

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

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| VUW degree(s) | B/A |
| Major(s) | Spanish, Linguistics |
| Exchange Institution | Universidad Catolica de Argentina |
| VUW Tri & Year of Exchange | 2nd Tri 2014 |

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.)

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| Books | 20 (all the following prices are from using the unofficial money exchange using USD in Cash) |
| Accommodation | 400 for month, 1600 for entire 4 month period |
| Return Airfare | 1800 |
| Local Transportation | 50-80 (around 6 dollars a week) |
| Meals | 30 dollars a week (I ate well) |
| Visa | 35 dollars |
| Health & Insurance | 400 |
| Personal Spending | 200 |
| Communications (phone, etc.) | 30 (for four month) |
| Other fees (specify) | |
| What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected? | I took ARS (Argentine Pesos) out of country and they are worth their weight in paper – got maybe 40% of what they are officially worth. Were optional weekend trips which I didn't know about but wasn't interested in, they go for around 200-300 dollars. Have to pay for the obligatory Spanish course, which was around 150 NZD |

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

I got off pretty good, with student allowance I actually managed to save money. Food was pretty cheap cooking my own meals, got a very nice and cheap apartment, didn't eat out too often, etc., and so I spent a lot less than I had prepared for.

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

I initially used a travel card (Travelex) but it was such a bad idea. Got charged around 7-8 dollars for every single atm withdrawal and the limit is only 150 NZD per withdrawal. I felt iffy about carrying so much cash, but without a doubt the best way to go is to carry USD in cash from NZ with you. Bring a travel belt or something, but bring enough for your stay, cause not only would

you save on bank fees, but you get around 1.5 times as much in exchange at the unofficial money exchange places than the official rate (and you don't have to get it off the shifty street vendors shouting at the corners, you can go to official shops that will offer the unofficial rate: La casa de Pepe, Av Cerriño 4667 – just one of many). I ended up traveling to Uruguay on the ferry just to get out cash and in the end lost a few hundred (at least 4-5) in ATM fees, crappy exchange rate, and travel costs to Uruguay. Get a travel belt, carry USD, find a place to change it as you need, your room/apartment should be safe enough, and if not there is always insurance for that – but don't be afraid to bring a good amount of USD.

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

Put aside money for the Spanish course, they surprise you with it. Visa is cheap enough. Reading/book costs are pretty low comparably but depends on course. As far as accommodation goes they will send you some info on an email, not very well advertised at all, and you can go through all that to sort out accommodation before arriving, otherwise you can just google 'apartamento buenos aires' or something similar.

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

Coke – 1.5L \$1.50 (didn't even see cans) Coffe – \$2-3

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?

Have to apply for Visa but don't need to do anything at all until around half way through the semester – so no need to check or prepare anything before actually leaving NZ, simply arrive, take a free tourist visa for 90 days, and before it runs out you will have got the Visa with the help (they give you all instructions and relevant paperwork) of the Uni

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

Don't do anything at all before leaving, no need. The Uni will prompt you and tell you what to do and what you need and where you need to go – all the 400+ international students are in the same boat, and the Uni guides you through it all

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?

Insurance was mandatory, but any insurance would do. They ask that you give them a copy of your insurance info

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

I used World Nomad (worldnomad.com), and they were the cheapest and most recommendable one online – never needed to use it though

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 |
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| VUW Trimester 1/YEAR | | | | | |
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| VUW Trimester 2/YEAR | | | | | |
| Español 2B | Spanish | SPAN315 | 20 | 4 | Pretty normal language class. Less book focussed and spent a fair amount of time talking about Argentinian relevant stuff: culture, history, politics, etc. Enjoyable class, a lot of chatting, easy atmosphere, work not terribly difficult, didn't learn a whole lot, but great for speaking and listening practice |
| Lingüística general | English | LING101 | 20 | 2 | Silliest class ever. Loved the teacher, but he was not terribly interested in teaching – had us copy, word for word, what he read out of some old linguistics books, then had us read chapters independently and make a presentation to teach the class ourselves (which is meant to be his job, |

