

THE BASICS

Your first name: Emily

Your email address: etwilson@uvic.ca

Your partner university: Victoria University of Wellington

Your UVic major during the exchange: Biology

UVic session(s) during which you did your exchange: Winter 2012

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GENERAL EVALUATION

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

Rating: 5

Comments:

Absolutely the best thing I have ever done. This exchange gave me so many opportunities, challenges, and experiences through which I gained confidence and lifelong friendships.

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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: 4

Comments:

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

The university offers an airport pickup service to take you to your accommodation, but because I was staying in a hotel when I arrived, they wouldn't pick me up. The hall I was going to be staying in was very helpful though, and they let me leave a suitcase there while I travelled around New Zealand.

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

I found it pretty straightforward. You need a student visa, and the application form tells you exactly what other documents are required.

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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:

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

Usually I found the information I needed on the university website or by asking friends. When I did need further help, the international office was prompt in answering emails.

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

They helped me with class registration, filing an insurance claim, and signing up for events.

What was your impression of the international staff or office?

They were friendly and able to answer any questions or point me in the right direction. I found them a bit difficult to deal with in person because they were so busy and couldn't spare the time I needed.

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

There was an orientation for all international students. It was mandatory, as we couldn't finalize our registration until we received a stamp for attending the orientation. I found it very long and dull, and they gave us a lot of information, some of which was useful while some was irrelevant.

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?

Cultural adjustment was challenging at times and I had to deal with homesickness. There were a lot of resources on campus, such as the international office and counselling services. When I needed to talk to someone I usually went to my international buddy, who was extremely helpful.

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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: 4

Comments:

I lived in Stafford House, which was great. However, I had difficulties with one of my flatmates, which had a negative effect on my housing experience.

How early could students move in to housing at the beginning of term?

Students could arrange to move in as early as they wanted, but had to pay for the additional nights before the contract start date.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities?

Some halls have a meal plan while others are self-catered. My hall was self-catered and I shared a kitchen with two other flatmates.

How satisfied were you with the food?

Very satisfied! There was a supermarket nearby and a veggie market every Sunday, and the kitchen was well equipped (we had a dishwasher, but no oven.)

How close are the residences to the university?

They are scattered around the city. Some are right next to the main campus, while others are downtown. My hall was close to the commerce and law campus, but the main campus was only about a 20-minute walk or 5-minute bus ride.

Could students stay in the residences during major holidays? Yes

Which residence would you recommend to UVic students?

Stafford House has a mix of international and local students and is good if you want to avoid the first year halls but still want a social atmosphere. Apply as soon as the application opens or you may end up waitlisted.

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

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

If you want to find a place once you're in New Zealand, arrive as early as possible. Options will be very limited right before classes begin. Check out ads on trademe.co.nz and the university listing service.

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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

Comments:

Please describe the registration process at your partner university.

Registration was pretty complicated. First you send in a list for pre-approval of classes that you might want to take. They will look at your prerequisites and tell you which classes you can take. Make sure to check the timetables before you do this to make sure there aren't any clashes. You can submit as many classes as you want, but you only get one chance for pre-approval so make sure you include several backups. Then you can register online for the classes you actually want. Finally, at the international orientation you wait in a really long line, then they will check your student visa and allow you to finalize your registration. You can also add or drop classes at this time.

What kind of help was available?

The International Office was available by email throughout the registration process.

How successful were you in registering for classes you wanted?

Somewhat successful. I wanted to take a first year design class, but I wasn't approved. Otherwise I got the classes I wanted.

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

Be organized. Expect a few bumps along the way, but don't panic. There is always someone who can fix the problem, and you can always change your schedule after orientation.

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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: 4

Comments:

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

The lecture style was fairly similar. Class sizes were generally smaller, but I found it was more difficult to get help from lecturers outside of class. My classes also had a lab or a tutorial, which were similar to those at UVic.

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

For me the course workload was heavier than at UVic, and I was expected to do more work outside of class. But since I only took three courses, it was about the same workload overall.

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

Your second term? NA

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

A full course load is three 20-point courses or four 15-point courses. I would recommend three.

What specific courses would you recommend to visiting UVic students? Why?

Maori Society and Culture was a good way to gain a solid understanding of New Zealand history and contemporary indigenous culture.

