

## Student Evaluation Form

### A. Student Information

Degree(s) enrolled in at VUW	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Political Science and Media Studies
Exchange Institution	University of California, Davis
VUW Trimester(s) and Year of Exchange	VUW Trimester 1, 2012

### B. Finances

Please provide an estimate on how much you spent on your exchange (in your host country's currency).

Food & personal spending	\$2,000
Accommodation	\$3,500
Return Airfare	\$3,000
Local Travel	\$3,000
Books, misc. levies (e.g. student association)	\$500
Visa	\$200
Insurance	\$1,000
Other (please specify)	
	<b>Total = 13,200</b>

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

Generally it matched up to what I thought I would spend, however, there were a few unexpected expenses, so it is a good idea to always save up more money than you think you will need.

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

I had a Loaded for Travel Card where I loaded US currency onto it before I left, but when I was over there I also opened up a bank account to make it easier to pay rent. I ended up not having enough money on the travel card and so I had to transfer money from my New Zealand bank account to my American account a few times, which ended up being pretty costly.

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

Take a pre loaded travel card with you to avoid paying extra bank fees while on exchange.

**Were there any extra or unexpected costs which future students should be aware of?**

At the UCs health insurance is mandatory so I ended up spending a lot of money on that when I already had travel insurance that included pretty comprehensive medical cover – so try and get the cheapest travel insurance possible as UC health insurance is expensive and unavoidable. Take more money than you think you will need, as transferring between NZ and US bank accounts is very expensive.

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

Around \$1 for a can of coke and \$2-\$3 for coffee – generally a little bit cheaper than in New Zealand.

**C. Visas & Insurance**

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

Just be aware that it is a long process, so do it well in advance. Also, there is only a consulate in Auckland, so factor the costs of travelling there in when planning your trip!

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

I used Southern Cross Insurance, which provided good cover. Next time I would get a cheaper and less comprehensive insurance, because, as mentioned above, the UCs enroll you in mandatory health insurance.

**C. Academics**

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 (if applicable)	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
POL160 – American Political Parties	English	A 300 level Political science course	20 points	4	This course was really interesting, and the light course load made it not to strenuous.
POL106 – The Presidency	English	A 300 level Political Science Course	20 points	3	I found this to be one of the more difficult courses I did as the workload was quite large, and it required a lot of prior knowledge of American politics.
AMS10 – Introduction to American Studies	English	Combination of Media Studies and History	20 points		As it was a beginner course it was quite easy, though nothing like anything

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					offered at Victoria, and thus very interesting.
<b>AMS156 – Race, Culture and Society</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Comparable to an American History course</b>	<b>20 points</b>		<b>This was the most informative course I took, and completely changed the way I look at race and American history.</b>
<b>FMS121 – New Italian Cinemas</b>	<b>English</b>		<b>20 points</b>		<b>A good course that intertwined Italian film, history and politics.</b>
<b>SOC25 – Sociology of Popular Culture</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Similar to a beginner Media Studies course, e.g. MDIA103</b>	<b>20 points</b>		<b>This course was similar to a lot of Media Studies courses at Victoria, but was a beginner course and therefore very easy, although the workload was quite large.</b>

**How did you find the teachers at your exchange university?**

They were mostly all helpful and friendly, and even in the larger classes they attempted to get to know all the students and build a rapport with them.

**How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria?**

I found the workload to be a bit heavier than at Victoria, though generally I found the work itself to be easier. There was less essay writing than in the courses I've done at Victoria, although I had a lot more exams. The format of some of the exams was multiple choice, something I've never had in a humanities paper at Victoria. What I most enjoyed was having the opportunity to do a wide range of courses, and pick up general interest papers such as Italian film and American Studies, something I wouldn't be able to do at Victoria.

**How did your academic experiences differ from what you expected?**

I expected the work to be a lot harder, however my grades turned out better than expected. As a whole, my academic experience was pretty in line with what I expected – fulfilling and interesting.

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

Make sure the amount of courses that you are doing is quite small (while still meeting the minimum requirements, of course) so that you have time to partake in all the new social experiences that going on an exchange has to offer. By making sure that I had a relatively small course load, it allowed me to travel more throughout the semester. Also make sure that you don't just do courses required for your major – make the most of doing random, general courses, and take some courses just for fun!

## **D. Accommodation**

### **What form of accommodation did you stay in?**

I stayed in an apartment complex away from campus.

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

It was much cheaper than living on campus, and it allowed me the independence that living in the dorms doesn't offer (e.g. cooking for myself). At first I wanted to stay in the dorms, but they all had rooms that you had to share with other people, whereas in my apartment I had my own room, but shared everything else with my flatmates.

### **What accommodation would you recommend to future students?**

I would recommend this type of accommodation as it was a lot cheaper, and I gained a really close bond with my roommates.

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

A good website I used to find accommodation was Uloop. Before I met my roommates I Skyped them, which was a good idea as it allowed me to see if I would be a good fit with them, and it also enabled me to avoid scams, one of the perils of looking for accommodation online.

## **F. Culture**

### **What were some of the hardest cultural differences you faced while abroad?**

I didn't expect there to be as many cultural differences as there were – there were often language barriers in terms of some of the words I used, and I had to adapt my vocabulary to become more American. I wouldn't say these differences were hard though – everyone I met was really accepting of foreigners, and Americans loved my Kiwi accent!

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**How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?**

Just go into it aware that there are differences, but I found no problems with it. Being culturally different is one of things that sets you apart when meeting new people on exchange, so embrace it.

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

No, not at all. Everyone was very friendly and welcoming in Davis – one of the reasons I enjoyed my exchange so much.

**G. Other opportunities**

**Did you take part in an internship or any volunteer activities while on exchange? If so, please explain.**

**Are there any great clubs or associations etc. you recommend other students get involved with while on exchange at your host uni?**

I joined the international club, which was a good way to meet people before I had settled in. The Outdoor Adventures club was great because it offered a cheap way to explore some of the California wilderness.

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

- Travel around while on exchange – because I made my course load so light I had a lot of opportunities to travel around while on exchange – I went for some weekend trips with friends, and I went to the Coachella music festival which was amazing. Spring break was also great as I stayed with a friend's family over on the East coast.
- Go to a frat party – it's a very 'American' thing to do, and the whole frat/sorority culture is so different from anything in New Zealand.
- Hang out with the other international students – It's really interesting meeting people from different cultures, and means you have friends from all around the world!
- At UC Davis the Outdoor Adventures Club was really good, so I recommend participating in some of the activities they offer, such as Whitewater rafting, camping in Yosemite, hiking the Grand Canyon, and kayaking near Mt Shasta

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## H. Personal Response

Studying abroad at UC Davis was an amazing experience, and I'm so glad that I stepped out of my comfort zone and participated in the Victoria Overseas Exchange. I had some unforgettable experiences, such as going to the Coachella music festival, and experiencing snow in Quebec City. I also made some great friends that I know I'll see again – all of whom I've convinced to come and visit me in New Zealand! While it was hard leaving friends and family here behind, and I had the occasional bout of homesickness, I gained new friends, new confidence, new independence, and amazing memories.



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