

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	MIA Masters of Interior Architecture
Major(s)	NONE No major requirements
Exchange Institution	Rhode Island School of Design, Providence RI
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	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	1000 (Architecture Materials/Supplies)
Accommodation	7000 (On Campus)
Return Airfare	3000
Local Transportation	RISD provided free transportation with Student ID
Meals	2000
Visa	600
Health & Insurance	500
Personal Spending	1000
Communications (phone, etc.)	50/month
Other fees (specify)	Holidays/Travel within the US 1000
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Just get familiar with the exchange rate and keep up to date with the fluctuations

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

My expenses ending up being almost exact.

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

My older brother lived in New York so he was kind enough to set me up with a joint credit card so I transferred my money into his account and just used his card. However, a lot of the other students I met on exchange primarily used their own credit cards.

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

Make sure you plan a weekly budget and set aside personal spending. You are there for quite a while, so make sure you pace out your spending.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?  
 More of a coffee drinker myself and a latte was around 3.50 USD so 4.90NZD

**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?

The Visa process was not complicated; time consuming, but really coherent. You have to register for a SEVIS number and then your I-20.

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

Make sure you get onto it as soon as you get accepted as (for the US) it does require a trip to Auckland. There are also a lot of small costs involved with the Visa process apart from the overall Visa cost that is 500. So just be aware.

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, RISD has mandatory insurance with HTH Worldwide Insurance. No need to worry, RISD will contact you with all the information you require to purchase your insurance.

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

HTH Worldwide 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 Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					
Site/Ecology Design Studio	English	Interior Architecture Design	30	4	Through the Interior program at RISD you have a choice of an advanced design studio. The studios they offer range from Interior Architecture, Industrial Design, Landscape, and Restoration.
Energy and	English	Professional	15	4	This course was

Systems		Practice (Although this course at Victoria cannot be done through exchange, it was most akin)			particularly difficult for me personal, as it really required you to learn, understand and critique building mechanical systems through reading 2D plans and rebuilding them in a 3-dimensional model. Nonetheless it was really beneficial.
Theory of Adaptive Reuse	English	Theory and Criticism in Interior Architecture	15	3	Primarily a research based paper. It was by far my favorite. Quite journalistic and required you to cultivate strong and justified opinions on past/present architecture precedents.
Advanced Computing: Carved Projects	English	-	5	2	This was an optional studio
Advanced Computing: Kinetic Shapes	English	-	5	3	This was an optional studio
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

The registration process was really easy. When you arrive at RISD you meet with the head of your department and they talk you through all the courses and enroll you for them.

Even before the registration process starts, make sure to get onto your recommendation letters early. RISD

required two letters of recommendation from two of your VUW lecturers. So out of respect for the lecturers who are willing to take the time to write the letters for you, give them as much time as possible and maybe buy them a little box of chocolates as a thank you.

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?

Due to all my courses being within the department of Architecture, registration and enrollment was really easy. However, some of my friends also on exchange had a little bit of a harder task for them as they took courses outside of the Architecture department and that required additional meetings with different department heads and lecturers.

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

I took a lot of classes because I really wanted to make the most of the resources at RISD however, I do wish I didn't take as many additional workshops so I would've had more free time to explore. Also take advantage of the drawing nights that the illustration departments hold for free on some weekdays and other departments have specific nights with activities to help promote interdepartmental conversation.

### **Academic Experience**

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

Mine was very different and I decided to take a Landscape studio for my advanced design course. This required me to learn a whole new language, rapidly and quite in depth. Nonetheless it was by far the best decision I made, although being very tiring and trying, it really improved my understand of architecture in general and opening up new design prospects for my interior architecture projects.

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?

At RISD they don't really have Tutors. Classes are smaller and more intimate so you work directly with your professor(s). Daunting at first but it really helps you develop your vocabulary and helps you learn how to articulate your concepts/designs at a more professional level.

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?

You have to be in enrolled into a full-time (or courses with credits equivalent to full-time load) course as per the VISA obligations. I think that, in terms of what specific courses I would recommend, it completely depends on where you are – personally - with architecture. If you feel as if you need to broaden your understanding of design outside of architecture definitely take advantage of courses outside the Architecture department ie. Graphic design, industrial design, apparel etc. Or, if you want to gain a more in depth understanding of Architecture - in a different culture/academic environment - stick to your department.

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

It goes the same as Victoria University. Find passion in whatever course you're taking and then dedicating time/effort will come easily. What became most pressing when I was at RISD was time-management, although I loved all my courses, there were so many things I wanted to do outside of University (ie. Explore the surrounding areas) that it became a lot harder than it ever was at Victoria.

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

Unlike Victoria, you don't get your own computer and labs are scarce so get use to the programs on your MAC laptop if you're use to using the PC's at Te Aro. Buy a mouse as well before hand!

The Library was one of my favorite buildings in the whole of RISD. It is located at 15 West, which is also student accommodation and café. Not only is the design amazing, the books there are incredible! Take advantage of their resources there and read as much as you possibly can!

Internet access was the same as Victoria. you just use your student username and password which you set up prior to arriving to RISD so take note of it.

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?

I stayed at one of the RISD residences. This decision was purely based on convenience.

