

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BCom
Major(s)	Marketing and Economics
Exchange Institution	University of California Santa Barbara
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 1 2015

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	Didn't buy any of the books
Accommodation	\$4900NZD approx.
Return Airfare	\$2500NZD approx.
Local Transportation	Free bus rides
Meals	\$3500NZD approx. (including groceries eg laundry, soap etc)
Visa	\$340USD (J1 application fee + SEVIS fee) + \$200NZD for flights to Auck
Health & Insurance	\$2500NZD
Personal Spending	\$5000 (A lot of travel)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$45 per month for phone
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Some courses (the exercise courses and the arty courses) had fees. Cellphone plans were more than expected

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

More than I budgeted but did expect to spend more than I thought. There are always little expenses you don't think about that add up.

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

I opened a bank account as soon as I arrived. It took about 20 minutes and all I needed was my passport with my visa in it. I would definitely recommend this. I also used an Air NZ Onesmart card which was great for when I first arrived before I had the account set up.

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

Everyone tells you how cheap America is before you leave, but I found California (and especially Santa

Barbara) to be just as expensive as home, sometimes more. Stuff often looks cheaper, but by the time you add tax, add a tip and convert to NZD it is often around the same or more.

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

Drip coffee was usually around \$2USD (and very common over there) and espresso tended to be around \$3USD or above.

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 actually very straightforward. I had to wait until UC had sent the necessary forms for me to apply for a visa (which seemed to be quite late) and the online application process does take time. But once that is done, I flew up to Auck, had a two minute interview and my visa arrived at my home the next day.

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

Just keep in mind that you have to go to Auckland for the interview. Also, try and schedule an interview in the first set of interviews (8am I think) because the line builds up really fast. I arrived at the building at around 7:30 and was done by 8:30.

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?

There was mandatory health insurance that was very expensive. It is possible to get it waived, but very difficult. I heard that you can possibly get it waived if you get the Obamacare coverage for visitors or something? I found out about it too late so didn't look into it, but I would recommend doing so as it would save you A LOT of money.

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

I only purchased insurance for the five days between leaving NZ and when my Uni insurance would kick in. I used 1 Cover which was the cheapest option I could find. Didn't need to use it so not sure what claiming with them is like.

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					
ECON 171 Game Theory	English	ECON 314 Game Theory	15	3	Very good lecturer. Less math than the VUW equivalent

					apparently.
COMM 166 Marketing Communication	English	MARK 301 Marketing Communication	15	2	Very popular class. Lots of little assignments, but reasonably easy to get the grades
SOC 133 Sociology of mass communication	English	-	15	2	Really interesting class. Taught in a very interactive, opinion/ discussion based way.
COMM 112 Media industries in a changing social world	English	-	15	1	Very simple and easy but enjoyed learning about history of different media industries. Very good lecturer (Dana Mastro) – wont get into her classes unless you select them in your first pass time (eg 100 people waitlists usually)
COMM 114 Media effects on society	English	-	15	1	Although some of the content was interesting, most of it was very disjointed and a lot of studies that didn't seem awfully relevant. Same for the course below – same professor – wouldn't recommend taking his classes (Charles Mullins).
COMM 145 Media entertainment	English	-	15	1	See above

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

All registration is done through a system called GOLD. It is very straightforward, however classes fill up very quickly so you need to know what you want to take and enroll in it during your first pass time (there are three pass times in which you can enroll). Luckily, international students get one of the earliest pass times so you can usually get the classes you need.

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 ended up being able to enroll in the two classes I needed. I almost missed out on my econ class though because I had not contacted the head of the department to get a code to exempt you from not having done the prerequisites at UCSB. So make sure you have your prerequisites sorted before your pass time.

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

There are so many random courses to take as students over there have to take general education classes, so make the most of these. I took a tennis class and a swimming class.

Academic Experience

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

I found it difficult to compare for the most part as I tried to take more interest courses, and course that might be easier than what I take at home so I could travel a lot and make the most of being in a new country. I also wasn't striving for the same grades I do at VUW, so it did seem easier. There did seem to be more assessment during the term time, and terms were very short (10 weeks) so it can be quite fast paced. All the exams were a lot more relaxed which I found surprising – they were almost all multiple choice and just taken in your lecture with everyone sitting beside each other – you didn't have to leave your bags by the door or anything.

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?

Style of teaching was pretty similar – although only one of my lecturers used power points. As I said above, workload was a lot less but that was more to do with the papers I chose and how much effort I put into them. Im not sure what it would be like studying full time there.

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 taking only three classes just to get your 12 units for visa requirements. It leaves enough time to get some travel in and enjoy living on the beach!

