

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

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

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	LLB/BA
Major(s)	Law, International Relations and French
Exchange Institution	Sciences Po Paris
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	\$0 – all readings were online
Accommodation	\$6541 (730 euros per month for rent/power/internet etc all included– for 6 months)
Return Airfare	I bought two separate one-way tickets as I was unsure of my post-exchange plans. Wellington-Paris (via Auckland and Hong Kong) \$1665 Paris-Wellington (via Singapore and Auckland) \$1394
Local Transportation	I regularly bought <i>carnets</i> of 20 metro tickets at the ticket machines, costing 28.20 euros each time. Very rough estimate - \$300 in total (assuming 6 lots of 20 tickets – I can't remember how many I actually bought)
Meals	Roughly \$60 per week on groceries – more in the orientation week when I went out a lot and ate at restaurants more
Visa	\$158
Health & Insurance	Travel insurance with Southern Cross - \$569 (from Jan to Nov – ended up travelling less than I had planned originally) Compulsory Sciences Po health insurance (pointless and annoying but you can't get out of paying) – 213 euros or \$348
Personal Spending	I spent maybe \$2-3000 on travel – mainly after my exchange
Communications (phone, etc.)	Roughly \$270 (30 euros a month for unlt'd calls/texts & 2GB data, with SFR)
Other fees (specify)	Welcome Programme – \$414 (250 euros)
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I never really got my head around the euro to NZ\$ conversion rate, so was always surprised to check my bank account and see how much I had actually been spending. Most items cost roughly what I expected them to though.

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

My expenses were surprisingly close to what I expected. But on my post-exchange travels, I ended up spending a ridiculous amount of money on food – especially in Spain. Tapas seem cheap but they add up when you want to try everything at 6 different bars!

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank

account, travelers checks, etc)?

I used my VISA Debit card connected to my ANZ bank account, as well as a Mastercard cash passport connected to my parents', and withdrew cash from ATMs as I needed it. Both worked fine; I didn't look into it much but I think the withdrawal fees weren't too bad.

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

Paris is an expensive city, especially for going out eating/drinking. Try cook your own meals at home as much as possible (but obviously enjoy what Paris has to offer too – don't be too stingy).

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

I didn't have much of either – but at a normal café/bakery, an espresso (ie short black) is about 1.50 euros, coffees with milk more like 2 or 3.

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 applied for a student visa (giving me the right to stay for 6 months, but not to work) and the process was surprisingly quick and simple. If you want to be able to work while you're over there, though, there's a whole lot of bureaucratic hassle to go through once you arrive in France (medical tests etc), and another form to fill out in NZ. Make sure you have all the documents listed on the embassy's website in either case and you shouldn't have any problems. I forgot to include my academic transcript at first, but was able to email it to the guy at the embassy when I got home, no problem. My visa arrived in the mail a few days later, from memory.

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

Just be prepared and have all the documents ready. And don't leave it to the last minute! (Seriously.)

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?

Yes, you had to buy health insurance (impossible to avoid – all students have to buy it under French law). You get to choose between two providers (SMEREP and LMDE) but there's very little difference between them and it costs the same regardless – 213 euros (\$348 for me at the time).

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

Southern Cross – I never had to claim anything so don't have much to say.

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					
Théories des Relations Internationales [Theories of International Relations]	French	INTP 371	20	4	Extremely theoretical, the course methodically goes through all the different theories (realism, liberalism etc) and explains the important theorists, variations and development over time. Lectures are mind-numbingly boring but optional (although beware – the Powerpoint slides don't have that much detail); tutorials are compulsory (miss 3 or more and you fail) and slightly better. Readings are long, and sometimes in English. About 20% of the mark is participation in class discussion (asking people questions about their presentations, mainly), so everybody talks a lot. The sheer quantity of material seems overwhelming at first, but I got a handle on it by the time of the final exam. Surprisingly, literally everyone doing the course was an exchange student.
Politique étrangère de la France [Foreign Policy of France]	French	INTP 300-level	10	4	Quite interesting if you pay attention, but again very theoretical – you spend more time talking about stuff like “models of rational decision-making” and the acculturation of EU diplomats than what France's foreign policy actually

						is. Readings are sometimes in English too, and usually quite long. Hard to follow occasionally – the teacher talks quite quickly. Her jokes especially were hard to understand, though everyone else laughed. No final exam – assessment is two 10-minute oral presentations, and participation in discussion. About one-third French students and two-thirds foreign – good mix, though the French ones obviously dominate class discussion.
African Urban Spaces	English	INTP level	300-	10	2	An interesting course taught by a swarthy Italian geographer, it's listed as an IR subject but is actually much closer to Geography. Assessment is two in-class tests and an oral group presentation about an African city, as well as participation. Gets a bit repetitive sometimes with Valerio going on and on about "reclaiming spaces" and "colonial legacy" and showing Google Maps screenshots, but he includes heaps of videos and pictures and quotes to maintain interest. Friendly, relaxed classroom vibe, including 3 or 4 African students too.
Geopolitics of the Middle East	English	INTP level	300-	10	2	Very relaxed course with no readings and not much assessment either – a multi-choice test, a newspaper editorial and participation. Class was full of loud Americans who loved giving their opinion. The lecturer was

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

You register for courses online after a given date, via your 'Espace Etudiant' (their rough equivalent of Blackboard). It's very similar to signing up for tutorials on S-Cubed – everyone logs on at the same time to enrol, so you really have to hurry to get the ones you want. They sent out instructions via email a few days beforehand.

