses and Metro are around 2 pesos per trip (under 1 dollar)
Meals	30 NZD per day, more if you eat out at expensive places, but it's cheap usually!
Visa	<p>Visa is approx 71 NZD plus 22 NZD</p> <p>Student cedula 72NZD *no longer required for 1 trimester students</p> <p>Note > check with EAFIT as the Student visa requirements have changed since I left</p>
Health & Insurance	1,092 through Student Flights for 6 months (Plan IE)
Personal Spending	3000 on travelling around Colombia and up to Panama
Communications (phone, etc.)	Bought a SIM card with Virgin Mobile on a anti plan 20NZD per month
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	<p>You need to pay for your visa application, the visa itself and the cedula which all together including flights to Bogota etc cost approx. 300NZD, but this was to extend my visa.</p> <p>Food and drinks are super cheap if you eat outside of the main gringo spots such as Lleras, you can get menu del dia for under 5NZD usually!</p>

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

It was about right. Once I knew what my fixed costs were and I was set up with accommodation etc in Medellin it was a case of deciding how much I wanted to travel. Once I decided to extend my exchange for an extra semester I arranged living situation where I gave English lessons for 2 hours a week in exchange for cheaper rent, which helped save more money for travel after.

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

I just withdrew the maximum amount off my Visa debit card once or twice a month and operated in cash. If I had known I was going to stay in Colombia for more than 6 months I would have organized a Colombian bank account, but at CitiBank you can withdraw up to 2,000,000 pesos (just under 1,000 NZD) which I did in

my last few months. But before then I didn't know so I was withdrawing in 600,000 peso (approx. 280NZD) amounts and paying a lot in bank fees!

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

Depending on how long you are staying, either withdraw large lump sum amounts from Citibank or get a bank acc.

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

3,000 pesos (approx. 1.20 NZD)

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?

I did / but since I have left the process has changed (i.e in the last few months) so I would email Esteban at EAFIT and ask.

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

If in doubt, give your contact at the host country an email for up to date information. They are fantastic and will save you a lot of time!

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 was mandatory for EAFIT and we had to email it to the Exchange office at EAFIT before we started. Mine cost 1,092 NZD through student flights.

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

I went through Student Flights on Manners Street in Wellington and Jessy Wadeson there was awesome! She had travelled right through South America already and could tell me what I should focus on insurance wise while keeping it as cheap as possible.

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					
Derecho International Comercial	English	International Law / Business	15	3	Great professor, great course but it was offered at first / second year level so even

					though the content was great, the students were not in a position to really make the most of it.
Negociacion Internacional	English	International negotiation strategy	15	3	Very interesting, the teacher was more interested in the practical components than theory so our assessments were based off negotiation / conference simulations rather than exams
Economia Politica de los Negocios	English	Political Economy	15	5	The best course I have taken in my 5 years at university. I had Josh Large as my professor and I would recommend taking any course he offered, as he is brilliant.
Estudios de Area> Latinoamerica	English	Latin American Studies	15	4.6	Awesome overview of politics in Latin America, highly recommended to any exchange student regardless of what you usually study in order to understand more about the countries in South America.
Resolucion de controversias internacionales	English	Resolution of International Conflicts	15	4	This was brilliant, mainly because we only had 5 people in our class so we changed our syllabus structure to a mini thesis with research and draft timelines throughout the semester, which I loved. Fantastic

					professor too.
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					
Theories of Firm Internationalization *MIB programme	English	Masters in International Business	20	3	Was a basic look at how firms look to internationalise and the strategies used.
International Management	English	Masters in International Business	20	3	Overall introduction to International Management
Risk Management in International Business	English	Masters in International Business	15	4	Course was rather dry but interesting.
Geopolitica *not for points just for interest	Spanish	POLS 200	15	3	Very interesting, good challenge for my Spanish comprehension!

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

We were sent a link from EAFIT with all the classes we could look up and then register from. Esteban at the exchange office is a rockstar and will go above and beyond to try get the classes you want.

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?

Successful! There were a few courses I originally registered for which I didn't like, so I ended up moving a lot! But I would ask other exchange students who had been there the semester previous or your host university buddies, as they are the best recommendations for classes. And get it sorted in the first week or so, even if the novelty of orientation is distracting!

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

As above, have a go looking at the courses offered, and definitely choose one or two papers you wouldn't usually, especially around GeoPolitics in Latin America. As above, the best recommendations will come from your "buddies" from the host university, so ask away!

Academic Experience

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

EAFIT was more like high school than university in terms of how they assessed you and the class size etc, but they have some great teachers so it really is a case of the more you put in, the more you get out.

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?

It was very different! Mainly because our classes had no more than 30 students, and sometimes less than 10! It felt more like tutor groups all the time, and there was a real emphasis on class discussion and contribution. This meant we usually had lots of little assignments rather than one or two big ones, which was fine if you were there every week to study, but not so much if you wanted to travel for a week or so in the semester! But most of the teachers were fantastic, and will exchange an assignment hand in or exam for an alternative form of assessment.