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

What advice would you give UVic students about succeeding academically at your partner university?
Stay on top of the workload, and make friends with local and international students in your classes right away so you have people to study with.

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

The wi-fi on campus was painfully slow. The library was great for research and there were lots of computer facilities and printers available.

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

COSTS

Please indicate currency: NZD

Books - per term: \$40

Accommodation - per month: \$800

Meals - per month: \$160

Local transportation - per month: \$30

Health insurance - per term: \$235

Personal spending - per term: \$600 (excluding travel)

Communications (phone, etc.) - per term: \$130

Other university related fees - per term: NA

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:

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

There were lots of clubs and sports teams you could join. The tramping (hiking) club was especially popular with exchange students. There were also several events put on by Victoria International, the exchange club and the International Buddy Program, which were a great way to meet people from all over the world.

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

Any club that interests you. I would also recommend signing up for the buddy program – they match you with a local student with similar interests who can help you adjust to life in Wellington. My buddy became one of my best friends.

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

Try to see as much of New Zealand as possible. Bus tickets are cheap and can take you anywhere. The Tongariro crossing is a must-do hike (but go before it gets too cold!) There are also tons of activities right in Wellington – hang out downtown, go to the zoo or the Zealandia nature sanctuary, explore one of the suburbs, go to a rugby game, go rock climbing or rollerskating on the waterfront, jump in the ocean, take a ferry to Somes Island, explore the many cafes and bars on Cuba Street and Courtenay Place – you'll never run out of things to do!

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

I'm not sure. As far as I know, you aren't allowed to work on a student visa.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?
It's not something I looked into, but there are probably lots of volunteer opportunities in Wellington.

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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:

What are the biggest safety concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?
The same as anywhere, just use common sense. I always felt safe in Wellington, but I made sure to walk home with someone or take a taxi at the end of the night. I wouldn't recommend driving unless you have experience driving on the left side of the road. And make sure to look the right way before crossing the street!

What are the biggest health concerns for future exchange students going to your exchange site?
None really, but there was a free clinic on campus for any health concerns.

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PERSONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

What was it like making friends?
I made a few close friends very quickly, mostly people in my hall and other international students. Before going on exchange, making friends was something I worried about, but I had no trouble at all.

How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?
I found it hard to talk to local students in my classes, but I met several local students in my hall and through other friends.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange site?
It was pretty easy to adjust at first, as the culture is similar in many ways. What became difficult were the small cultural differences that you notice after a month or two in New Zealand. These were very frustrating, but I found it comforting to know that this is a natural part of cultural adjustment and many of my fellow international students were experiencing the same thing.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging?
I sometimes found it difficult to make connections with locals because they tended to be more reserved. Also the lack of central heating, people assuming I was American, and walking on the left side of the sidewalk (more frustrating than it sounds!)

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?
The "sweet as" kiwi slang, laid-back attitude, environmental awareness and cultural inclusion.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?
Most people were very welcoming and friendly, and were willing to go out of their way to help you.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university?
The campus seemed very accessible, with many resources available for students with disabilities.

For students who are visible minorities in your host country?
Wellington is a culturally diverse city so I don't think it would be a problem.

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TAKING STOCK

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

- Camera
- Good walking shoes
- Rain jacket/windbreaker

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

- Keep an open mind and always have a backup plan.
- Get out and do as much as possible, especially in the first few weeks of school, as this is the best way to make friends and become immersed in the culture.
- Don't expect every moment to be amazing. A lot of them will, but some of them won't. When you look back you will be a better person for all of it.

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

Not that I can think of, but I can answer any questions by email.

What was the most rewarding part of your exchange experience?

The friendships I made and the opportunity to define my own experience and be completely independent.

What was your greatest challenge on the exchange?

Homesickness was definitely one of my biggest challenges. I was able to overcome it by having a support system in New Zealand and keeping in touch with my family.

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

I think the most important thing I learned is that I am in control. Of my life, of my experiences, and of my happiness. There will ALWAYS be highs and lows, but it is up to me to find the best in all things. I learned that I am strong and smart and adventurous. I learned that I can do just about anything on my own.

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

There's not much left to say, but I have no regrets and would do it all over again!