

# 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 Commerce, Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Commercial Law, Marketing and Media (Communication Studies at UCLA)
Exchange Institution	University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 (Quarters 1 and 2 at UCLA)

## 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 - \$300 (depends on your classes, some of mine had no books)
Accommodation	\$13,000 (approx., for 2 quarters)
Return Airfare	\$1,700
Local Transportation	\$500 (this is just a rough guess but unfortunately you have to use Uber a lot in LA, as public transport is not very good)
Meals	Included in the accommodation costs
Visa	\$200
Health & Insurance	\$1,500 for UC Ship (required health insurance) + own travel insurance
Personal Spending	\$2,000 - \$5,000 (depends if you want to travel a lot, go to events etc.)
Communications (phone, etc.)	Cheapest prepaid plans are about \$40 USD per month (approx. \$60 NZD)
Other fees (specify)	Groups such as sororities and fraternities are expensive, approx. \$1500 NZD Small fees for sports groups, approx. \$40 NZD
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	The exchange ended up costing more than I expected, mostly because I wanted to do as much as I could to make the most of the experience. So things like weekend trips away, festivals etc. definitely add up. Also phone plans were annoyingly expensive! A lot more than at home.

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

It ended up being more than I planned and I had to borrow money from my parents. This was mostly because I went away to other states and cities for weekends and spring break. I also went to a few festivals like Coachella, which is quite expensive.

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

For most of the time I used an Air New Zealand OneSmart card, which works as a debit card. It worked really well but I ended up getting an American debit card from Chase bank because I wasn't able to set my App Store location to the US without it and also wasn't able to use Venmo without it. Venmo is the app

most people at UCLA use to pay each other back because they don't do bank transfer or anything like that usually.

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

Get an American card and have a credit card or another back up card that you can use if there is an emergency, you lose your other card etc. This was useful for me because my OneSmart card actually got stolen.

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

Coke – \$1 USD, Coffee - \$3.50 USD

**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 got a J1 visa – the standard one for exchange students. The process involved submitting my details, filling out a long questionnaire online and booking an appointment at the US Embassy in Auckland. You have to do the interview there so if you're not from Auckland you will have to get there somehow. I think it cost around \$200 NZD. Also the interview is not scary at all, you just need all the required documents.

I found this kind of confusing to work out, but the required documents are:

Passport, SEVIS registration and fee payment confirmation, DS-2019, DS-160 confirmation, appointment confirmation and supplementary documents (something that will compel you to return to NZ e.g. offer of study, return flight booking; financial ability to pay e.g. a bank letter; academic documents e.g. print out of grades)

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

Do it early! Sometimes it is really quick, but if there are any issues it can take a while and you might have to make another interview appointment.

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?

UC SHIP is their mandatory health insurance plan. You can waive this for another type of insurance but the requirements are very specific so its easier to just use theirs.

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

UC SHIP is done through Anthem. I would recommend this, as it covers doctor visits, some medication etc. and even covered 90% of an operation I had to have whilst on exchange.

## 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	VUW	Rating (1-5)	Comments
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	Instruction	equivalent or elective	points/credits value		
<b>VUW Trimester 1/2016 (Winter Quarter)</b>					
COMMST156 – Social Networking	English	Elective	15	3	A very new subject that is only just starting to be researched. Combines some business and easy math to look at the effects of social networks. Very useful information for a lot of subject areas, that isn't offered at Vic. Would definitely recommend!!
COMMST105 – Conspiracy Theories in Media and the Middle East	English	General 300 level media course	15	2	A very specific course that was super interesting. Quite easy as well, as there is just one midterm and a final essay.
GERMAN59 – The Holocaust in Film and Literature	English	General 200 level media course		3	This course was taught by a boring professor but is an interesting and important subject matter. You have to read 3 or 4 books, do 2 essays, quizzes and a final, which felt like a lot for a lower division class. Grading was not too hard though, so you can get good grades.
<b>VUW Trimester 1/2016 (Spring Quarter)</b>					
COMMST154 – Social Communication and New	English	General 300 level media course	15	4	I found some of the material for this class to be very hard and confusing + the professor

Technology					assigned a lot of homework but didn't really tell us about it. The grading was easier than I expected though.
COMMST107 – Terrorism in Journalism	English	General 300 level media course	15	2	Taken by the same professor as COMM ST 105, so again it was quite straightforward and only had a midterm and a final paper.
COMMSTM147 – Sociology of Mass Communication	English	General 300 level media course	15	3/4	This was definitely my favorite class! So interesting and opens your eyes a lot to the inner workings of media industries. That said the material is based in economics and sociology, so it was difficult at times. There are also reading memos each week, which was annoying but made me understand everything a lot better (also meant less study for tests and final)

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Everyone is assigned two 'pass' times. In your first pass you can sign up for a maximum of 10 points, so I signed up for two 4 point courses. Then the second pass, which is usually a week later, you can sign up for your other classes. This is all done through MyUCLA, so make sure you know how to use it before enrollment. The pass time will most likely be before you arrive at UCLA, so it is hard to get help but I'm sure there is someone you can 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?

I enrolled at the exact time my pass was opened for both quarters, so I had no issues getting the classes I wanted. However, getting in to classes at UCLA is extremely difficult at times so be prepared to take classes that aren't your first preference. If you're a junior or senior it is a lot easier because you get given earlier pass times.

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

Look up your courses and professors online e.g. on the BruinWalk website – that can give you an idea about how difficult it will be to get into the class etc.

### **Academic Experience**

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

Since UCLA is a very highly ranked university, the academic experience was really good. At times it can be challenging but I found it quite interesting and still had heaps of time to explore LA and other parts of the US.

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?

