

# 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/BCom  
 Major(s) Linguistics, International Relations, International Business, Accounting  
 Exchange Institution University of Victoria, BC, Canada  
 VUW Tri & Year of Exchange Tri 2 2014 – Tri1 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	\$500
Accommodation	\$7000
Return Airfare	\$2000
Local Transportation	Free!
Meals	\$1800
Visa	-
Health & Insurance	\$1000
Personal Spending	\$4000
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$700
Other fees (specify)	

What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected? I had to buy insurance there on top of my travel insurance, and as a foreign exchange student, I paid at the highest level. Rent is cheaper than NZ, and uni students get an eight-month bus pass but this is normally ~\$250 (local students must buy it, exchange students can opt-in but they accidentally gave it to is for free)

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

I spent way more than expected in the first few months while setting up (textbooks, bulk groceries and aforementioned insurance) but as time went on I spent less than my budget and it evened out to about what I expected.

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

I went with a bank draft and a loaded credit card, and then the rest of my money was sent by international bank transfer. Unless the exchange rate is really high and you think it will drop (so buy a draft), the international bank transfer is the safest and most reliable, and doesn't cost heaps either.

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

Live off campus and make your own food. Meal plans for residence are super expensive. Get the bus pass and do what grocery shopping you can at Walmart

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

Coke can: \$1-2. Coffee was \$4-5

**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 did not need a visa, I only needed a study permit. Anyone staying for less than 6 months doesn't even need that. You pretty much apply online, get approved, then turn up in Vancouver and wait in line where they give you the actual study permit. I can't really remember the cost, or if there was one at all.

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

Make sure you have a new passport already, don't get a new passport in the middle of the process. Also, the line at Vancouver Airport for a study/work permit was horrendous, so give yourself lots of time to make any transfers (I was in line for aaaaggeess/ like, 1h30 maybe?)

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?

The province of British Columbia had mandatory insurance (British Columbia Medical Services Plan) for anyone staying longer than 6 months, and UVic required you to have insurance for the month before the BCMSP kicked in. Be aware that they will make you pay for the entire time you are in Canada, even if you leave the province, and any part of a month will be charged as the whole. If you have overall travel insurance, be conservative with your departure time (if you don't know when you leave exactly, give an early date or they will automatically charge you the full time). It cost about \$70 CAD per month.

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

I used Southern Cross and it was fine but I had no need to claim anything so I can't comment on their efficacy but it was easy to get and reasonably priced.

## 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	VUW course	VUW	Rating	Comments
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	equivalent or elective	points/credits value	(1-5)	
<b>VUW Trimester 1/2015</b>				
Writing Systems of the World (LING260)	LING 200-level special topic	15	3	Perhaps it was the time (late afternoon) or the two-hour lectures, but while interesting, it seemed to drag sometimes
Anthropological Linguistics (LING361)	LING 300-level special topic	15	4	Interesting and with a fascinating group project to create a language, but covered a confusing range of subjects
Sociolinguistics (LING398)	LING221	15	5	Very interesting, lots of eye-opening, practical examples, excellent professor (Dr D'Arcy) who knew NZ
Greek and Roman Mythology (GRS200)	elective	15	4	Covered many stories and explained origins and some of the multiplicity of stories, but sometimes got boring
<b>VUW Trimester 2/2014</b>				
Democracy and Diversity (POLI305)	POLS 200-level special topic	15	5	Focused especially on First Nations in Canada but ideas applicable everywhere. Assessments relied heavily on engagement with the readings
The UN and Global Issues (POLI341)	INTP 200-level special topic	15	4	The Model UN assignment was interesting and interactive, but its assessment method was not clear and the lectures themselves were sometimes repetitive or shifted topics too fast.
International Security (POLI348)	INTP 200-level special topic	15	3	Interesting and informed lecturer; stock standard assessments; nothing special
Language, Gender and Sexuality (LING398)	LING 331 special topic	15	4	Interesting and eye-opening but a little light, very easy assessments

### Course Registration/Enrolment

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

They sent us a link to create an account, then I stayed up in the early morning to enroll for my courses. I didn't need any help as it was all quite simple.

