

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	BA
Major(s)	Political Science, International Relations
Exchange Institution	Sciences Po
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 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	-
Accommodation	1,700 NZ\$ p/month (including breakfast, dinner 3x week, power and internet)
Return Airfare	2,700
Local Transportation	116 p/month
Meals	50 p/week (note that some meals already cooked for me)
Visa	British passport, none.
Health & Insurance	500
Personal Spending	4,000
Communications (phone, etc.)	-
Other fees (specify)	-
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	Doctors visit (in France very expensive, can get refund if you are with a school and find out early enough). Basically everything in Paris costs more!

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

Generally about 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 had a debit card with ASB which charges a tiny fee for using money overseas. Also CashPassports are offered in most banks and are really great because you can withdraw money from ATMs and use it like an Eftpos for no charge once you have loaded money on to it. I opened up a bank over there but didn't really use it except for CAF (see below).

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

Most people pay for things in cash in Paris- make sure you always have this on you! Also, there is a thing called CAF which offers money to any student studying in France, if you get on to it early and can be bothered (it involves a LOT of paperwork and it is all in French but worth it) it can end up being quite a lot of money (up to 200 Euros a month).

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

Coffee generally 4 bucks for an espresso (what you get if you ask for a coffee there), a coke is probably the same (although Paris is much more pricey than it would be in other regions of France).

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?

I have a British passport so just went on that.

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

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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?

We had a health insurance we had to apply for through the uni- it was around 300 NZ.

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

I did mine through STA travel and they were really helpful and gave it to us for a discounted rate. So yes!

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					
Multiculturalism and Identities in a Global World	English	INTP	10	5	Very interactive and discussion based. Really multicultural class and an excellent teacher so it made for a really interesting course.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

Online. There was a video talking us through the whole process.

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?

Quite successful, enrollment is all online and everyone signs up for it straight away so you have to be pretty on to it! But Vic was quite flexible (for BAs) about which courses you take and cross crediting if it in the general area you are studying.

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

Have a back up, and also make the most out of the fact that you have the freedom to try new topics!

Academic Experience

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

It differed a lot. Firstly SciencesPo specialises in Political Science so it was very geared towards that. People were generally a lot more academic so they expected more from us in class than at Victoria.

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?

Most of the classes were like tutorials, so very discussion based. The workload was actually around the same, the only difference was what was expected of us in terms of background knowledge and ability to contribute to discussion.

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 5 courses- but I think that is compulsory for SciencesPo. The French politics paper and the French language paper were both really great because it helped make everyday life and conversations better. If I were to do the exchange again I would definitely take another paper in French because of this.

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

Generally the same as at Vic- do your readings, try and think critically etc...

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?
All were really excellent.

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 took French from high school and in the first year of uni, so this helped with the initial stages. Taking the French language paper was such a help and I would thoroughly recommend this too! However, to really improve your French the best thing you can do is immerse yourself- whether that is by taking a paper in the language, living with a family or making local friends.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Homestay

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

The pros: Language immersion, not worrying about landlords and bills, it was amazing having a family to come home to, really learning about French life from a local perspective. Cons: you have a little less freedom because you obviously have to be respectful of the family you are living with, and if you have gone from flatting with friends back into this environment it can be tricky at times.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Homestay for me was really great. In Paris if you flat, they are generally small one or two bedroom studios so either way you wouldn't be missing out in terms of students living together. If you can find someone you know you would be able to live well with then this could be a good idea as well as homestay.

How early can you move into accommodation?

As early as you can pay!

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

The kitchen was free for use whenever I wanted it. My family's agreement was that they would cook for me three nights a week and I would cook the others. It was quite nice seeing how 'normal' French people ate on a day to day basis as opposed to in all the touristy restaurants. It was great!

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 quite hard finding a homestay agency that I could trust because with most you have to pay a fee before you even get a contact to the family. I found a really great organisation called which I would recommend highly.

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

Make sure to always convert money-sounds very silly to say but it is easy to forget to do it when budgeting !

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

If you rely on just university and your classes it will probably be quite hard to get close to local people. I can't recommend enough joining extracurricular activities in order to do this! It enables people to spot common interests and breaks down the cultural and language barrier. I also made a lot of friends through a music bar for the same reason- I started going every week and it didn't matter that the language was a bit of a barrier to start with because we would just play music- language wasn't a key component of that (as time went on/language improved we were able to actually start getting to know each other really well)

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university? Initially it can be quite isolating because you are operating in the mode of your own culture. When you are in this stage you notice that the locals treat you like one of the tourists. I noticed that there was a tipping point when I realised I was starting to understand how Parisians work and that was so satisfying. It doesn't take long to adjust, so don't worry!