Teaching is in general a much higher standard and I found it to be much more interesting. Professors don't usually read off lecture slides, so you can't really miss class too much. Also professors each have their own way of teaching, grading etc., which can be kind of confusing. The workload differs from class to class. I know science courses have a very high workload, but the humanities/COMM ones were fine. Sometimes there can be a lot of reading.

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 would recommend only doing 3 classes per quarter, so you can have time to go to parties around campus and do other fun things around LA. COMM ST M147/SOSC 176 is a really cool course if you are interested in media industries and economics.

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

Try to go to class as much as possible, so you don't have to spend ages catching up around midterms and finals.

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

I think the facilities at Vic are better, but they're not bad at UCLA. There's internet all over campus and I didn't have many problems with that.

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?

Triple residential plaza room (shares a bathroom with another triple room) – one of the many types of dorms/on-campus accommodation

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

If you get roommates that you don't get along with then sharing a room is definitely a con, as well as the fact that you have to get used to not having a lot of time alone. It is almost impossible to get a single room, including off campus apartments and other accommodation, so it is just something you have to get used to. Pros are that you're close to campus, the food is amazing and it makes the whole experience a lot easier. I had friends who stayed in apartments and the co-op and regretted not staying on campus.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

On campus accommodation

How early can you move into accommodation?

For us it was only one day before class started, but if you start Fall quarter then I think you can move in before zero week.

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

There are different meal plans based on how many meals you want per week i.e. 11, 14, 19. There is also the option of having a P plan (premier), which means unused meals roll over, you can swipe in multiple times etc. – definitely get this!!

There are 4 dining halls and 4 quick service restaurants, which are all so good!

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

I didn't live off-campus, but it is quite hard to find off-campus accommodation because most people at UCLA organize to live with their friends.

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

Try to get a deluxe residential hall – they're the best ones, as they're social and still have air conditioning (the standard residential halls don't). Also make sure you answer the housing application survey carefully because they do look at that when assigning rooms.

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

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

international) students?

Everyone is pretty friendly and interested in NZ. As long as you make the effort to talk to and meet people it is easy to make friends!

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

There are definitely differences in culture in America that are sometimes surprising, but on the whole it wasn't too difficult to adjust to. You quickly get used to it!

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

Something I noticed a lot was the difference in humour between New Zealand and America. Americans don't tend to understand sarcasm very well. Also in LA it can be materialistic, which can be annoying at times.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

This is more about uni, but I love the college life on campus. It has a community feel and people are really proud and excited to be a part of it. The sports games are so much fun because everyone gets so into it.

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

Everyone was really nice and willing to help out if you ask. Professors and TAs are always willing to answer questions and help you out.

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?

There is an LGBT center that is quite active on-campus and lots of different groups/clubs for minorities. UCLA is great in that way!

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

This wasn't an issue at all; people were very interested to hear about New Zealand and they love the accent!

## **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 are so many opportunities for extra curricular activities at UCLA. IM sports are really good if you want to play sport casually and make some new friends. There are also sororities and fraternities that are a good way on meeting new people (although you have to go through a recruitment process and it comes with some costs).

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

Travel around LA and outside it e.g. Santa Monica, Downtown, Hollywood, Melrose, Orange County, Long Beach, Malibu etc. Go to the museums like the Getty, LACMA, the Broad. I also went to Colorado one weekend, as well as San Francisco, Indio (Coachella) etc.

On spring break definitely get out of LA (you actually have to leave the dorms anyway). I went to Chicago and New York, which was super cool! Lots of people go to Cabo in Mexico and Miami for this, but book ahead because it gets very expensive.

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

I think you can work a maximum of 10 hours a week on campus. I don't think you're allowed to work off-campus on the visa but you could do babysitting/nannyng.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

You can do all this through UCLA, I just think you need internships to be approved.

### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

1	Camera/Phone
2	Food from New Zealand e.g. Whittakers chocolate, Marmite, Pineapple Lumps
3	Some kind of All Blacks clothing (this is how we met another NZer)
4	Warm clothing and summer clothing – LA temperature can vary a lot
5	Photos from home for your room

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

1	Make the most of everything offered at UCLA e.g. the sports, clubs, trips out of LA (Outdoor center)
2	Do your best to do well in your courses but also don't spend all your time studying
3	Don't over pack!!! Such as hassle coming home with all the extra things you accumulate
4	Research about the culture of the host universities, especially for universities in the southern states – it's a very different culture there.
5	As well as local people, make friends with other exchange students at UCLA because they are the ones who are more likely to want to travel and explore.

## 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 (or another festival, there's a lot – BottleRock, Stagecoach etc.)
2	Newport beach and Laguna Beach (whale watching)
3	Hollywood sign walk at sunset
4	Go to a movie premier in Westwood – highly likely you will get pics/meet with celebrities and sometimes they give out free tickets.
5	Go to another state, each one is so different

## H: Personal Experience

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

Going on an exchange was definitely one of the best things I've done, most people say this but it is so worthwhile and such a good experience. Going to another country for 6 months by myself was very out of my comfort zone, but it was very rewarding being able to meet so many different people and do so many things I never thought I would do. Being one of the top universities in the country, the professors at UCLA are really good and I found most of my classes really interesting and found lectures and discussions to be really enjoyable. The American college experience is pretty unique and something you will never be able to experience again – including the school pride, sports games, frat parties and general campus life. Being in LA there is so much to see and do with a lot of cool places nearby like Santa Monica, Venice Beach, Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Downtown LA to name a few. There are always events and activities on in LA, so you definitely never get bored! As well as this, I was able to travel around (and out of) the country to Colorado, Chicago, New York, San Fran, Indio Valley, Napa Valley and Mexico. I 100% recommend an exchange to UCLA if you are considering it!