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 got every class that I wanted that was available, but lots of courses that I wanted simply weren't offered the year that I was there. I stayed up late to enroll, I'm not sure how necessary it was but I got into everything,

no waiting lists.

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

Just make sure you have a list of lots of possible courses that you could want to do, and use the previous year's calendar to see if they were offered then

### **Academic Experience**

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

It really wasn't too different to VUW. It did seem more relaxed, but that may have been the general atmosphere.

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?

There were no tutorials and smaller classes (in general), the latter perhaps due to them being at a higher level than the ones I've done here. This meant lectures were often more interactive than ones at VUW. Workload-wise, it was lighter than expected. Students commonly do five papers (but they call them courses) per semester, so four was certainly manageable.

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?

Doing four courses is ok and more would not be creditable to VUW, so unless any really catch your eye, four per semester would be appropriate. I would totally recommend sociolinguistics (LING395) with Dr D'Arcy if you have interest in that at all.

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

Go to class, do the assignments, turn up to tests. It's really not hard.

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

The only computers available were in the library (and food was not allowed), so people were expected to have and do work on their own laptop. I didn't really use the books in the library but there was WiFi everywhere and it automatically logged you in so it was really easy. This was probably due to the residences on campus and thus all the first-years living there 24/7.

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?

N/A

### **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Rented a suite in a house off campus

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

Pros: privacy, lots of space, cheaper than res, independence, laundry facilities on site, own bathroom,

Cons: not on campus, had to buy groceries and cook own meals, do own cleaning

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Grad student flats with own kitchen but still on campus, or live off campus. Cluster housing could be nice but there were lots of parties so not so good if you like your sleep. Don't bother applying for res in general, first priority goes to domestic students.

How early can you move into accommodation?

Move-in day to res is about a week before classes start but you can pay to move in early. Other accommodation, negotiate with the landlord or your roommates. Anytime during August is generally ok.

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

UVic offered a meal plan for residents that involved paying a huge amount up front then getting half of it as "food credit" on your id card that you could use to get food for half price at the dining hall (but not at the food court). Cluster housing and grad flats have their own cooking facilities (cluster have ovens, grads get a countertop stove) and residences tend to have communal kitchenettes with microwaves and kettles. Students can load money onto their ID card to get a 5% discount at the food court. The food is quite nice (and well-priced on a meal plan) but gets a bit repetitive by semester two.

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 found my place through family contacts but there was quite a bit available on the UVic website. It got less and less as it got closer to September so many exchange students who got there later had some trouble. Living off campus, rent is paid monthly and usually includes water, power, and internet, but check with the landlord. \$600 per month should be the absolute max you pay; anything else for student housing is a rip off. Many students lived in basement suites of family homes; these can be cheaper but may be dark and/or damp. People don't really make use of suburb names. Check proximity to bus stops.

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

If you don't want to live in res, stay at the Ocean Island Inn, meet other internationals, and make up a flat there. UVic has a food bank with free food for all. You can get your staples and some canned goods there. Fill your pantry 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?

I made more friends from locals than other internationals as I did not live on campus and so did not go out to town much (would've had to walk back after bussing back to UVic) or to house parties. I met locals through a club I joined, and although I was friendly with students in my classes I did not make any long-term friends from there.

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

Canada is quite similar to New Zealand, culturally, although they have a different favourite sport. Victoria has a small-city feel to it: lots going on but relatively laid back overall.

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

None, really, except that they have a very different perception of time and space: driving for 2-3 hours is a short commute and could easily be a day-trip; the 12-hour drive between Calgary and Vancouver is "short". Just be prepared for long driving distances.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Everyone was very kind and easy-going, very friendly to strangers

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

Locals were friendly and loved my accent, staff were always patient and helpful, and generally had time for the international student, students wanted to know where I was from and didn't mind that I didn't know whichever tiny town they were from.

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?

