

THE BASICS

Your first name: [Laura](#)

Your email address: lstocker@uvic.ca

Your partner university: [Université Libre de Bruxelles](#)

Your UVic major during the exchange: [Political Science](#)

UVic session(s) during which you did your exchange: [Spring 2009](#)

GENERAL EVALUATION

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

Rating: [4](#)

Comments:

In general, I had a really amazing time. Although I was only there for five one semester, I feel I was able to fit a lot in. I met a lot of really interesting people and now have friends from all over the world. The school system was very different from the way it is in Canada and it was a very challenging but worthwhile experience to learn how to adapt.

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: [3.5](#)

Comments:

It was rather stressful to obtain a visa, as all the necessary documentation was not specified correctly in the checklist, but my arrival went very smoothly.

What assistance, if any, did you receive when you arrived at your exchange destination?

I was very lucky as my landlord picked me up from the airport and drove me to the house I was renting from him.

How difficult was it for you to obtain your travel documents (visa, etc.)?

It is best to start very early gathering all the documents you need to apply for a student visa. I had problems with the office in Montreal because I was under the impression I had sent them all the necessary information, but some of it did not meet their unspecified requirements, so I had to send more.

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: [4](#)

Comments:

At the beginning, I was very satisfied with the exchange coordinators and the university. While still in Canada, I received a general information package and received a more extensive one during my first week of arrival.

How easy was it to find information you needed to know right away?

There was a mandatory two hour meeting during the first week where the exchange coordinator went over a lot of information.

What help did you receive from the international staff or office?

They were generally available if you stopped by their office during the week with questions.

What was your impression of the international staff or office?

They were quite helpful and friendlier than any of the other faculty

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

Besides the two-hour meeting and information packages, the university had an association called EXPRESS which was put on by local students to interact with exchange students. It was a really great club and they organized a lot of fun events and travel days. It was a great way to meet other exchange students.

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?

I found I settled right in to life in Brussels, but In the information packaged it listed ways to deal with homesickness, such as keeping a journal or talking to other students or the coordinator. It also suggested where to find professional help for more serious cases.

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: 3

Comments:

There is very little university housing available to students, and international students are given last priority- there were only 20 rooms available. I lived off-campus so am not familiar with the university housing

How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term? *N/A*

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? *N/A*

How satisfied were you with the food? *N/A*

How close are the residences to the university? *I believe they were just a couple blocks away*

Could students stay in the residences during major holidays? *N/A*

Which residence would you recommend to UVic students? *N/A*

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find?

It was a little difficult to find, however there were several websites which posted listings. The off-campus housing on the ULB website was difficult to navigate through and usually the adds were out-of-date

What should future UVic exchange students know about living off-campus?

The best area of the city to live in is "Ixelles," the university quarter. If you do not live in Ixelles, it is best to find accommodation close to transit.

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: 2.5

Comments:

The registration process itself was rather easy, although was not done online. However, you had three weeks to attend classes to see if you like it or not (classes were only once a week, so you attended three classes). Once registered for a course, it is PERMANENT, which was not made clear.

Please describe the registration process at your partner university.

You fill out a form, listing the classes you want to take, and then hand it in to your academic coordinator

What kind of help was available?

The coordinator had office hours two hours once a week, so usually you waited in a long line to speak with him/her. I was not given any advice about the courses I should/shouldn't be taking, and ended up taking several advanced courses without any warning from the coordinator.

How successful were you in registering for classes you wanted?

I was pleased with a few classes, but was unable to drop the ones I didn't want to take

What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your partner university?

It is imperative that you find out deadlines, as they are not always mentioned. Don't assume that the process and help are the same as in Canada

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: 2.5

Comments:

The biggest culture shock I had was the way the school system and administration works

How did the style of teaching at your partner university compare with that at UVic?

It was very different. I find that professors at UVic try to cater a relationship with their students and encourage students to ask questions and see them during their office hours. At ULB, it seemed as though teachers were too important did not care about students. They seemed to find it insulting when they were asked questions during class

How did the workload compare to what you would expect at UVic?