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

It's all little things that you will pick up as you go. I guess the one big thing is just not making a big scene in public; Parisians like to remain quite cool and collected and don't really like that to be disrupted.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The way that no one is in a rush! As I said before they like to keep their cool so no one ever seems to be rushing or panicking to get anyway. I miss seeing people just sitting outside the bistros drinking their coffee in the morning and wine in the afternoon. It's a really lovely culture that you appreciate more and more as time goes by.

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

If you respect the French culture and even just try to use a bit of French when asking for help (even if it's just a greeting) then people will be so kind to you. I think the perception that French people are rude is so false. The university staff and students were also really accommodating of the exchange students.

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?

In terms of services for students with disabilities there were elevators, ramps and support services readily available (however I am not too sure if it's in English). And in terms of minority students, whether visible or non-visible, Sciencespo is a very accepting, forward thinking university and there are numerous clubs and organisations for all different cultures, groups and sexual orientations. Further, it is a very multicultural university as it hosts 50% exchange students.

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

Not at all.

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?

Numerous sports clubs and many cultural clubs too. I joined choir and it was fantastic- I made so many friends and the performance at the end of the term was a great way to finish it.

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

All the museums, the gardens around Paris, the different arrondissements (my favorite were the Marais and Monmarte) and making the most of the nearby countries/cities- one weekend my friend and I spontaneously decided to go to Belgium- the bus only cost us 15 Euros.

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

I'm not really sure about this one. I do know that the school was offering a summer internship for those wanting to stay on.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Heaps of different student associations to get on board with that kind of thing.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	A good pair of winter boots and wooly socks.
2	A Paris map
3	A travel bag for weekends away
4	A journal for keeping track of your experiences
5	A knowledge of all the simple phrases (how to order something, please, thank you etc)

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

1	Don't be scared to speak in French! It's the only way you will learn.
2	The Seine is closer to the uni than most people realise- it's a really nice place to go on your breaks at uni.
3	Do the Welcome Program- it is the best way to make friends which will last your whole exchange.
4	Try and make the most of the fact that SciencesPo hosts so many exchange students- don't just stick with the NZers/Aussies!
5	With Paris in particular, it takes a while to get to know it and it is only then that you will start to love it. Although travelling to other countries is amazing, make sure you really make the most of living there. Too many of my friends spent too much time outside of the city and never really got to know how to appreciate it.

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Walk up to the Sacre Coeur through Monmarte and watch the sunset/see the whole city.
2	Go to Père Lachaise cemetery (sounds grim but is so beautiful and interesting)
3	Go to the Marais (the Jewish, Gay, Hipster district) for opshopping and the best falafel in Paris.
4	All the Museums! Louvre (this takes the whole day if not more), d'Orsay, Pompidou...
5	In terms of France- Nice. So, so beautiful in the summer and makes for such a nice getaway.

H: Personal Experience

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

It was honestly the best experience of my life. Before going on exchange I was petrified, I was even thinking about not doing it because I was worried about the language barrier, not meeting friends and missing out on what my friends were doing in New Zealand. But looking back now it went by so quickly and I have no idea why I was so worried. Two of my flatmates went on exchanges to different countries and they all agreed, however it is so interesting learning about how our experiences all differed so dramatically. What Paris will give you is the most cultural experience you could ask for. I learnt about history, art and music that I had never heard of before, got to walk through hundreds of years of architecture every day and learnt a whole new language. It can be difficult at times because it is such a huge city, but that's why it is perfect for an exchange- because you have 6 months (or a year) to explore it all, and you will without a doubt still be exploring it when you come to leave. What's nice is that I was there for long enough to establish a real connection to the place, and it's funny because where Paris is so famous you will be constantly reminded of these connections through images in magazines, pictures in movies and even anecdotes from other people's travels. I think the thing you have to think about when you are going on exchange is what you really want to get out of it- for me it was culture, language, history and a chance to travel more of Europe, and so Paris for me was perfect.



- 1) View of the Eiffel from Palais de Tokyo
- 2) The Bastille march after the Paris attacks (1 million people present).
- 3) Embracing the roots
- 4) Seine river at night
- 5) Moulin Rouge in Pigalle