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

Use Rate My Professor – it gives you a good insight into what the lecturers are like, how they examine, whether you need to go to class or get the book etc

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

The library was under renovation while I was there, but there was still plenty of room in the old library. There was wireless all across campus and you could set it up so it would automatically connect and you wouldn't have to log in. There are a couple of free printing labs on campus (you have to pay for the ones in the library). Definitely find these to use and there are students working there who will show you how to use them.

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?

I stayed in a private house (flat) with Americans. I found it on Craigslist.

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

It was a really good way to meet locals rather than just other international students. I don't think I would have met many Americans otherwise. It was also the cheapest accommodation I could find. Also, being 21 it meant I could live with other people my age rather than with freshman in the dorms. The only con is that it can be hard to secure private housing while not being in the country.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would definitely recommend going with private housing as it allows you to truly integrate into the community. However, Tropicana residence halls are also a good option if you want to secure something earlier (they are private residence halls – not university owned – so are not freshman dorms).

How early can you move into accommodation?

With private housing it really depends on the house and when the lease starts/ or when the person you are subleasing for moves out. I moved in the day I found the place and secured the room.

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

I was in a house with a kitchen so I just cooked for myself. It is possible to get an off campus meal plan which allows you to eat in any of the dining commons on campus. I heard they were actually very good, just expensive.

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

Off campus housing wasn't super easy to find, but it was possible. There is currently a housing shortage in Isla Vista (where almost all of the students live) so rooms can be tough to find, especially if you are going for fall quarter. Craigslist is the best way to find rooms, just be careful. Just look for people who need subleasees.

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

When looking on craigslist, you barely get any replies so you do have to persevere. And be careful of scammers!

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

All the Americans I meet were incredibly friendly and welcoming. I was lucky to be living with a group who immediately invited me into their friendship circle and were very inclusive. Joining the excursion club is another good way to meet locals! And while I didn't make any local friends in classes, I know a lot of other internationals who did so it is possible.

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

Very easy. It's not too different from NZ although university pride in excess was something I had to get used to. Also people tend to eat out a lot more.

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

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

How friendly and inviting people were. Everyone is always ready to have a good time and include you even though you had only just met. This was fantastic as an exchange student who was just coming in for a short period of time.

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

Once again, everyone was very friendly and very accommodating. International students seemed to be more integrated with local students than I have found at Vic (probably just due to the fact that everyone essentially lives on campus) and everyone was always interested in hearing about where you were from and helping with any enquiries you had.

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?

California is very liberal and especially UCSB. Everything is ramp accessible and paved. I cant imagine there would be any discrimination against any minorities or any LGBT student.

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

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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?

Definitely join the Excursion Club! They run weekly trips such as surfing, hiking camping etc and they have a whole lot of gear that you can borrow. For example, every camping trip I went on, I borrowed everything I

needed for the excursion club. There are also a lot of extra curricular activities and trips run through the rec centre. I took a pottery class for one quarter but they also had yoga, rock climbing, wine tasting etc

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

- Go to the basketball games at the Thunderdome (on campus)
- There are free films in IV theatre (on the edge of campus/ in Isla Vista) most Fridays
- Go to Extravaganza if you are there for spring quarter. Essentially a mini one day festival put on by the students association
- Go to Chilla Vista (spring quarter) – like a fair with live bands, giveaways and various games/ arts and crafts
- Get out of IV and travel up and down the California coast! Try and go all over California – there is so much to see and do.

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

You are allowed to work on campus, however getting jobs is very difficult. I don't know of any international students who managed to get a job on campus.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There were quite a few internship opportunities, both on campus and in Santa Barbara. It is also possible to get a summer internship after spring quarter if you want. Im not sure how easy these are to get though. Career Services was very helpful.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Chocolate
2	Sunglasses and sunscreen
3	Good walking shoes (lots of hikes and national parks nearby)
4	Camping/ outdoor clothes (I can blissfully unprepared for camping – it still gets quite cold in Cali in the winter)
5	

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

1	Get a bike
2	Make the most of all the events hosted by the university
3	Caje has good coffee and the Food Coop is a good healthy food selection
4	Join the excursion club
5	

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Yosemite
2	Drive Pacific Coast Highway/ drive all over California
3	San Francisco
4	Vegas (because Vegas)
5	Surf/ paddle board/ make the most of living on the beach!

H: Personal Experience

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

I had an incredible time on my exchange and often reminisce about lazy days in the California sun as I sit in Kelburn library. It was the perfect way to break up my degree, meet new people and make contacts all over the world. I went into it with the mindset that I was going to have an incredible time and say yes to (almost) everything, and I am so glad I did. It was busy and at times daunting, but I came out of it with some incredible experiences that I never imagined I would have. It has helped me clarify what I want to do going forward, while feeling like I was on a seven-month holiday. For anyone considering it, I could not recommend it more.