

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	B.A
Major(s)	Theatre, History
Exchange Institution	University of California Los Angeles
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2016 Trimester 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	\$200
Accommodation	\$15,000
Return Airfare	\$2,000
Local Transportation	N/A
Meals	Included in accommodation
Visa	\$400 + airfare to auckland
Health & Insurance	\$300 (UCLA Health Insurance)
Personal Spending	\$1500
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$50 per month phone plan (US plans are really expensive)
Other fees (specify)	Linen, pillows etc for accommodation- \$100
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Phone plans were really expensive and you can't really get a cheap one unless you want no data at all.

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

Once I was on campus and had paid for accommodation I really only had to spend money on events and entertainment. If one was really strapped for cash or had a low budget you could quite easily live on just the standard Student Loan weekly payment (once accommodation with food and fees have been paid etc). All in all I spent probably around what I expected to.

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

I took a 'Loaded for Travel' card to the US with American Dollars loaded on as a currency and once I was in LA I got a US Debit card. The Loaded card was fine for eftpos machine purchases but you cant use it for online stuff, so I mainly used the US Debit Card when I was over there. To put money on my Debit Card I would transfer \$\$ from my New Zealand accounts to the Loaded Card, take cash out of the Loaded card (with a \$3 fee at any ATM) and then put the cash onto the US debit card. Way cheaper than transfer

straight from NZ to US where you get hit with massive fees!

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

You will find so much to do in LA so its probably best to overestimate how much money you need/want to take. I for one basically didn't use any student loan weekly payments until near the end of my trip because I had saved up a decent amount of money in advance. Just be aware that the US really sucks with its banking because of all the fraud activity- you can't just transfer money from person to person. So I found its really helpful to have a bit of cash on you at all times in case you need to pay someone for something.

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

\$1.

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 and YES it was difficult. The Visa application was the most stressful part of the whole planning/exchange. The process consisted of having to go through a whole list of forms in a PARTICULAR ORDER, some of which had to be sent over from the US. You need to book an appointment at the US Embassy in Auckland, but before you can do that you have to fill out a whole bunch of forms. Important point: you can't do much until your College sends you your confirmation of study which has a certain number (I cant remember its initials) on it required to enter most of the other forms.

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

Get onto it as soon as you can. The application in Auckland is the easiest part about it, you'll stand in line for an hour for a 3 minute chat with someone about why you are going to the States- don't stress about that at all. As for the Visa Forms, they take a while so give yourself plenty 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 UCLA had a mandatory student insurance which was paid each quarter-roughly \$120 USDper quarter I think? I had heard it was difficult to get out of so I just paid the money and let it be.

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

Just do your University's Insurance. Even though nothing happened to me you can get into huge money problems over in the US if you need medical help and don't have Student Insurance.

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	VUW course equivalent or	VUW points/credits	Rating (1-5)	Comments
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	Instruction	elective	value		
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
THEATRE 20 Acting Fundamentals	English	100 Level Theatre	15 credits	1	This was a really entry level theatre course that was aimed non-theatre students. It was fun and the workload was pretty light but as a Theatre major I didn't learn a whole lot. 2/5
THEATRE 110 History of American Musical Theatre	English	300 Level Theatre	15 credits	3	Awesome course if you are interested in the history of Musicals. The lecturer David Gorshein was fantastic, would take the course just for him. Again, only about 50% of the class were Theatre Majors, all sorts of people were taking it for whatever reason. 3.5/5
HISTORY 140C 20 th Century US History Since 1960	English	300 Level History	15 credits	4	An interesting history course about American History from 1945-1970's. The lecturer was a little bit crazy, but in a bizarre-hippie-70year old king of crazy-so many tangents! The class did have a lot of reading (big whole books) and the big essays were a lot of work but it was all engaging. Take this only if you are a History student though. 3/5
HISTORY 111c Modern Middle East	English	300 Level History	15 credits	4	AWESOME CLASS! Only about 30 people took it so it was a much more senior, open debate type vibe. The lecturer was my favourite lecturer on exchange, he really knows his stuff on the Middle East but he likes to have fun and joke with the class too. Would recommend. 5/5
THEATRE 120C Acting and Performance in Film	English	300 Level Theatre	15 credits	2	Relatively easy course this one. Should really be a Film course not a Theatre course- essentially

					watched a movie each week and looked at a whole number of movie genres. Pretty meh- I didn't have a blast, but it was relaxed enough, pretty suitable for an exchange type class. 3/5
THEATRE 123 Intermediate Acting for the Stage- Improv	English	300 Level Theatre	15 Credits	1	This class had literally no assessment- graded purely on turning up. You'll learn to be more confident and the teacher Tom is an amazingly intelligent guy who knows a lot about the entertainment industry. 5/5