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?

See above / I would look to the professors offering the courses as much as the content of the course itself.

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

Get to know your professors immediately! There will be times when you are travelling or missing classes for certain reasons, but if you engage with them early on and show them that you want to learn and are enjoying their class then they will be a lot more flexible if you need to get time off.

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

Excellent, there are computer rooms and loads of laptops in the library to use, as well as laptops to rent out for free from the tech block.

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 would learn some Spanish before you come, even just the basics and practice online and via skype as it will give you a great advantage and give you some confidence. EAFIT offers the first course free so I would take advantage of that as soon as possible, before then taking more courses from EAFIT or from private tutors, there are plenty of these all over Medellin so ask the exchange office for recommendations or check the notice board for English Spanish exchange options.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I rented a room in a three bedroom apartment in Envigado for my first trimester, then a room in a 7 bedroom house in Estadio for my second trimester.

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

I had my own base with access to a kitchen, laundry, lounge etc and could make it into my temporary home. No cons really, just depends on who you live with.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would recommend living with Colombians, or Spanish speakers, even if it seems easier when you first get there to just pair up with exchange students. Your Spanish will progress way faster than if you stay in the gringo bubble.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Depends really, we booked a hostel for the first week and then had the flexibility to get to know the place and make appointments to see 3 or 4 different places or more to decide.

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

Again, depends on what you decide re accommodation. Some apartments will not have a decently equipped kitchen, so make sure you check first if you want to cook lots! Otherwise eating out is relatively cheap.

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 is a notice board and a list of landlords and apartments that past exchange students have recommended to the exchange office, so ask them for leads, otherwise ask your buddy (and friends buddies) for recommendations!

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

Make sure you shop around, there is a saturation of accommodation so there is no rush. Although living in Lleras seems the easiest, I would recommend looking to Envigado or estadio for a richer experience of Medellin. Lleras is a gringo bubble so if you want to integrate fully into Medellin then I would recommend looking outside for some real experiences.

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 is a massive group of exchange students every semester at EAFIT (more in our trimester 2 from Europe in general) so it is difficult to get out of the exchange bubble so to speak, but the Colombian EAFIT students are usually very friendly, and I found that by volunteering in English teaching projects outside of EAFIT I met so many more Colombians who have become life long friends.*

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

Ok, EAFIT is definitely westernized in the sense that being a private university means that a majority of the students are from comparatively privileged backgrounds and many have visited the US or Europe. As soon as you become involved with the locals outside of University you will pick up on more nuances in culture, which makes for a more fulfilling or interesting time!

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences? *As a woman I found the level of sexism and the machismo culture quite challenging, but that is something that I had to learn more about and choose my battles on. As a young girl with light coloured hair and blue eyes you do get men yelling or whistling on the streets on a daily basis, but after a while you forget they are even there. On the other hand the guys are very protective, and even possessive and will demand to pay for almost everything, and insist on opening car doors and helping you off buses. Somewhat contradictory but it makes for an interesting learning experience, and it should certainly not put you off going!*

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The genuine familiarity and warmth of the people of Colombia. Those who have a strong idea about "personal space" may need a bit of time adjusting like some of my European friends, but once you are used to it you have an ability to engage with people in a way that we don't see too often at home. Colombians are not afraid of expressing exactly how they feel, and it makes for a richer more genuine experience in my opinion.

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

I have had no problems in my time here, and the university staff (especially the International Office at EAFIT) were nothing short of exceptional. I have made best friends for life with students I have studied with, and have been invited to their family gatherings, Christmas eve celebrations and many a finca party as a result.

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? *From what I saw there was wheelchair access to all parts of the university. As to transport and accommodation, I have no doubt that the International Office would assist in any way possible. While Colombia still is quite Catholic and has rather conservative opinions reflected by their current laws on one hand, the friends I have are all very open and actually quite protective when it comes to visible minorities. There would be a difference in how one is perceived in the university versus one of the poorer barrios, but at university the friends of mine who identified as gay or lesbian (including exchange students) did not express that they felt it inhibited their ability to study.*

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

Colombia does have a "machismo" culture like much of Latin America, which means they have rather conservative and contradictory perceptions of the role women and men play in society, however I have found that our generation coming through are usually a lot more open and liberal.

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 is a ridiculous amount of activities you can get involved in, from sports teams to volunteering in great initiatives by clubs in the university. I would recommend getting involved in one or two things by yourself to really see another side of the country outside of the exchange group.

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

See as much of Colombia as you can! Stretch out your holidays by talking sweetly with your teachers about any assignments which may clash and get going. The Caribbean coast along from Cartagena to Santa Marta, Parque Tayrona, Palomino Beach and La Guajira is a no brainer, and San Andres Island if you have time. West to Bahia Solano and Nuqui on the Pacific Coast is magnificent September through to November for whale watching. South to Manizales and the coffee region, and further to Cali and Tatacoa desert is also a must do. Bogota is worth spending a few days in checking out Monserrate and La Candelaria Old Town.

