

THE BASICS

Your first name: Lisa
Your email address: cotttrell@uvic.ca
Your partner university: University of Newcastle (Australia)
Your UVic major during the exchange: Political Science
UVic session(s) during which your exchange occurred: Spring 08

.....

GENERAL EVALUATION

Please rate your overall exchange experience on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5+++

Comments: I cannot say enough about the positive impact this experience has had on my life. It challenged me to grow, mature, relax, be spontaneous, and open my mind to the possibility of being a different version of myself. It was the most fulfilling experience of my life, and I am, beyond a doubt, a better person for doing it.

.....

ARRIVAL

How satisfied were you with your experience of arriving in your host country or city? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments: Email the international support office to arrange all the details about transportation from Sydney to Newcastle, there are lots of options and they are very helpful. I recommend the Happy Cabby (shuttle bus between Sydney-Central Coast-Newcastle). They meet you in the airport, drive you right to the front door of your destination, all for \$50 or so. It's a beautiful drive with lots to see and way quicker than taking the train and struggling with your bags. Also, the odds are if you arrive within a couple days of orientation week, you won't be the only one trekking up to Newcastle (it's about two hours north of Sydney). I met three students going to the Uni of Newcastle in the airport and kept in touch with all of them.

What assistance, if any, did you receive when you arrived at your exchange destination? Phoned the Happy Cabby operator because my flight was late, and they made sure the driver picked me up.

How difficult was it for you to obtain your travel documents (visa, etc.)? Wasn't hard at all. All the forms are online and very straight forward.

.....

ORIENTATION AND ASSISTANCE

How satisfied were you with the orientation and assistance available to students at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments: The interesting thing about the Uni of Newcastle is they run 3 orientations at once. One is run by each of the residences (called colleges), one is run by the international office and another by the university for new students. If you live on college (at Evatt House, International House or Edwards Halls), I highly recommend doing that orientation because it is organized around social events, many of which involve leaving campus, and includes some on campus orientation. You can get a timetable of all three orientations so you can pick and choose, mix and match, which things you go to. For example, I did almost every Evatt House orientation event, and one of the international student events.

How easy was it to find information you needed to know right away? It was very easy because I lived on college and was surrounded by students who knew the ropes.

What help did you receive from the international staff or office? I didn't use the international office.

What was your impression of the international staff or office? The staff on the orientation trip were very enthusiastic, many were international students themselves and were very informative.

What was the orientation like at your partner university, if there was one, and how well did it suit your needs? See above comments.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site and were there people you could talk to about what you were experiencing? Because the college I stayed at sees international students come and go every semester there were many people to talk with about my experiences, as well as many other international students. I don't know what was available through the international office however I know that there was counseling services on campus much like UVic. In general there was some culture shock for sure but because there were many similarities too it wasn't overwhelming and I found it more entertaining than anything.

HOUSING

How satisfied were you with the housing available to students? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments: I believe living on campus is essential to a quality, fulfilling experience at Newcastle. Living on college was at the heart of my experience. It is a culture within itself. College at Newcastle is nothing like residence at UVic. Once students make it on campus, they can stay as long as they want until they are done their degree so there is a good mix of older students and new students. It also creates a healthy college rivalry and college spirit unmatched by anything I ever saw living on campus at UVic. There is inter-college sporting competitions, debating competitions, and fund-raising competitions. Each college has a residence association that plans events for its residents. Almost every week we had some event to attend like karaoke, balls, barbeques, trivia, wine tours, theme parties, beach days, pub nights, trips to Sydney or sporting events. Living at Evatt House was intense fun all the time.

*** housing is very competitive on campus at Newcastle. They will try to give you the impression you will not get on campus. APPLY EARLY. Take the time to fill out your application well with lots of detail and lots of enthusiastic comments. They are after perceived overachievers so talk yourself up. Highlight any diversities you may have (religion, ethnicity, personal challenges) and community involvement. And most importantly, harass the housing people weekly. If you don't get in at first, make phone calls and write emails and you will most likely get in. If you can direct all your correspondence to the specific college you want itself rather than the general housing office (after your initial application) you are more likely to get in. Speak to the head or deputy head of college him/herself. Or email an RA to help you get in (you can find this information on the websites).

How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term? A week or more, they just need email the office of the college they get into and ask. A nightly fee applies.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? Each college has a different set up. Evatt is self catered. International House has dinner provided Sunday-Thursday. Edwards Hall is fully catered and Baraheinaban is self catered. A good thing to know is that about 70% of Australian students living on college have cars so there is always someone driving to the grocery store.

How satisfied were you with the food? I was self-catered. Most foods are the same.

How close are the residences to the university? On campus. No building is more than a ten minute walk away.