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It can be a bit of struggle working out what courses you can and can't do- often departments don't even know where exchange students fit into their programs which is very unhelpful. If in doubt talk to the International Office and they will point you in the right direction.

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?

Enrolling classes was fine. Make sure you know when your enrolment time is so you can sign up for classes as soon as your time comes- do the research of what classes you want to do in advance because most courses fill up!

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

Try to find a balance of courses for your degree and courses that are wildly different. There are so many weird and wonderful courses that you should take- I recommend doing at least 1 elective each quarter! You'll have way more fun if you aren't trying to do 3 stressful, hard courses each quarter.

Academic Experience

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

The academic experience was different, but not overwhelmingly so. Some of the testing is certainly easier- particularly in class tests- but again it depends on what courses you take. The end of quarter period is much more stressful than at Vic because A) there is no time between classes ending and exams which are the following week , B) almost every class will have some kind of assignment or exam in this one week period.

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 workload seemed to vary based on what courses you took. Half of my courses had such a relaxed workload- far less than any Vic course, even 100 level classes- and then other courses were like full on 300

Level workloads. It really pays to ask around students and see what people say about specific courses and how they are taught/assessed. Generally, the assessment is a bit more intense than at Vic because the teaching period is only 10 weeks, so you are doing work more frequently- OR on the other hand some courses will just have one big mid-term essay and one big final essay.

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 took 13 Units (3 classes) each quarter which was one above the minimum requirement of 12. Generally if you take 3 classes you should have a good amount of Uni work to do. You can take more but it will start eating into your free time to do other things.

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

Don't do you study with your friends. Every little conversation is so interesting while you are on exchange that you'll find it impossible to stay on task. I did almost all of my academics by myself to be as productive as possible.

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

Library facilities are fantastic. UCLA has multiple libraries with different interior feels so you can work in different atmospheres. You can borrow laptops for free as well. The internet is pretty good, but you have to do a bit of connecting at different spots around campus until your devices recognize the networks.

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?

N/A

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

A Plaza Triple in a University Hall

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

Pros- Living around lots of people, always something going on, the food is AMAZING.

Cons- The rooms might be quite small for some people, sharing rooms with other students can take some getting used to (it depends what your room mates are like).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Go into a Hall. Just do it. You will have a much less wholesome experience if you try to save money by living in the apartments or the Co-op. Spend the money, you won't regret it. I lived in a Plaza triple which had the added benefits of no security guard after 9pm (in other halls you had to sign friends to after that time which was annoying) PLUS in the plazas you share a bathroom with 4 or 6 people instead of the whole floor. Personally I found living with two other people (a triple) fine, and wouldn't try to save money by getting a double. I had one awesome roommate and one terrible one, which is better than getting stuck with just one terrible one! The only downside to the plazas are that they are definitely less social than the regular halls where all the freshman are. Deluxe halls are somewhere in between- you have slightly bigger rooms, but still have the whole-floor bathrooms. Do Plaza or normal hall, don't bother being a deluxe.

How early can you move into accommodation?

The Sunday before your quarter starts- i.e late!

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

If you are in a hall you have to have a meal plan- and believe me you will WANT ONE! The food at UCLA is next-level good- trust me. If you normally get up for breakfast then get the 19P meal plan- it's the most expensive but it lets you be nice and flexible with your eating. If not go for 14p and just eat big lunches. I wouldn't do 14 or 19, it's a bit too restricting (you have to use swipes in certain time frames).

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

N/A.

