

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 Arts
Major(s)	Italian, Linguistics
Exchange Institution	State University of New York at New Paltz
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1, 2016

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 (at least)
Accommodation	\$5800
Return Airfare	\$2,319
Local Transportation	\$60 return trip to New York, I didn't use other transport
Meals	\$3000
Visa	\$400 (incl. flights to Auckland and back and other forms needed but could also add accommodation and local transport)
Health & Insurance	\$1,650
Personal Spending	\$5000 (I travelled for a month after so this is mostly from that)
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$45-60 a month
Other fees (specify)	International Orientation: \$190; Health Center Fee: \$100
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Text books were more expensive but if I had planned better I could have rented them all online. I also had to buy bedding because none was provided, that was about \$60

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

It ended up being similar to what I had planned.

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

I used a travel card from Kiwibank which worked fine almost everywhere, just like a debit card. I also withdrew some cash because then I was able to see physically how much money I was spending.

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

Take every travel opportunity the International department offers because it'll be a lot cheaper to travel with them than by yourself or with friends.

Rent textbooks online because they are priced ridiculously otherwise and most sites have free shipping. You can also rent them from the bookstore on campus.

I know it gets said a lot but you really do need to budget more than you expect.

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

Coffee was about \$2.00, coke \$1.50

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. There was a lot of paperwork to fill out and quite a few different forms you needed but the process was pretty straightforward. There were several different costs because some of the forms had fees with them.

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

Go to the embassy early in the morning because there is much less of a wait time than later in the day and make sure you have everything you need (eg. All the forms, passport photos, etc.) to make sure everything goes smoothly.

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?

They had a mandatory medical insurance, which was different prices for different semesters. For the spring semester it was just over NZ\$1000.

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

I used 1Cover because it was cheap and pretty comprehensive. If you can find an insurance company that only does travel I would recommend that but I wasn't able to.

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 2016					
CMD312 Intro to	English	elective	15	5	This was incredibly interesting and I was able

Communication Disorders					to apply prior linguistics knowledge to this class.
CMD306 Language Development in Children	English	elective	15	5	A great class, super interesting if you're looking into working with children in some capacity.
PSYCH101 Intro to Psychology	English	elective	15	5	I loved this class so much. It was half in class half online so there was some self-teaching.
BIO170 Human Biology	English	elective	15	3	This class was okay, we didn't get much help with the stuff we actually needed to learn but the professor did teach us interesting stuff about climate change and nutrition and GMOs.
VUW Trimester 2/YEAR					

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It was a bit difficult because you had to have approval through your advisor before you could sign up for any courses because as an exchange student you are registered as a freshman which means some classes are not available to you without authorization. The advisors were very helpful though and the professors as well whom I got in contact with for some classes that were full.

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 was relatively successful. The classes I ended up with were fantastic. You definitely need to choose a lot of

courses you want to do before you go so that you aren't hurrying to find anything later.

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

Choose more classes than you need, then have some more back ups after that as well. Because of the way we enroll through the International Department, it's not always easy to get into classes before they fill up which means you then have to email the professors and get permission to join and then you can enroll. Also, only the advisors can enroll you in most classes because you will be registered as a freshman which can limit your choices some.

Academic Experience

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

The majority of my courses had much smaller class sizes and felt more like high school in the set up. There were also heaps more in class tests than at Vic. I didn't really know what to expect before I got there so I was kind of surprised by everything.

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 teaching was similar in that they mostly used powerpoints and class participation. I felt like I didn't need to study as much as I do at Vic because we had very few assignments and had tests instead.

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 4 courses and that was a good number because I had plenty of time to study and plenty of time to participate in other things on campus and enjoy my time overseas.

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

Definitely go to lectures because it is a new experience for one thing but they also tend to have extra information in class. Don't spend all your time partying, actually put some effort into study, you'll have plenty of time to enjoy other parts of the exchange.

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

The internet was quite slow in some places (like the halls of residences) but was fast in other places. The library had just finished renovations so everything was new in there, plenty of computers and spaces to study. There was a café as well. There were a lot of places you could do printing which was very useful to know.

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 on campus in a hall of residence.

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

We had a suite set up so there were eight people sharing a living room and bathroom, two people in each room. This was awesome because I was able to meet and become friends with a lot of local students. I had awesome suitemates and my roommate and I get along well but I know some people who didn't feel the same so it's up to luck whether you enjoy it. We had one suitemate who fought loudly with her boyfriend at night a couple of times so that's also a con. I had an amazing experience with it though.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I definitely recommend on campus accommodation. It's close to most things and you have the chance to meet some local students.