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| | | | | | <p>right?), and the content had no context as a separate chapter and was difficult to understand (and yet we had to teach it without any help!). Half of the class' grade for a presentation (we done around 4 each) and then the rest from final exam, which consisted of us talking about two chosen topics that we covered in class: I spoke informally for around 3 mins and he stopped me well before my half way mark and said it's all fine and gave me my grade – this all took place at the front of a classroom full of other students from another class taking a separate written exam in silence – very awkward.</p> |
| Estado y religión | Spanish | HIST200 | 20 | 3 | <p>Pretty straight forward class, had simple but well-made slides which the professor presented each class – this course is designed for exchange students so he spoke well and clear and the content was well presented, so all in all was a nice and easy class – except for the 20 page essay in Spanish (around 16 thousand words!) which he threw at us casually and with a straight face – however I don't think anyone failed.</p> |

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It was pretty straight forward, just following the process that is given to us by VIC, then the UNI will contact you and tell you where to be and when for the orientation – at that point it is just a matter of enrolling for classes

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 for classes was a pain in the culo – all and any classes I put down on my application form in applying for the Uni were entirely useless and irrelevant, which I don't know if that is a good for a bad thing, adds flexibility I suppose. But the classes I needed, and got signed off by the head of school as they were not immediately available, and one of them not available at all. Thankfully I was able to get the class for my major exchange credits (Linguistics), but had to go and get permission from the head of the exchange department of the host Uni. Another class I planned on taking was just ridiculously difficult and so I dropped out after the first class and changed it for one that is designed for exchange students (Estado y religion).

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

Hard to tell what classes you can actually get before going there and talking to people – there is a test that will determine your level of Spanish proficiency for which you can assume you will get an 'intermediate' level, so any classes that require 'Advanced' Spanish you can forget about right now (unless you are hardcore, and before this trip I had spent 10+ months in South America, so practice wasn't an issue, A's for Spanish at Vic too). If a class seems available (in the courses list, etc.) that you want then go for it, but you might need to talk to heads of department and work for it a bit, it's not as simple as signing up and then all good – not all the classes that should be readily available for exchange students are available for sign up at orientation, but you can sort it out with a bit of work.

Academic Experience

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

Work load was silly small – around 9 contact hours at Uni and outside of that it was very very little (like an hour outside) until I got assigned the odd assignment that was ridiculous in comparison (20+ page essay in Spanish, presentation on 3 difficult chapters of that the Professor should be teaching us, etc.).

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 style of teaching was a little more open and relaxed, pretty much exactly like our tutorials here, but with maybe a few more students (depending on the class – Linguistics only had like 6 students including myself). Workload was pretty slight, and the classes never actually ran for the full time. Would often finish earlier depending on how the professor/class were feeling. Home work was easy until they assigned assignments, of course dependant on the paper and I can only

speak for the three I took, but my assignments for two out of three classes were a bit silly, examples being the 20+ page essay in Spanish and the presentation of chapters in a book that we are responsible for teaching to the class.

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?

Do a courses that are designed for exchange students, the PEL courses. Some are offered in English but go for a Spanish one, an interest one, just for the credits. The Spanish class will be compulsory and that's a pretty fun class and is selected based on a test you do during orientation. For meeting local students or just for the Spanish immersion it might be a good idea to do a normal course from the Uni, whichever one you want, maybe for major credits. That's only 3 courses and my week was like 9 contact hours at uni and maybe 1 or 2 outside of (rising to 15+ for assignments) – so I had a lot of spare time until given the fuller assignments, so by all means there is room for more classes, but if you feel like exploring BA or surrounding area then you will have the time and yet be a full time student with full time credits.

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

Focus in class – requires more focus because of foreign language, so will get more tired, but its pretty fundamental, but easy to drift off a bit. Work isn't terribly difficult and their marking is very lenient, especially with exchange students, I think you might have to make a conscious effort to fail.

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

Internet was pretty crap and unreliable – i often used the 3g instead, which was like 10 cents a day (for 15mb or something). They do have internet but it is sporadic and slow, but that doesn't mean it doesn't always work, but not as reliable as required.

Never actually used the library or computer facilities, but I know they have both – the library being pretty small but apparently good for study, and the computer facilities were fine but I really don't know much.

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?

