

# Vic OE Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VIC OE AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Chinese, Political Science
Exchange Institution	Nankai University
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Tri 1, 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.)

Books	\$40
Accommodation	\$1280
Return Airfare	\$1870
Local Transportation	\$100
Meals	\$900
Visa	\$250
Health & Insurance	\$370
Personal Spending	\$1000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$40
Other fees (specify)	
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Living costs in general were less than expected. I spent a lot more on food than was necessary as there are so many cool foods to try in China. Airfares were significantly more than they should have been as I booked rather late.

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

Mostly similar to what I was expecting, as I knew well in advance that China is a cheap place to live. I probably went over what I originally intended to spend though.

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

Cash. The most efficient means of getting money over is ATM credit card withdrawals. I did have a Chinese bank account for online shopping, but it was not connected to any of my foreign accounts.

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

China is a cash economy, and even your accommodation at university will be paid in cash, so save yourself in ATM withdrawal fees by bringing a good quantity of it from the currency exchange places in NZ.

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

Coke: 40c

Coffee: Up to \$6.00

**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, applying for the visa was a bit of a pain. You need an official and original letter of invitation from the university before you can apply for the X-1 or X-2 visa, and this for me took a very long time. The timing was actually very close for me and was stressful as it can take them up to a month to send it. Once you have it though, the actual visa processing is very quick (less than a week) and they have express options available. It cost around \$250.

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

Get into contact with them as soon as possible and try to get the documentation sorted early. Chinese universities are best contacted through VicOE's contacts, not their English websites.

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 optional insurance. I don't remember how much, but it was definitely comparatively cheap. However I already had travel insurance through a western company.

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

Covermore Travel Insurance. I would absolutely recommend it. On my last trip to Malaysia I was admitted to a private hospital with a bill running well over \$2000, and they fully reimbursed me for it. They have a 24hr international hotline and the cover is very comprehensive.

**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>					
Chinese intermediate level 1	Chinese	CHIN311/312	40	4	Full-time intensive course in Chinese. Challenging but extremely rewarding.
Chinese Traditions and Customs	Chinese			2	A simple extra course for a couple of hours a week. Interesting, but no workload.

## Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It was pretty straightforward. I filled out a form and VicOE helped me send it in. If I had a question I would contact them through the VicOE office.

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?

After an interview your class level is selected for you. You have the option to also choose to take a cultural class (Tai Chi, Business, Translation, etc). You can apply after the first couple of weeks.

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

None

## Academic Experience

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

It was incredibly different. The style of teaching is much more intensive and almost no English is used in the classroom (many of my classmates were from non-English speaking countries). I believe the teaching style was efficient and I improved at a very fast pace.

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 overall less than that at VUW, mainly because it was nearly 100% focused on the language. I didn't have essays or research to worry about, although we did have in-class tests weekly.

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?

N/A

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

GO TO CLASS. Probably only half the students actually showed up most of the time, and it was reflected in their speaking ability and test scores. Even if you are struggling, simply showing up and listening to the teacher will automatically improve your language skills. Try to memorize as many of the new words as you can and be an active participant in the tutorial classes. If there is any grammar you don't understand, ask a teacher about it because it WILL be on a test.

Also, download a free app called Pleco for your iPhone or Android. It will make your life inexpicably easier.

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

Mostly poor. They have no Wi-Fi, the campus accommodation has only internet available via Ethernet cables and it is both slow and outrageously expensive (\$10 per 1GB). If you get the opportunity, I recommend you move outside of campus as internet in China is actually fast and cheap, but the university gets away with ripping off the foreign students.

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?

I had already studied Chinese for 2 years prior. It still came as a shock for me and I had to adapt quickly. For

the first 2-3 weeks I didn't understand anything in class, but after putting my head down and studying hard for that initial period I caught up with the class, and from then on I was mostly fine.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

On-campus dorms for the first 2 months. Outside apartment for the remaining 2.

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

The on-campus dorms are convenient, fairly cheap and well-located. They're also a great way to meet other exchange participants. However the rooms are small and cramped, and generally shared (2 per room). The internet is also terrible and the place is often noisy.

The apartment was a spacious and comfortable suite on the 27<sup>th</sup> floor in a developed area, about a 20 minute bike ride from uni. I shared with another exchange participant, but we had separate bedrooms. Only fractionally more expensive than the dorms, but requires setting up power, water, internet, etc so somewhat of a hassle.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would recommend the dorms initially, as you can pay by the month and move out whenever you want. If you can deal with the living environment it provides convenience and good location for your exchange, but otherwise living outside of campus is better value and much more comfortable.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Anytime. Show up and they will give you a room.

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

The cafeteria at school has a huge amount of options – probably around 30 or so different places. It's subsidized, so extremely cheap (average meal costs around \$2-3). However I often cooked food myself as I found it the healthier option most of the time. The dorms have communal kitchens which is useful.