How early can you move into accommodation?

We moved in a week before class started for our orientation week.

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

There were kitchens in all of the halls of residence but you had to have your own cooking utensils so it was easier to have a meal plan. They have several kinds. You can get unlimited meals at the dining hall, a combination of meals at the dining hall and dining dollars, which can be used anywhere on campus, or all dining dollars. I had 7 meals at the dining hall a week and 900 dining dollars for the semester and I ended up with some dining dollars left over. I was happy with most of the food on campus because there were options for me (I have some food allergies). The dining hall food got boring quickly but you can have as much as you want there and there are plenty of options.

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

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

This is specific to SUNY New Paltz. They generally try to put the exchange and international students in the nicer halls but if you want to be sure you can request certain halls. I would request Crispell Hall or Lefevere Hall.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

People are pretty interested in you if you are an exchange student so quite a few people wanted to get to know me but I became especially good friends with my suitemates and some of their friends. I also made friends in the club that I joined so I would definitely recommend that.

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

There were lots of little things that were different but it was not all that difficult to get used to. I mostly just found it really interesting.

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

I had to explain New Zealand to quite a few people because they either only knew Lord of the Rings was filmed there or they didn't know anything about it. They didn't seem to have a whole lot of knowledge outside of the States.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

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

Everyone treated me really well. They were all very friendly and helpful.

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?

New Paltz is one of the most liberal places I have ever been. Everyone is supported well. As a member of the LGBTQ community, I felt very comfortable, safe and accepted there. There is wheelchair access around the campus and I saw a couple of students in wheelchairs but it's probably not the easiest place to be especially because the elevator in my building broke and it wasn't fixed for about a week.

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

I didn't face any but I mostly went to big cities where people are more accepting. I think for students who do face discrimination it's best to make sure you have a solid support system and report it to authorities as soon as possible.

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 a ton of organized activities. Literally something for everyone. I was part of Dumbledore's Army where we did Harry Potter themed things every week. There is a fare at the start of the semester so you can look around and see if there's anything you want to join.

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

Go to New York City as often as possible. The International Department had 4 trips during the semester but I went more than that. The bus cost about US\$40 for a return trip so make sure you budget it well but it's so worth it.

Go on all the trips that the International Department offers because you get to see some more of the

country. We went hiking one weekend, to the largest public military academy, we went to Washington DC over spring break. There are so many opportunities. If you have friends with a car there are a few towns nearby that have malls with more stuff to do and see.

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

It seemed like there was pretty limited work because the local students had most of the jobs available.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

They had a program that helped set students up with internships for the summer in the city or nearby places. There was also a club that volunteered quite often, I think.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Photos of friends and family
2	Something comforting to you (e.g. a blanket, a certain sweater, a soft toy, etc.)
3	NZ souvenirs for your American friends (they love it)
4	Adapters for your chargers
5	Appropriate clothing for the weather!!!

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

1	They don't have any bedding for you to hire or use so bring some or hold out for the mall trip
2	They like to keep the inside of their buildings the opposite to the outside temperature wise so it'll be minus degrees outside and like 30 degrees inside and vice versa so be prepared for that.
3	There are heaps of free performances and activities around campus so keep an eye out for that kind of thing.
4	Go for a meal plan with a decent amount of dining dollars because you'll be able to get more of a variety of food.
5	Do your laundry in the middle of the day because most people leave it to night time.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	When you're in New York City, go to Times Square at night.
2	Go to the Fry Shack on Water Street and get the cinnamon sugar fries
3	Hiking in Mohonk Preserve, there are some really beautiful views
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!!

Going on exchange was the best decision I have ever made. There are so many things I have been able to do because of it that I never even dreamed I would. I made so many amazing life-long friends, both from America and from different places around the world. I never thought I would be able to tell you what the best part about New York City is or give an opinion about what season you should visit in. I've experienced weather that is completely different to what I'm used to and I have a completely new perspective of the United States and was able to experience the lead up to the election of the new President, which has been both enlightening and terrifying.

It was mostly the small things that made it really amazing, hanging out with my friends and learning about the country from their perspective, and learning about how life was for them. Going to classes, gaining a bit of an American accent, experiencing their culture with them rather than just seeing it from the outside.