They did have an intensive language course available around a month before the semester started, and I think we can make it if you leave right after the exam period at Vic (Tri 1, obvi). Knew a couple of people who did it and it was like 5 hours every day or something so the practical time spent speaking might be great, but learning wise apparently it wasn't great. For the Spanish course during the semester also, there is the possibility to go to another local language school for Spanish classes relevant to your level – all fees must be privately paid, but you will get all the appropriate credits.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in 3 places – hostel upon arriving for around 5 nights, an apartment near uni with the landlady for 1 month, then another apartment very close to uni in the newest/richest/safest suburb with another student and the landlady. So, all apartments (honestly don't think there are really any other viable options)

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

Living with just the landowner is a terrible idea – live with students or other younger people and make an effort for that. With just the landowner it gets terribly lonely and a little depressing, and it's not even terribly great for Spanish practice. So it might also be a good idea to find a place with a social area (lounge, balcony, rooftop area, etc.) for that reason. Can't exactly be too picky and you might want to have something secure before you go, so don't be afraid to change flat after some time.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Flat with students (not necessarily from UCA – however I found exchange students a comfortable crowd as talking to locals can be intimidating and hard to understand, plus you already have common ground) or other young people to socialise with and get to know and practice Spanish with. Don't be afraid to change your accommodation after some time – know some people who just got used to and stuck in pretty average flats. Also is a good idea to experience other ways of living in BA, the different suburbs offer different life styles and opportunities. Can easily enough find some hostel to go to before arriving and make a reservation. And please do it, for reals - I turned up with a couple of addresses in a cheap part of town and it sucked arriving at 10pm, jet lagged and tired, finding the hostel is full and there is nothing around for blocks and it was raining and I had all my bags and I got lost and it sucked and you can save yourself that nonsense - the money is worth the security. Otherwise you could find a flat/apartment online and email the person and sort that out (ideally if not arriving at night time), or the email from the host Uni with the map with all the information about accommodation options – could even go to the place I went to. And if you want to move on after a month or so, all good, do so (check with landowner first, obvi).

How early can you move into accommodation?

I moved in starting on the first day of the month – but it is entirely dependant on landowner – you could just email them and sort this kind of stuff this out.

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

Fully furnished kitchen (minus the microwave which was broken – but there was a little toaster oven that was used in its stead). I made all of my own meals and often had left overs for lunch and dinner the next 2 days, or just freeze something and take it out for the weekend. In my first apartment I had a deal with the landowner to eat with them for a price – so I got some Argentine cooking and dinner company too – but that particular deal wasn't even close to being worth the

money.

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

Not terribly easy, very independently done – however, at a certain time before the exchange the host Uni will send out a map filled with information on possible accommodation options – this is what I used both times to find accommodation – emailed the owner, organised a time to visit, responded with a yes, moved in at an agreed upon time. Many people also used just a google search to find accommodation websites, some even just craigslist – both are fine and will allow you to actually sort out proper accommodation before you arrive if you want.

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

If you want, go where I went, it was sweet and cheap as chips – live with the land owner however, if that bothers you – but another room for another student too. Otherwise be proactive and email people, get photos, ask about the local area, set up a time to meet (you can be in a hostel (which I suggest you find and book before arriving too) for a few days to sort of meetings and stuff – so arrive early, which is really easy considering our Uni dates), etc. Seems a little daunting but it's no biggy – just do what you gotta do in steps – find places, get info, set up meetings, check them, decide, go for it.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

I made a heap of local friends at a church and youth group I attended – and that by far was the most positive experience of my time in Buenos Aires. Very friendly, saw a few of them outside of church related stuff, keep in touch, etc. Really cool. In one class I got to know a few of the students, local Argentinians, but didn't really actively pursue any outside Uni relationships. The local students can be distant, a lot like at our Uni really, but do open up and are welcoming, just a little shy/distant at first – also Spanish speaking skills becomes noticeable and a bit of a wall (very big one at times to be honest) – sort of need to find people that are interested in maintaining a relationship with that in mind.

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

I didn't really struggle, but the cultural differences are obvious, and not always in subtle ways. Buenos Aires may seem modern and well developed, but it is certainly not (for the most part) similar to NZ. Stuff like traffic, time consciousness, constant protests blocking roads, the dialect of Spanish even, rubbish and dog crap everywhere, etc.

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

Rubbish and dog crap everywhere. Not much to do about it. Not having change at some shops for 100 peso bills was a bit annoying at times – and 100 pesos is like 10 bucks. Unreliability in people was a bit annoying at times – multiples times did I not have the book copies I needed to read to make presentations for class (which was very time consuming and important) until 1-2 days before even though we had around 2 weeks of notice because the person in charge of copies wasn't reliable. Time is another thing – just like the rest of South America, time is a relative thing, as in, 5 O'clock does not mean around 5, but more like from 6:00+ (obviously this doesn't go for everyone but as a cultural norm it's pretty much like that). They usually tend to eat very very late (around 10pm) and go to sleep a lot later too, around 1-3, even if they are just hanging out, drinking tea or whatever.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I suppose they were friendly and welcoming enough – a lot like here, but I wouldn't be able to say they are more so – but that was cool.

