

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BSc
Major(s)	Biotechnology
Exchange Institution	University of Groningen
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	2014 trimester 2, 2015 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	100
Accommodation	8974
Return Airfare	2640
Local Transportation	0 (biking/walking)
Meals	3000
Visa	0
Health & Insurance	200
Personal Spending	Unknown
Communications (phone, etc.)	200
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	

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

I was very slightly under budget.

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

I used a cash passport (mastercard). It usually worked well but took a long time to transfer money to, and did not work everywhere.

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

Get a bike and a local. Overall costs were similar to Wellington if you're not in overpriced uni accommodation (e.g. a hotel boat).

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

About 3 euro, but it varied widely depending on whether you want good coffee (go to Black and Bloom)

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 university took care of the application process, I just needed to go to Zwolle (1 hr by train) to give biometric information and pick up my residence permit.

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

No.

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?

Not that I knew of.

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

I had travel insurance through STA travel, but did not need it at any point so I can't say if it was useful or not.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Registration was online. Some help was available, though information was not always clearly presented.

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?

Unfortunately I was not able to take all the courses I wanted, and had to improvise while there. I would recommend contacting a member of the faculty you are studying with as early as possible and organizing an appointment to sort out your courses or asking for advice via email.

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

Well they split each semester into two sections, so you'll have semesters 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b, in that order starting from September. You need to make sure that your courses are spread over these different semesters (the meaning of these was never clearly explained, which led to some confusion)

Academic Experience

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

The academic experience was largely similar to that at VUW, however there were more options for performing original research while an undergrad, as well as writing and presenting based on this research.

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 workload was slightly less than that at VUW. The style of teaching was similar, but more open to input from students during lectures.

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?

As a biology student, the appropriate course load is one course at a time, with each course presuming a full work day (eg 9-5 in a lab) over their 3 week duration. I would highly recommend doing a research course as these have a great deal of freedom and responsibility involved, and are a good preparation for postgrad.

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

Study a lot, and pick courses that interest you, same as other universities.

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

Groningen was excellent for all of these. All three universities in the city use the Eduroam network, meaning that you'll have free internet in most of the city centre. There are also many computer/study spaces available

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?

Most, if not all, of the people living in Groningen speak very good English, so not speaking Dutch was not much of an issue except in some social situations. Some courses are only offered in Dutch (depending on faculty) but this was made clear before enrollment.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

International student hostels through the housing office.

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

You'll make a whole lot of awesome friends from all around the world, but most of them won't speak Dutch so there's not enough pressure to learn the language (I'd consider that a con, anyway). Also some student accommodation was very expensive.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Student hostels are good for one semester, but I'd recommend looking for a flat if you're there longer.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Usually one week before the semester begins.

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

On the Hotel Boat Prinses Juliana everything was catered, to varying degrees of success, with minimal options for cooking for oneself. In all other accommodation kitchens were available.

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

It was difficult to find for the first time, when unfamiliar with the city. Study the map extensively **before** you move, and if possible don't have everything with you at that time.

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

Do it early, not when travelling around France with intermittent internet and printer/scanner access.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

Making friends was easily the best part of the journey. I became part of an amazing group of local students,

who I still miss dearly.

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

Very easy, the culture is quite similar to NZ culture.

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

The only major differences are that everyone rides bikes, and many people smoke. I'd recommend getting a bike once you get there.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Christmas. They just do it so much better over there.

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

Everyone was absolutely lovely, I don't think I had any negative interactions at the university. I would often run into professors and have conversations about my studies, one even gave me a book on genetics as a gift after I did well in his course.

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?

This did not seem to be an issue, though I may have been unaware of it. The Netherlands is very accommodating to people of different sexualities or gender identities.

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

I did not face any issues regarding discrimination.

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 heaps, the universities in this city have a gym/sports complex, and a pool, and a rock climbing wall. There are clubs for a great number of sports and other activities. Just look around, see what interests you, information should be freely available.

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

Travel. It's about 30 minutes by train to Germany, or you can fly to a bunch of places around Europe. Or you can stay in the Netherlands and visit Amsterdam (get out of the city center, see some museums or gardens as well as the night life). Or go east to Friesland, or look at the museums and shops in Groningen.

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

On a student Visa, I was not allowed to work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Warm clothes/thermals (depending on season)
2	Immersion water heater for making tea
3	Adapter plug
4	Clothes to cycle in
5	Digital copies of important documents

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

1	Don't expect to be given all the information you need
2	Talk to people
3	Explore the city (there's a lot to it)
4	Find a Dutch course and start it straight away, if you want to learn the language while you're there
5	Get a bike immediately

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Sit in the Noorderplantsoen in Summer
2	Get dinner on the pancake ship
3	Visit local cafes
4	Get a drink at de Drie Gezusters, de Pintilier, or de Koffer
5	Visit Mr. Mofongo's

H: Personal Experience

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

Travelling to Groningen was probably the greatest year of my life. I made so many friends over there, and got to do some really interesting research. It's such an excellent location to travel from as well, as it's only 30 minutes by train to Germany, or there's an airport that flies to various places (at one point I organized with a friend to go for a weekend in Barcelona with only 4 days warning). Everyone was incredibly friendly, and I couldn't have asked for a better exchange experience.