Could students stay in the residences during major holidays? **Yes.**

Which residence would you recommend to UVic students? **EVATT HOUSE!!! Or International House. It is best to avoid Baraheinaban because it is mostly older, non-english speaking students and it isn't very involved in any college activities. Other international student who I knew that lived there were not happy with their experience.**

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? **I didn't but housing is hard to find off campus because a flood a couple years ago destroyed many basement suites.**

What should future UVic exchange students know about living off-campus? **Newcastle is very spread out so it is best to look into what neighbourhoods you are moving into. Downtown or close to the university are best for transportation links to the school.**

COURSE REGISTRATION

How satisfied were you with the registration process at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: **3.5**

Comments: **I didn't get any information about registration before arriving. Domestic students had already registered before I did, however that didn't pose a problem. I just asked my RA to show me how to do it and it was simple.**

Please describe the registration process at your partner university. **It is online. You pick the class, register for it in My Hub (the program that takes care of every students' stuff [you access My Hub using the code on your student card]) and then register for the corresponding tutorial separately using the link on the side of the screen. There is much help available at the Student Services.**

What kind of help was available? **Student Services and International office.**

How successful were you in registering for classes you wanted? **Harder than at UVic because many classes are only offered in one semester and not the other, but in general I was very satisfied with what I got.**

What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your partner university? **Don't plan on getting specific classes to fulfill UVic degree requirements because they might not be offered in the semester you attend. Keep an open mind.**

ACADEMICS

How satisfied were you with the academic program at your partner university? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: **3.5**

Comments: **Australians take university a lot less seriously than Canadians. It is widely accepted that passing is good enough. The university likes to make it easier for students to pass but also is reluctant to give out anything over 80%. Most marks fall between 63-73% and it is very hard to do worse than that or better than that (in Arts...Sciences and Engineering is very difficult and most students only receive passing grades). There are only four letter grade HD (High Distinction), D (Distinction), C (Credit), P (Pass) and F (fail). Overall, on my exchange, academics took a back seat to social aspects, but this was also the case for most Australians.**

How did the style of teaching at your partner university compare with that at UVic? *Very different. Professors aren't as engaged and every class has a tutorial no matter what year it is. The tutors are more hands on than the professors but in general, teaching was not at the core of the learning experience.*

How did the workload compare to what you would expect at UVic? *About the same. Not as much testing.*

How many courses did you take in your first term abroad? *4*

Your second term? *N/A*

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other UVic students visiting your partner university? *3-4 classes. Lecture is only once a week and tutorial is only once a week so if you plan it right you can have a pretty open schedule. I took a full course load (4 classes) and only went to school three days a week.*

What specific courses would you recommend to visiting UVic students? *Aboriginal Studies 1110: Intro to Aboriginal Studies and Geog 1030: Global Poverty and Development*

Why? *Abor studies is really relevant to understanding contemporary Australia and is a great intersection point for Canadian and Australian culture.*

If you studied in a non-English speaking country, what was the availability of courses offered in English? *N/A*

What advice would you give UVic students about succeeding academically at your partner university? *Don't focus on one medium of delivery, take a little bit from lectures, readings and tutorials. You don't need to do 100% of each.*

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your partner university? *I didn't use many of them but what I did see what similar to UVic. I didn't notice a lack of anything.*

What electronic devices would you recommend a UVic student bring (laptop, PDA, etc.)? *If you live on campus bring a laptop, it is more important as a connection to home than it is academically though. They have a network for free, instant downloads of whatever you want too if you live on campus! ☺*

COSTS

Please indicate currency:

Books - per term: *AUD \$80 (many courses use course packs which are dirt cheap compared to UVic and/or have all the course readings posted online)*

Accommodation - per month: *AUD \$133-\$250 a week (rent in Australia is per week not per month) however, if living on campus accommodation fees are paid in one or two lump sum payments (approximately AUD \$3200 a semester)*

Meals - per month: *food is more expensive in Oz so if self catering about 400 a month conservatively, fully catered college is \$85 a week and partially is \$40*

Local transportation - per month: *AUD \$20 there is no bus pass system in Newcastle but you do get a 50% student discount on public transportation*

Health insurance - per term: *around CAD \$300*

Personal spending - per term: *CAD \$4000 or approx. AUD\$5000 conservatively*

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: *AUD \$ 40*

Other university related fees - per term: *\$100 for college based activities*

EXTRA-CURRICULAR/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

How satisfied were you with the out-of-class opportunities at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5+++

Comments: All the best extra curricular activities are run through the colleges which is more incentive to live on campus if you can.

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? Each college has activities to get involved in like intercollege sports teams (baseball, rugby, cricket, badminton and netball), writing articles for the college magazine, dress up days, theme parties, wine tours, weekend trips, fundraisers and events for cultural holidays like ANZAC Day, Autonomy Day.

What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students? Everything and anything put on by the colleges if you live on college. Put yourself out there and really get into the culture. Don't hold back.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays? Sydney (Northern Beaches, Central Business District [Queen Victoria Building, Centre Point Tower, Opera House, Botanical Gardens], Darling Harbour, Bondi, Manly, 3 hours south by train), Central Coast (Lake Macquarie area 1 hour by train), Port Stephens area (Nelson Bay 1 hour drive), Great Barrier Reef (from Magnetic Island because isn't as over-populated and over used than Cairns and the island has a great laid back attitude 3 hour plane ride), Hunter Valley (world famous wine country, my wine tour with friends was one of my favourite days my whole trip, 1 hour drive), New Zealand (South Island is definitely worth the trip 4 hour plane ride), and an inland city if you have the opportunity because it's a side of Australia and Australian culture that is totally different than what you find on the coast.