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

Uni staff are pretty good. Contacting professors about exam content/preparation was pretty limited, but outside of that the exchange staff are great and responsive and on to it. During class time the professors are pretty cool – can butt in, ask questions, clarify something, go off topic, etc.

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?

Gay, lesbian, bi, and trans people I wouldn't imagine having a hard time, but I didn't see a whole lot of that either, but it is a big city capital, and I know they are a lot more open to it than other more rural parts. Argentina in itself consists of different ethnic groups, and there are plenty of emigrants in the capital, mainly from Africa and China, and I don't recall them ever having any trouble. Disabilities I also didn't see much in Uni, but outside of that, cripples would board the subway and around there and beg or ask for donations or something, which shows the social system isn't up to it.

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

Not really, only the language wall that causes the expected amount of social distance and shyness – but in other situations it is actually cause for interaction and conversation and such so it really depends. Only other thing I can think of is when someone might recognise you as a foreigner they might try and sell their wares a bit more forcefully.

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 were a fair amount, the biggest of which being football, in which all kiwi's would probably be out of their league. Also were other opportunities like rock climbing or archery and stuff – so a bit of variety. Also could join a volunteering group, which I regret not – good opportunity to see more of Argentina and its culture and situation, but also to meet more people and real good Spanish practice (I suppose you also might be able to pat yourself on the back for being so selfless too).

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

A fair bit to do in BA – museums, parks, plays, historical places, tours, etc. Also take the train a bit out and see surrounding area. Visiting Colonia in Uruguay is a real good idea – such a chill and quiet and relaxing place in comparison to BA. The Uni organises mini-tour trips to the touristy places of Argentina if that's the sort of thing you are interested in – or just meet up with other students and go wherever.

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

Work? Pretty darn limited I would say, or very hard to find. On campus I would say close to zero. Outside of I couldn't really say at all, but imagine it to be almost as close. The locals struggle finding work as it is. Only thing I could think of is using English and tutoring or something, or maybe a foreign bar or café.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Can do a teaching English program if you are a native English speaker, and that offers an international qualification (or might just be a recognised certificate or something, but there is an equal amount of learning to teach and there is of teaching – I didn't do it though). Any local volunteering programs you could just google, but the Uni also offers a couple which they are active in – visiting hospitals, raising money, etc.

5 things to take to your host country or region

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| 1 | Umbrella – or buy one upon arrival. Need to be able to get from A-B without getting soaked, even just between bus stops really. |
| 2 | USD in cash – its worth it, just hide it in the following when needing to get around |
| 3 | A money belt or other security device for important documents and money. |
| 4 | Clothing is reasonably expensive there, compared to everywhere else in South America, and the locals will agree with that – no sweet op shops or anything either – so bring with you what reckon you will need for the time unless you are happy to spend a little more than expected on clothing |
| 5 | A can do attitude? |

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

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| 1 | Can get yellow fever vaccination for free there –costs like \$200 here in NZ |
| 2 | It might not be terribly fun or exciting consistently (it won't) – at some point it will likely suck or be home sickish or whatever else – it happens, don't be surprised. Also passes. |
| 3 | Eggs are hard to crack so don't be surprised if you get yoke or something on you. |
| 4 | Bring USD guys, seriously |
| 5 | |

Top 5 Things to do

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

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| 1 | Eat out at cool and cheap local restaurant with people – pizza is everywhere and ranges in price – also enjoy the little things, a coffee at an interesting intersection and watch traffic during a storm or something simple – BA has many opportunities for this. |
| 2 | Could actually travel before the semester starts – there is like an entire month between the end of our Tri 1 and the start of their semester 2. If not, travel afterwards – wherever you want, and don't be afraid to go alone. |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |

H: Personal Experience

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

It was a good experience. Things worked out in the end that initially seemed tricky, and the experience was generally comfortable and accessible. I would have committed more time to volunteering or general outside social stuff, so as to make the most of practicing Spanish. Who you flat with is pretty important, and I was lucky enough in that regard, but would have preferred heaps more to flat with more people, students preferably. The best moments for me were the simple ones – reading on a park bench, quiet walk home, etc.