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 managed to enrol for all the courses I wanted. Make sure you log in and enrol as soon as possible once enrolment opens (I think it was 3 pm or something when I was there). Have backups already decided if you don't get the courses you wanted at first. And don't give up if the site crashes!

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

Only do courses in French if you're confident about your language ability – they tend to be harder and more rigorous than the English courses anyway. Make sure you get into all the courses you need for your major at Vic (you can email them if you miss out on a course you really need); after that, just pick any that sound interesting. And if you want to travel a lot in the weekends, consider picking your courses so that you have no class on Thursday/Friday/Monday etc – a friend of mine only had class 2 days a week, so it is doable.

Academic Experience

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

Academically, it was really interesting to experience the 'French way' of doing things – unlike in NZ, the French are very precise about language (in the Welcome Programme, you spend time learning how to deconstruct an essay question and define the terms and come up with your own reinterpretation of the question) and theoretical and abstract in their thinking. Though citing real-world examples is still crucial too. I also found it interesting how much people participated in class discussions – regardless of whether they were motivated by the fear of getting a bad participation grade (it counts for much more than at Vic) or they were genuinely engaged, it had the same effect.

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 Sciences Po style of teaching is actually much closer to the Anglo-Saxon style (or Vic's style) than most other traditional French universities, where (or so the stereotype goes) the focus is still on rote learning and deference to the teacher. So there is a focus on applying theories to explaining the real world, and on developing your skills of analysis and oral and written self-expression, rather than just memorising stuff. The teachers are still generally more aloof than most Victoria ones (even intimidating at first), but are actually pretty approachable.

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 follow the course load suggested by Sciences Po as a full-time load – 30 points (their points system is different to Vic’s). So, I’d do 1 Cours Magistral (10 points, 1 2-hr lecture and 1 2-hr tutorial per week), and then 4 seminars and/or electives including 1 French language course (5 points each, 1 2-hr tutorial per week).

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

Sign up for the Welcome Programme – you make friends with a whole group of other exchange students with a similar level of French to you, and learn how to do things (write essays, give presentations etc) the Sciences Po way. And take a French language course too, whatever level you are. Apart from that, just do what you do at Vic – keep up with readings, enjoy yourself but get your work done too, etc etc.

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

The library was good but almost always crowded and the computers almost always all taken, so it’s not very useful for sitting around and studying. Having your own computer is a very good idea. Wi-Fi on campus is decent.

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 already had a high level of French having completed FREN 316 at Vic, so I felt relatively comfortable anyway. The university does offer French courses, which definitely helped me to keep progressing even after having finished my French degree at Vic.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I flatted with a French student who I found on the internet (lacartedescolocs.fr – website all in French).

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

Pros: Got to live with a local and have a much better cultural experience than I might’ve otherwise.

Cons: Renting in Paris is expensive (though so is NZ, to be honest).

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would definitely recommend flatting (*colocation* in French), with a local if possible. There are various free websites you can use to find flatmates (a much easier process if you speak French) – Sciences Po’s own listings, lacartedescolocs.fr, leboncoin.fr. Other ones like colocation.fr and appartager.fr seem free at first but then charge you if you actually want to contact anyone. Sciences Po doesn’t own any student accommodation anyway so you don’t have much choice. Other exchange students I met lived by

themselves or with a homestay though, and seemed to enjoy that too. Decide what's right for you.

How early can you move into accommodation?

I met my flatmate over Skype while still in NZ and signed and scanned the contract etc, so I was able to move in the day I arrived in Paris (before having paid a cent). Otherwise, I would've stayed in a hostel while looking for an apartment once I arrived.

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

Living in a private apartment with a fully functioning kitchen, I got stuff from the bakery down the road for breakfast/lunch and cooked dinner for myself most nights. I was pretty satisfied with my cooking. Unlike the norm in NZ, my flatmate and I sorted out our own food rather than taking turns making dinner for both of us.

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

I got lucky by finding a good flat before even leaving NZ, but it generally takes a while to find a place in Paris – very high demand.

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

Start looking early and hope you get lucky, but don't panic if it takes a while to find a place! And especially: take some time and do heaps of research about the different neighbourhoods in Paris to help narrow down where you want to live. For example, living by the Eiffel Tower might sound glamorous, but the area around it is expensive, full of tourists and lacking in cheap places to eat/buy food. Anywhere outside the periphery will basically be boring suburbia or grim (even dangerous) apartment blocks. Plenty of students stay in the slightly touristy but very pretty old area around the universities (5th and 6th *arrondissements*). The 9th and 10th *arrondissements* around Canal Saint-Martin are more hipster, while the 18th, 19th, 20th and parts of the 10th are a bit grittier and more exciting, with cheap bars and restaurants and a wonderfully diverse population.

