



**2013-2014 Student Mobility/Exchange Program
Returning Undergraduate Student Report**

Host University: Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

Host Country: Israel

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Architecture

Semester: February-June 2014

Date of Report: August 2014

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor **Excellent**
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please explain your rating.

Why did you choose this host institution? What key factors or issues influenced your decision?

I chose Israel because it was one of the places on the list of schools that I knew the least about. I have travelled a lot, and wanted to go on an exchange somewhere completely new to me. I was really curious about Israel because of the political and religious issues there that are not like anywhere else.

What was the most meaningful thing you learned while studying off campus?

I learnt how important it is to be open-minded. Jerusalem is a very interesting city, and you need to be open-minded to experience it to the fullest.

Please share three of your most positive experiences and three of the biggest challenges you faced.

Positive experiences:

Studying at a new school. The Architecture school was really great.
Making friends with some really interesting people from around the world.
Learning about the political situation first hand was really interesting

Negative experiences:

Many classes are only offered in Hebrew, which makes the selection for exchange students very limited.
Getting used to Shabbat was a bit difficult.

2. PREPARATION

Please describe your preparation for the exchange, including banking, travel documents and student visa application. In retrospect, would you have done anything differently?

I got a student visa through the Israeli Consulate on Bloor. You need to make an appt before going, for any reason. It is best to get your VISA ahead of time. I took a lot of cash with me to pay for the dorms, and for the first couple months of living. I found this to be okay, if you are comfortable travelling with a lot of cash.

I bank with Scotiabank and there were only specific machines that accepted my debit card, so I would withdrawal large amounts at a time from that specific machine. Other Canadian students, with other financial institutions didn't have this problem.

Are there any important items (e.g. art & design supplies, documents, specialty foods, health items) that a student should take to your host country?

I am not a picky eater, so I was fine with all of the food. I can't recall anything that I needed and they didn't have.

3. ARRIVAL

Was anyone at the airport, train station, etc. to meet you? Did you experience any difficulties upon arrival?

No one from the school meets you at the airport.

If you are staying in the dorms it can be a bit tricky when you arrive. I had to go to the university to pay first at the post office and get a slip before going to the dorms. This can be difficult with a lot of luggage. I booked a hotel for the first night, because I was alone and arrived late. This way I could get the papers organized in the morning, then pick up my luggage.

From the airport the easiest way is to take a Sherut (shared taxi) for 60 shekels and it takes you directly where you need to go. If you arrive Friday night to Saturday night public transposition is closed so Sheruts are your only option.

When should students plan to arrive at the host university? When did you arrive? Would you have benefited from arriving earlier?

I arrived 2 weeks before school started because I was in the Hebrew class offered by Bezalel. I think it is good to be there a bit earlier.

Was there an orientation session offered at your host university? If yes, did you attend and what did you learn?

Bezalel has an orientation for all the exchange students. I would recommend attending this. The registration process is a bit confusing, and the orientation helps a little. They had cookies, drinks, Tshirts and clipboards as well.

Is there a coordinating office for international students, including exchange students, at your host university? Is there a staff person you would recommend students approach with their questions?

There is one lady named Sarit and she deals with everything for exchange students.

4. ACCOMMODATION

Where did you live during your exchange? Were you happy with your accommodation?

I lived in the dorms. It was the easiest choice, but I would have preferred to live in the center near the Architecture department.

Did you have any difficulties arranging accommodation yourself? Did the host institution assist you in finding accommodation?

Organizing dorm accommodations is easy. If you want to live in an apartment outside of the student village its useful to contact exchange student that are already there. You can join the Bezalel exchange student page on Facebook to help find apartments.

If you lived on-campus, which residences would you recommend? Are there any that should be avoided?

The student village was the only option. It's pretty nice. If you aren't happy with your roommates or room you can switch apartments within the first couple weeks.

5. STUDIES AT HOST INSTITUTION

To better understand the similarities and differences between academic studies at OCAD U and at your host university, please comment on the following:

Level of Academic Difficulty & Challenge:

For the architecture studio, it was a lot more demanding than OCADU. Other classes (art/design) I found less demanding.

Time spent in class (# of hours per week):

Architecture Studio is 10hrs/per week. Other classes are 2-3.

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): At least 15hrs

Oral presentations (Individual and Group):

Critiques/pin up every week in my architecture studio showing progress of project

Written assignments: None

Studio-based work:

Interaction between students and professors: All the professors were very accessible and willing to help

6. SERVICES

Were there any extracurricular activities/events scheduled for exchange/international students at your host university (cultural visits, trips, workshops, etc.)? Which ones would you recommend?

There wasn't any events organized by the school specifically for exchange students, but the exchange students organized a lot of parties/bbqs/trips etc. through the facebook group.

What were the libraries and computer facilities like?

The library and computer facilities are good.

7. COST OF LIVING

How did you prepare yourself financially for your exchange? Did you pay for the experience entirely out of your own savings? Did you receive student or bank loans? Did you apply for / receive any financial awards (scholarships or bursaries)? Did you have help from parents / family / friends?

I used my Alberta Student Loans, and I had help from my parents for tuition costs. I didn't receive any awards or scholarships.

In general, was the cost of living in your host country higher, lower, or similar to that in Canada? Please explain.

The cost of living was about the same as Toronto. I thought it would be less, but it wasn't.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1NIS = 0.31CAD

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): February/2014-June/2014

Would you estimate that you spent more, less, or the same amount as an average, local student attending your host institution?

I spent more than an average local student. Being on exchange you want to travel and see the country/neighbouring countries, which added to my expenses.

Please complete the following budget to give other students an idea of what they can expect to spend in the host country.

Basic Expenses in Canadian Dollars:

1. **Tuition and general fees (paid to OCAD U):** \$2500
2. **School supplies:** \$300
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = \$700
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month included
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month 30
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month N/A
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = \$70
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = \$50

7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$10
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = 200 for semester bus pass
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$100
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$800
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$2000
14. **Student visa:** \$100
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$

Estimated Total Expenses: \$10,000.00 (all estimations)

9. ADAPTING TO YOUR HOST COUNTRY

Did you experience any “culture shock” during your exchange? How did you deal with it? Do you have any advice for students on how to adapt to life in your host country?

The orthodox religious culture in Jerusalem was overwhelming, but you get used to it quickly. I am not Jewish, so some of the traditions, holidays and ways of life were new to me. Some Israelis are very cold and not very polite which took a bit of getting used to. You just have to make sure you don't take it personally.

Was there a lot of interaction between local students and exchange/international students? What is the best way to develop friendships with students from your host institution?

There isn't a lot of interaction between exchange students and local students. It is mostly the exchange students that stick together. My architecture studio was with only Israeli students so I was lucky to make friendships with some Israeli students.

Did you have any unforeseen problems? Was there anything that you felt was strikingly different from what you expected? If so, is there a way that you could have prepared yourself?

Shabbat: From Friday sundown until Saturday sundown most businesses and transportation is closed. This can be difficult if you want to go anywhere. From the student village it is about a 45 minute walk into the center. There are no buses to other cities either. Most businesses are closed. There are a few Arab grocery stores near the student village open on Shabbat.