***Jetstar is a great budget airline in Australia and offers great deals on flights. All the exchangers as well as Aussie students flew Jetstar (Virgin Blue is also a low cost airline that offers cheaper flights within Oz and between Oz and NZ)

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

Off-campus? Yes lots of places wanting casual employees...minimum wage in Australia is around \$15 an hour and double time on Sundays and double time and a half on holidays☺

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

.....

SAFETY AND HEALTH

How safe did you feel at your exchange site? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is the best rating):

Rating: 5

Comments: I never felt unsafe once in Newcastle or Australia more generally. The same safety concerns apply there as do here. Common sense.

What are the biggest safety concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site? Traveling on the train at night can be intimidating. Travel in the cars with the blue light on the outside of it that means there is a guard in that car. Like anywhere, try not to travel public transit alone at night.

What are the biggest health concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site? Undertows and rips while swimming, and nasty sunburns. Also, bad diet and too much drinking makes it easy to catch colds and gain the exchange 15!!

.....

PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

What was it like making friends? Living on college it was very easy to make friends. I lived with eight other people with whom I shared 2 bathrooms and a kitchen and another 10 lived upstairs so it was like built in friends. Everyone was so enthusiastic and open-minded. It was a very inclusive environment. It

was easy to make friends, and by putting in the effort to get to know people on a more personal basis I was able to make many life long friends.

How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students? Very successful because I lived on a college with 75% Australian students and because I made a conscious effort to focus my time and energy on living an authentic Australian life while I was there. I did know other international students who lived off campus that did not make many close Australian friends but made friends with other international students.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site? Many people say Australia isn't that different to Canada but they are wrong. There are many cultural differences but they just aren't so obvious as food or language. They are more subtle things that run through all aspects of life. Some days were easier than others but in general adjusting to the culture was something that came very naturally and easily once I stopped trying to classify things and make value based judgments about things in comparison to Canadian culture. In other words, I stopped fighting it or trying to do things the Canadian way. Once I just let go, threw myself into it, and decided I was going to become as Australian as I could it was very easy and very comfortable.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? Some of the cultural differences I noticed the most were how people communicate with each other (Australians are less politically correct, polite and subtle than Canadians and a little more crass however it is all in good fun and not meant to be offensive), the lifestyle (Australia has a large drinking/partying culture, they are more laid back than Canadians, they are very prone to prioritizing play over work), and the media is very liberal (lots of swearing sex and nudity) but they are very strict on drugs and alcohol (in the pubs in Newcastle there are no shots and no doubles served after 10). In general, I would say Australian culture is a very young one. Not all the differences were challenging but sometimes they could be especially in the first couple weeks when interacting with Australian people.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate? The go big or go home attitude, the laid back nature of people, and the live in the moment spirit the whole country seems to have.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students? Very well by everyone.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? It would be fairly easy, the only concern would be the spread-out and hilly campus.

For students who are visible minorities in your host country? Very easy. Australia is very multicultural.

TAKING STOCK

What are the three most important things for students to take with them when they go to your host country or region?

Deodorant (Australia only has spray or roll on and they don't work...something you find out the hard way)
Sunscreen over 30 SPF (because they don't have anything over 30 there if you need it)
Reese's Pieces/Peanut butter Cups (you don't realize how much you love them til you cant get them AND they can be traded like gold to Australian's who will do just about anything to get their hands on them).

What are the three most important things you would tell a UVic student who is going to your partner university on exchange?

Push yourself to do things outside of your comfort zone and try as many new and unexpected things as you can.

Quality not quantity...its more important to get to know a few people and places very well than try to see half the country.

Don't hold back.

Is there any other information that you think might prove useful to UVic exchange students attending your host university?

Optus has the best pay as you go cell phone deals.

Food/alcohol is 20% more expensive so make sure to budget for that.

There aren't bus/train passes included but you do get a 50% concession if you are a student.

In the summer and fall, bug-spray will be your best friend as the University is built on forest land.

What was the most rewarding part of your exchange experience?

Without a doubt, making life long friends with some amazing people. I knew I would make friends, but I had no idea I would leave with family and that was the most rewarding part of my exchange.

What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?

Allowing myself to change and preparing myself to leave.

How has your perspective changed as a result of the exchange? It has allowed me to appreciate the beauty of our country and the subtleties of Canadian culture. It also has made me realize that the people in the world have a lot more in common than they do in difference. Most of all, it gave me more confidence in myself, helped me to learn to make the most of the moment, and taught me to not take life too seriously.

What else do you want to say about your exchange experience? If anyone wants to know anything more about my exchange or has questions about Newcastle, the uni or living on campus, please feel free to email me!