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

I became relatively close to my French flatmate over the 6 months; he was very busy with endless exams for his Master's degree and I was often in my room skyping my girlfriend, but we still found time to chat about travel and football and our lives and stuff like that. We held a joint flatwarming party after 2 months, where I invited some of the exchange students I had met and he invited all his French friends. Overall though, it was hard to form any real friendships with other locals – apart from my flatmate's girlfriend, I only met the rest of his friends once or twice each so never got to follow up any initial connection made. And at university I was almost always surrounded by other exchange students, even in courses done entirely in French. Most of my closer friends by the end were Australians, plus an American and a Singaporean – all of whom I had met in the Welcome Programme.

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

I didn't feel like I had to make any major adjustments – I was surrounded by other foreigners at university, and had been speaking French even at uni in NZ in my French courses. Even the French people I met were keen to practise their English (conversation with my flatmate was in English probably two-thirds of the time), making things even easier. The Welcome Programme definitely helped, though, by preparing me for the academic adjustments I had to make.

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

Only in terms of language did I feel particularly challenged: it was often hard to understand the quicker, colloquial, conversational French used by people in the street. However, I did notice a lot more homeless people/beggars in the street than in Wellington, which was a bit confronting at first. I'd pass several just while walking 2 minutes down the road to the supermarket, in a relatively posh part of Paris; homeless alcoholics and drug addicts often hang out in metro stations and can be unpredictable. Also, the metro stinks of urine. You just have to put up with it.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The bakery down the road from my house was amazing. Excellent and cheap baguettes and croissants and *pains au chocolat* and quiches and all sorts of other things, often made twice a day.

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

Unlike the stereotype, Parisian shopkeepers and sales people were very friendly: maybe it helps speaking French to them rather than English. My university lecturers were very nice; for my French courses, they were slightly stricter when you did something wrong (like being even a few minutes late, or not emailing your presentation to them two days beforehand) but still fair and friendly once you earned their respect. Students were also nice and sociable.

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?

I can't imagine students facing any discrimination at Sciences Po. In general, physically disabled people might find it hard to use the metro system in Paris – stations have lots of stairs going up and down and very little (if any) wheelchair access. I'm not sure if buses are any better in that regard as I didn't use them. I imagine that LGBT students wouldn't face any problems in Paris, although a male friend of mine who came to my flatwarming party in drag said that an Arab man on the metro was staring at him menacingly. Make of that what you will – I don't want to make any sweeping generalisations based on one fairly innocuous incident.

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 discrimination personally. Female friends of mine have complained (not to me; I mean in general) about the constant cat-calling in the streets, one even had a creepy man expose himself to her while waiting for the metro.

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 were sports courses (and arts workshops) you could take for extra credits, which I didn't do. I went to the first week of futsal though with my flatmate and everyone was very welcoming despite me being easily the worst player there. I'd recommend doing whatever sport or art interests you if you have the spare time – maybe you'll make more French friends than I did.

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

Go out with friends, go out by yourself, explore Paris, eat, go travelling elsewhere in France/Europe/Africa/wherever you want.

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

I wasn't aware of any on-campus opportunities, and didn't look for any off-campus ones since my visa didn't give me the right to work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I don't know.

5 things to take to your host country or region

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|---|--|
| 1 | Warm clothes (jacket, gloves, beanie) – it almost never snowed in Paris, but it got pretty close to zero degrees in winter |
| 2 | Something from NZ to give to your flatmate(s) as a present – I'm not sure mine liked his Pineapple Lumps that much but it's a nice thing to do |
| 3 | Books/music for the long plane ride over |
| 4 | A smartphone – Google Maps is really useful when you're travelling |
| 5 | Money – you can exchange it for various goods and services |

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

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|---|---|
| 1 | Sign up for the Welcome Programme – it's expensive and some of the activities are pretty lame, but you meet heaps of people who can be your backup friends if you don't meet any locals |
|---|---|

2	You can do all your courses in English if you really want, but do as much French as possible – you're in France
3	Don't be afraid to speak up in seminars and give your opinions (not essential, but you really should, at least in some of them – it counts for much more over there)
4	Find a cool neighbourhood of Paris to live in
5	Remember that it'll be over before you know it and you'll be back home – don't forget the people from home who are important to you

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Find a really nice bakery near where you're living and go there often
2	Have a boozy picnic with friends at Parc des Buttes-Chaumont
3	Asian food in one of Paris's two Chinatowns – le Quartier Asiatique in the 13 th arrondissement, or Belleville in the 20 th
4	Go wandering by yourself in a new city and get a bit lost
5	Drink down by the Seine

H: Personal Experience

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

My time on exchange was a real defining time in my life. I discovered a sense of independence I had never felt before, living away from home and travelling wherever I wanted to on my own terms, usually on my own. I further developed my French-language skills to the point of still-not-quite-fluency-but-getting-close, and immersed myself in another worldview and another culture. Thanks to Victoria Abroad for giving me the opportunity, and for their generous support! I hope future students will take this opportunity too and get out there and see the world.