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

I really enjoyed living at one of the Residences. One thing you need to understand is that at American colleges, students stay in halls of residences beyond their first year. In my residence there were undergraduates and postgraduate students.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

If you are conscious of your finances then try get an apartment off campus as they are much more economical.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Around 5 days prior to the start of the semester. But they will let you know once you apply when the move in dates are.

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

There was a kitchen in my apartment that I used scarcely. However, RISD has amazing food courts/cafes scattered all around the campus. I think there are around

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?

Apply fast. As soon as you get your acceptance letter make contact with RISD Residence Life because the good apartments get snatched up quickly. This is especially crucial if you're attending RISD for Victoria Universities first semester (which is RISD's second) as students already reside in the halls of residence.

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

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

In the classes everyone was really welcoming and friendly. I found it particularly easy as my classes were all within the same department, which was relatively small, so I got to know everyone quite well. Outside of my department though is where I made my three best friends. I attended one of the postgraduate open studio nights and mingled with students outside of Interior Architecture and we soon became really good friends, hanging out almost everyday.

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

I was fortunate enough to have travelled to the states quite a lot prior to moving to Rhode Island, thus transitioning there was not difficult at all. The university as well was quite similar in its formatting. I think the most significant difference was that the Interior course had a much stronger emphasis on Adaptive Reuse, conservation and restoration that I found incredibly interesting. This just required a bit of reading in order to catch up with their knowledge but not much.

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

There is quite a difference between New Zealand and the US in regards to how people interact. New Zealand is a bit more laid back and relaxed, not saying that people the US aren't, but I would say that you need to be conscious of what you say. I think that this was the case in large part to the political and social movements that were occurring whilst I was there.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Food – Markets – Thrift stores – cafes – civic events

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

Just like one of them. Definitely wasn't treated any differently. Although they were very attentive and also offered to help if I didn't know about something ie. Printing took me a while to figure 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?

I hinted at this before in regards to being conscious of what you say but - especially at RISD - they are a very open and accepting community. From my time there I did see some student protests that were dedicated to cultivating awareness around the LGBT community.

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

From my understanding there were quite a few issues that were brought to the RISD student community's attention in regards to ethnicity, but this was primarily about local/national ethnicities and not foreign. These issues were more evident throughout the undergraduate community and were practically nominal in the postgraduate programs.

### **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?

RISD has a million different groups/organizations that you can join. Everything from a journalism group, sports, hiking/camping, etc. I would strongly suggest that if you attend RISD keep an eye out for visiting scholars and guest lectures. I attended one almost every week. They have an amazing line up of firms and architects that come to the school and gives talks and do lengthy Q and A.

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

Definitely visit New York and Boston. You can also go to Newport, which is about an hour and 15 minutes bus away and you can go for free with a RISD ID. Also, take advantage of free admission to the RISD museum. I went there a couple of times just to work/sketch/write. It's an amazing environment.

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

On our F-1 visas we are not eligible to work in the US.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

During the academic year there are plenty of volunteering opportunities through RISD. In terms of internships they primarily become available for the summer. You're given a 60 day grace period after the completion of the semester but unfortunately due to the start of Victoria's second trimester, there isn't much time available to get an internship.

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

1 Bed Sheets / Blanket

2 Photographs

3 Favorite everyday jewelry

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|---|---|
| 4 | A folder with all your documents (ie. Passport, visa, health insurance) KEEP THEM SAFE  |
| 5 | External hard drive with your work from Victoria University – after the summer holiday it is always good to refresh on what you’ve already done and keep updating the work that you submit at RISD. |

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

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|---|--|
| 1 | Arrive at least 5 days ahead of the start of classes to familiarize yourself with the campus and Providence.   |
| 2 | If you are of age (21+) get a temporary State ID so that you don’t have to carry your passport around with you. They do not accept an NZ license.  |
| 3 | Use RISD bucks. This is an online account that you can load money onto to pay for food (at RISD outlets), printing, supplies at RISD stores, and if you’re living on campus it is how you pay for laundry. You load money via credit card.                           |
| 4 | Use RISD second life for materials and supplies! It is on Westminster Street and is a great place where students drop off left over material and you can buy them for way cheaper than RISD store. Store days/hours are a bit strange because it is run by students. |
| 5 | Don’t be scared to ask for help. People are really lovely.   |

### 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 | Newport  |
| 2 | Eat at ‘The Kitchen’ and ‘The Grange’                                    |
| 3 | Visit New York City and Boston   |
| 4 | Take advantage of the RISD MET – best good on campus!                    |
| 5 | Wholefoods is a haven. Once you shop there you’ll never stop going back. |

### H: Personal Experience

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

RISD offered such engaging courses that notably challenged my artistic dexterity and allowed me to develop indispensable skills. Furthermore, the expansive resources and the vibrant campus life made the whole experience ineffable. Despite being – obviously – an incredible academic experience, the exchange program really enabled me to learn a lot about myself as an individual, which clearly reverberates through to my designs. The experience has notably fostered my global awareness and cross-cultural understanding which is imperative in the discipline of architecture/design. I have made amazing friends from so many different backgrounds, with such a variety of career ambitions and I can’t wait to keep in contact and see where their future leads them.