Physical disabilities: pretty easy as it was very flat and everywhere had lifts, but everything was spread out so wheelchairs would have it easier than crutches. Learning disabilities: I honestly don't know but they did have an office specifically for disabled students and lecturers were quite accepting of differences. Everything else: Victoria was so accepting and laid-back, I got the impression that elsewhere in Canada minorities have a harder time but UVic is full of students from all over the place and seemed to value diversity. There was an active Pride group on campus. There was campus security called on some pro- and anti-abortion protesters scuffling but that was more a source of amusement than discontent to the wider community at UVic.

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

I never witnessed any discrimination myself, though I did get some questions about my ethnic background (NZ, therefore Maori, right? Nope.). Everyone likes Kiwis there (some even knew not to call us Aussies!!!)

## **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?

Everything. Slacklining, frisbee, quiddich, ballroom dance, debates, religious, every faculty had their own group although their levels of activity varied. I would recommend trying everything you are possibly interested in. The Tuesday evening dancing (ceroc? rock n' roll?) looked really fun but living off campus, I wasn't able to make it.

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

Make friends, go to Seattle and Portland and Vancouver (drive if you can, it's cheaper), maybe skiing up island or on the mainland, whale watching and surfing at Tofino on the West Coast, Calgary for a white Christmas

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

On campus- quite a bit. You apply to worklife and they find you jobs on campus. There are food stalls and various admin jobs for the faculty. Off campus, you'll need a work visa so I wouldn't recommend it (but it is possible).

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

There were various advocacy groups that needed volunteers; you could do quite a lot. Internships you ran into the visa problem and most internships went to domestic students for their co-op program (they do internships for half a year during their degree instead of studying on campus).

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

- 1 Warm coat. They like coats and scarves over thermals because you get inside and take them off.
- 2 Gumboots. Or buy your own there. They are a valid footwear choice (I know, right?)
- 3 Smartphone. Plans are expensive so get a discount by bringing your own phone or going by prepay.
- 4 Medium bag for travelling, enough for a week or a month (you would go with a large suitcase but travelling domestically requires less)
- 5 Multiboard so you only need one adaptor for your NZ electronics

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

- 1 The Church just south of the Uni does free dinners on Tuesday. Good, plentiful food in walking distance and afterwards they allow tupperware.
- 2 Buses are free (or you pay a fixed amount at the beginning of the year) so take the 16 to Walmart for groceries (get a backpack to put them in and save your fingers)
- 3 The transit app for smartphones is the best thing ever it tells you what buses are leaving near you, where they stop and where they are going
- 4 If you register for a Starbucks card, they give you a free drink on your birthday and they send you offers by email. They have more flavours than us; it is cheaper, and totally addictive.
- 5 Buying textbooks at SUBtext in the Student Union Building can be waaay cheaper as it's pretty much a student-to-student marketplace but get in quick for the cheap ones. You can also rent them or get them online, but order online early because postage.

## Top 5 Things to do

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

- 1 Eat at Red Fish Blue Fish on the waterfront
- 2 Go ice skating (Tuesdays are cheap at Oak Bay Rec Centre)
- 3 Go over the Rockies (bus or train; the international student association does a trip every so often)
- 4 Watch a hockey game at the Save On Memorial centre (the Victoria Royals wear blue)
- 5 See Niagara Falls from the Canadian side. It's a short (Canadian short, like 2 hours) drive from Toronto, is absolutely gorgeous, and there are heaps of fun activities on the Canadian side.

## H: Personal Experience

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

I've always wanted to live overseas for a bit. The VicOE (as it was called when I applied) seemed like the perfect way to get that experience within a low-cost, low-risk structure. Part of me expected to go on weekends away all year, but that's not who I am; instead, I made friends with the locals, carved pumpkins, celebrated Thanksgiving, and basically built myself a life in Victoria BC. It's there I really got to know who I was, without the relationships and things that have defined me since day one. The last few months I spent travelling, seeing the country and making friends, if only for a day. I am now broke BUT IT WAS SO WORTH IT. The entire thing felt like a holiday, but at the same time, it was real life, and I am desperately sad that it is over. If you have the chance? Go. You might never another chance like this.