All the weight of the class is on either a final exam or one paper. The exam usually consisted of one or two questions and was either written or oral. Although it would seem like this is a much easier workload, it is much harder to pass exams and is very important to keep up during the whole semester. Your general knowledge of the class material is not tested; the one or two questions were often more specific.

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

N/A

Your second term?

6 + 1 French course

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other UVic students visiting your partner university?

Courses at ULB are usually worth fewer credits than at UVic so if you want to receive full credit you need to take 6 or 7. I would recommend taking 5 if possible.

What specific courses would you recommend to visiting UVic students?

I took both 300 and 400 level courses and I recommend taking only 300 level ones. The 400 level is actually their first-year masters courses.

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

There were limited courses in English available, especially in Political Science.

What advice would you give UVic students about succeeding academically at your partner university?

It is important to stay on top of the material and do as much reading as you can as you will only be evaluated by the final exam

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

Good

What electronic devices would you recommend a UVic student bring (laptop, PDA, etc.)?
Bring a laptop.

COSTS

Please indicate currency:

Books - per term: *I was able to find most of my books in the library and did not buy any*

Accommodation - per month: *I was able to find something relatively cheap, but usually around \$500-700*

Meals - per month: *I spent around \$300*

Local transportation - per month: *\$90, with a \$45 rebate, but I am still waiting for my reimbursement...*

Health insurance - per term: *previously covered*

Personal spending - per term:

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: *\$35/month*

Other university related fees - per term: *some courses offered a "syllabus" which was a printed version of the professor's lecture. These were around \$15 each*

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: *4*

Comments:

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students?

The EXPRESS association, Student unions, sports centre

What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

It depends on your interests. I highly recommend being involved with the EXPRESS group. If you are interested, you can also sign up and take different sports classes.

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

I recommend to just see and do as much as you can. I recommend travelling, but it is also fun to explore the city you are living in. Look out for local events, such as outdoor concerts.

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

I don't know

Off-campus?

I don't know

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

I know a few exchange students were able to get involved with the EU parliament but I don't know any details

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: *4*

Comments

Most of the time, I felt very safe. While travelling or living in a foreign city, it is always a good idea to remain alert, but I found like Brussels was a safe city. It is best to find out the areas to stay away from.

What are the biggest safety concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

I was constantly taking the metro which I wasn't used to. I was fine after a while, but at first I was a little apprehensive.

What are the biggest health concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?

PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

What was it like making friends?

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

It was a little more difficult to make friends with Belgians as there is a significant exchange student population. I would recommend living with locals instead of other exchange students, especially if you want to practice speaking French. Sometimes it is hard to make friends in class, especially, if you are uncomfortable speaking French.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site?

Brussels is a very international city and I found in general I didn't have a problem adjusting.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?

The most challenging difference for me was the school system and just realizing that it isn't the same everywhere. It seems obvious that it isn't the same, but not until you deal with the administration, do you realize that it is very, very different.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Belgians are well-known for several things, such as their chocolate, waffles, fries, comics, (and beer). It was fun discovering these and seeing just how important they are to locals.

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

In general I was treated fine. The other students were nice, and the coordinators were approachable. As I mentioned before, I was surprised with the attitudes of the faculty. I also found that shopkeepers, waiters, etc were not overly welcoming.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?

I noticed elevators in several, if not all, of the buildings.

For students who are visible minorities in your host country?

TAKING STOCK

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

An open mind, a positive attitude, and a journal

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

Step out of your comfort zone a little when trying new things, take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way, and make the most out of every day

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

What was the most rewarding part of your exchange experience?

The most rewarding part would have to be passing all my classes in the end, as I had taken a few courses that were too challenging for me, especially in French. It felt very good to have persevered and not given up.

What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?

As I said before, my greatest challenge was how the school system works.

How has your perspective changed as a result of the exchange?

I now have a new appreciation for Canadian universities. Also, since I spent a lot of time visiting the city I was living in, I am excited to discover new things here, locally.

What else do you want to say about your exchange experience?

It was a really great experience and I feel like I have become a stronger person after living on my own in a foreign city.