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

Although you fill out a preference form, it seems like they will just put you in whatever housing is left over. Don't stress too much about it, any hall will be a great time. If you are a social person I would say fill out the rooming survey and say you are really social. I think the mean 'social level' in the states is lower (surprisingly, there are a lot of introvert academics) so if you want to party it up then don't sit on the fence in the survey.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

You'll make heaps of friends no matter what kind of personality you have. Everyone loves international students, particularly New Zealanders!

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

Adjusting to UCLA felt very natural, its not that different to University at Victoria- just way more social activities and you feel like everyone knows each other! No massive adjustments needed.

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

Tipping is a pain but you won't have to do it that much unless you eat out at restaurants and cafes. The only other thing worth mentioning is some Americans can be quite brusque and it can be interpreted as being rude, but its just how their culture is.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The universal love for sports and everyone's desire to do extra-curricular activities!

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

I was treated really well by everyone I met. As I mentioned above, people love talking to exchange students and getting to know you. Although people who aren't affiliated with the university- i.e bus drivers- don't really care that you are a foreigner unfamiliar with the country- don't expect special treatment from them unfortunately.

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?

I think it would be very easy for disabled students to study at UCLA, and the LGBT community is very strong in LA which is traditionally quite liberal so no issues there.

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

None at all.

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 way too much to put down! There are so many social sports teams and every cliché American club you could think of- acapella groups, drama clubs, law societies etc. etc. Anything you could possibly want to get involved with UCLA has. Personally I didn't sign up to any clubs because I didn't want to be restricted time wise for rehearsals and meetings. There are so many non-club events that are constantly happening and available to all students- UCLA Basketball, Football, Gymnastic meets, hiphop dance nights etc. I would go on but there is way too much to put down on paper and you should discover it all for yourself!

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

Make sure you escape the UCLA bubble at least once every two weeks. Me and my friends would make sure we did something off-campus on Saturdays- going to a beach (Newport beach was my favourite), visiting museums (LACMA), going to talk show tapings, theme parks etc.

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

There are heaps of jobs on campus for students- most of the uni work force running the dining halls, admin at gyms etc are students. As an exchange student you can work up to 20 hours per week on campus, although I didn't have a job and wouldn't recommend it unless you really need the money.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Plenty of volunteer opportunities for community groups and clubs like the Red Cross. Unsure about internships.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	All your generic essential things.
2	A good backpack that you can take to class or on day trips.
3	A rainjacket! Sounds stupid but I was told it never rained in LA.....it did.
4	NZ memorabilia- you'll be surprised how many people you want to give stuff at the end.
5	Marmite- it's a fun thing to make your friends try.

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

1	Live in a University Hall- don't try to save money by living elsewhere.
2	Don't stress over the size of campus, you'll get used to it really quickly.
3	Your Bruin Card is the key to literally everything- getting into your hall, having meal plan swipes etc. Make getting your bruin card the first priority! Generally you have to wait till the first day of classes and there are lines so go early on the Monday.
4	If you are a gym person go to Bfit not the Wooden Centre- way less egos at Bfit!
5	Make sure you don't get sucked into staying on campus/Westwood all the time. Make a friend with someone who has a car because that is your ticket to seeing so much more of California!

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Coachella- if you are even slightly inclined to go JUST DO IT. My first music festival ever and it was so worth the money.
2	Disneyland/Universal Studios/KnottsBery Farm- themeparks yes, but so much fun to go with new College friends- such a great environment to spend time with people.
3	Dance Marathon- an incredible UCLA-specific event that is similar to the 40 hour famine. You'll hate yourself for doing it during, but it will genuinely make you proud to say you did it.
4	Movie premieres in Westwood! Like the Westwood premiers page on facebook and you will get notifications when premiers are on. Literally a 5 minute walk from campus is where they have some awesome red carpet events- you might even get tickets to go inside and see the world premiere (I did for Hail Caesar).
5	Get out of Los Angeles and drive south to San Diego or north along the coast, or San Fransisco. Try and see a little more of California than just LA because it's not really the true West Coast.

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 was the most amazing 6 month adventure. I was pretty nervous going into it, but looking back on my time away after being back at Vic for a month I realize how special going to an overseas university was. I made some life-long friends, had other-worldly American experiences and got to live the US College cliché life for half a year. My exchange will be the highlight of my time at university for sure and I wish I could do it all over again!