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

With our student visa's I had the impression that you couldn't work, but I know the French exchange students sometimes did internships in some of the departments, and the language school also offers a few scholarship ie free classes if you apply and show you are volunteering in some capacity in Medellin.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

See above

I was involved as a volunteer in a few different capacities. Firstly, teaching English in Comuna 13 at the top of the escalators. I was there teaching 2 to 3 times a week since January 2016, and loved it. If you are

interested, we are in the early stages of creating a more formal organisation called “Stairway to English”, which various exciting projects in the pipeline! Another foundation I spent time with was Los Angeles de Medellin which was situated in the mountains above Santa Domingo. This community predominantly comprises of displaced peoples from the conflict over the past 30 years, in which 6 to 7 million (depending on the statistics you read) people, primary from the campesinos (farms) were forcibly displaced by Paramilitary forces or the FARC. The foundation offered English lessons every day, but also served as a base for the community, and was used by thousands who lived nearby. I also worked alongside a Senior Lecturer from New Jersey Institute of Technology who was bringing his students down to Colombia for a two week intensive crash course in IT web design, or coding, or fashion design, or film making for example, and ran the English lesson that all the students aged 14 to 18 had to attend each day before starting class, as part of their end presentation included marks for presenting half in English. Even now as I leave, there are so many other great start ups, makerspaces (Gora for example, see Facebook) or co working spaces, or community projects which anyone can get involved in if you are sincere and willing to consistently commit a small amount of time. There is no shortage of opportunity, it is just a case of taking it! See photos below.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Kiwi presents ie Pounamu necklaces or All Black Jerseys and a flag
2	Marmite, Tim Tams and Pineapple Lumps
3	A good jacket and pair of hiking shoes
4	Any familiar lozengers or medicines in case you are sick
5	Camera

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

1	Learn some Spanish before you arrive and get online and practice with a Colombian!
2	Don't book accommodation until you get there, just book a hostel or AirBnB and then see the places in person, and don't rush, there is no shortage of accommodation!
3	Make sure you make friends outside of the exchange group
4	Make sure you make friends outside of the university, as EAFIT is great but it is a private university and they are usually quite conservative about places you should and shouldn't go.
5	Once in a while, leave all your valuables at home, have approx. \$ 5NZD in your pocket for a Guarapo or Jugo and just wander and talk to as many people as you can, ideally in centro or one of the barrios such as comuna 8 or 13 (yes they are safe!). You walk lighter when you have nothing to lose and only friends to make.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Caribbean Coast
2	Adopt a local football team, buy the shirt and get to a few games

3	Check out Comuna 13 and Comuna 8, both have insane lookouts
4	Volunteer in some capacity
5	Get your nails done (yes boys, even a cut and tidy is very normal for men!)

H: Personal Experience

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

I have had probably the best year of my life this year. I loved Medellin and EAFIT so much I applied to remain in Colombia for an extra semester before travelling to Rio for the Olympics, and then returning to Colombia with my brother to introduce him to my favourite other country.

It did have its challenges, and learning Spanish while being here certainly had its up and downs, but the absolute joy I get from being part of a city and country and making it my home for a year is something I can't find words to describe accurately. One half year exchange truly is not enough to feel the heartbeat of a new city, alas, even a year doesn't feel long enough. Within the exchange group I made friends for life, and continue to talk with many of them every other week. However by stepping out of the university exchange group and even EAFIT and searching out small start ups, volunteer projects teaching English or other community projects, I've found a beautiful community of like minded Colombians (and a few ex pats too) who have given me an opportunity to share so much more of myself and in return, learn so much about the idiosyncrasies of daily Colombian life.

Colombia, and Medellin in particular is so different to the snapshot depicted by the TV show Narcos, the drug issues and violence, the Miss World contenders and their soccer team. They are some of the kindest, passionate and openly generous people I have ever come across, and the Paisas (from Antioquia, the state with Medellin) are even more so. I would happily return and live here again sometime in the future, and am so grateful that VUW has the option to come here. Being able to live and study in a city really does give an entirely different perspective then one when you are just travelling, as you have purpose and find a new rhythm and daily routine which is unlike anything you would ever find at home.

So from what I've learned in my year, I would suggest the following... (and more):

Date a Colombian. Take at least two paper on geopolitics in Colombia and Latin America to gain some crucial insight into the history which has shaped these people you share the bus with every day. Find an organisation or foundation and contribute some of your time and learn from how they operate. Talk to every taxi driver about their favourite football team (Nacional or Medellin) and political views. Go on missions to find things in central and talk to every vendor to practice your Spanish. Medellin is growing at an exciting rate, and while there is still a long way to go, I would encourage anyone with a willingness to become absorbed into a passionate and vibrant culture to consider coming here for at least one trimester, if not more!