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

My classmate had already set the place up, I just moved in with him for about 10 weeks or so towards the end of course. As I've stated, living off-campus is definitely better value and more comfortable.

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

Try out the dorms first and see whether you like it or not, then decide from there.

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

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

At university it was difficult to meet Chinese students, mainly because our living and studying area was quite separate from the rest of the university. The university staff were also not very helpful at involving us in Chinese students' sports and activities (though we would've loved to meet them), and it's quite difficult to "break in" to a group of Chinese friends when you have nothing to bond over. Through their language buddy program I met a few Chinese students, and also through my dorm roommate who knew some outside of university. While travelling, however, I met many Chinese people, and this was the most culturally enlivening experience for me.

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

Too difficult to describe. The hardest part I think was actually coming back.

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

The level of noise in China (and many other countries) is very different from NZ. It took me a while to get used to this. Many of the cultural differences are just something you have to find out for yourself though, and I can't explain very easily.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

I felt very welcome by almost everybody I met. Perhaps the side I saw was distorted though, since I was a foreigner and received the 'foreigner treatment'. A difficult question for me.

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

They were all very friendly. The girls especially. A lot of Chinese people are very keen to meet a foreigner and learn about the country you're from. They are equally keen to talk about their own culture.

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?

Wheelchair accesses are becoming more common in China, though still lacking compared to the west. Racism is generally not an issue in China, though sometimes they can be perceived as a little over-curious, insensitive or not so PC, but it's almost never intentional. LGBT is not a hot issue in China as it is in the west, and even though it's illegal I think people generally don't mind.

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

Nothing like outright racism, but while traveling through touristy towns I sometimes felt that I was treated like just a dumb foreigner loaded with cash. This is just because of the number of tourists coming through though, and it's often dispelled when I reply to them in Chinese.

## **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?

We had a few sports competitions throughout the semester organized for the international students. If you would like to get involved with the local Chinese students' sport and hobby clubs you can ask your teacher to help you get connected. This is one thing I regret not taking initiative on early.

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

You can hop on the bullet train to Beijing and get there in 30 minutes. There's a heap to see and do there. Tianjin has a few places of interest, like the museums, cultural streets and foreign concession buildings, and there is a Russian aircraft carrier out by the Binhai New Development Sector which has been turned into a theme park. There are also lots of places to go shopping and plenty of restaurants in the city centre.

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

Casual teaching work is easy to come by and well-paid. Native English speakers are in high demand. Talk to your teachers and classmates and you should be able to find some work. Just make sure your visa allows for

it.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

If you study business there are heaps of opportunities in Tianjin for paid internships, especially if you know something about exporting/importing. There are also many school activities you can get involved with if you are looking for volunteer opportunities. Talk to your teachers about it.

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

1	Good quality earplugs
2	Chocolate
3	Some warm clothing (if you are arriving in winter) – but not too much!
4	Spices – if you plan on cooking
5	Something “New Zealand” (I only brought some currency)

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

1	Google “Beijing teahouse scam”. You WILL fall for it if you are not aware.
2	It’s fine to hang out with the other foreigners, but try to make friends with the local students too.
3	Make every effort to show up to class. Even if you don’t fully understand the classes, just listening and participating will naturally improve your Chinese.
4	If you’re looking to buy clothes, Bingxiangdao (central) is expensive. Look around the nearby side streets or smaller malls and you’ll find shops that sell them significantly cheaper (Chinese brands).
5	Set aside some time to go travelling – ideally towards the end of your exchange. This can be almost as rich an experience as the exchange itself.

### Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Get a bike and go explore the neighboring areas. They are sold on campus and pretty cheap (\$30-40 second hand). Basically essential if you plan on living outside of campus.
2	Grab some friends and go to Beijing on a good day. There’s so much to see there!
3	There are a couple of “old culture” streets in Tianjin worth checking out. You can get souvenirs and things there (though other cities are better)
4	You’ll probably go to the water park (水上公园) at least once. It’s very close to campus and worth visiting to get a break from life in the Chinese mega-city.
5	You will most likely fall in love with the Tianjin steamed rice buns (baozi 天津包子). They’re renowned as some of the best in China and extremely cheap (20c each). Don’t take it for granted!

## H: Personal Experience

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

My exchange to Nankai University was my most life-changing experience. It's difficult even to think about my time there now because it feels like that was a different lifetime and I was different person. Every day I learned new things – not just from classes but from being immersed in a totally different culture, from being forced to speak a language I was not previously confident with, and from being exposed to such incredibly different ways of life. The sheer quantity of experiences there have formed rich and vibrant memories – both positive and negative, that are unmatched by any other single period in my life. At times I thought China was the most amazing, fun and fascinating place in the world, while other times I was on the verge of mental breakdown, unable to cope with the cultural differences. All in all I've become a stronger, more tolerant, more resilient and more worldly person as a result of it, and I've acquired skills that helped to shape and define my identity. I don't regret a single part of it, and given the opportunity I would 100% do it all over again.

