



2016-2017 Student Mobility/Exchange Program Returning Undergraduate Student Report

Host University: Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

Host Country: Israel

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Fine Arts

Semester: Fall Semester

Date of Report: February 25, 2017

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

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

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

When I first decided to go on exchange I knew for certain that I didn't want to attend a school in North America. Reason being, I wanted to experience a place that I knew would be completely different and would push me out of my comfort zone. I had been accepted to Glasgow School of Art in Scotland and Bezalel but for academic administrative reasons I ended up picking Bezalel in Israel. Aside from those reasons, the main reason why I chose Bezalel was because I knew Israel had such a rich culture and history and that it would serve me well when it came to experiencing something completely new. It was also a country that I felt would serve my artistic needs and inspirations when it came to the natural environment. In addition, Israel and its history is quite significant to me on a religious and spiritual level.

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

Israel being such a dynamic country has provided me with an immense amount of experiences that I would have otherwise not experienced had I chosen another school. The political, religious and even environmental climate intertwine to form a truly unique experience. It was really interesting to learn about the political situation in Israel firsthand and it seemed to provoke a lot of thought with myself and my fellow exchange students. I met such a diverse array of people from all over the world and from all walks of life. Jerusalem is an amazing city and there is so much to see and learn. Everything is fairly accessible so you should have no problems exploring the city. I found walking to be the best way. Off-campus experiences have definitely enhanced my experience at Bezalel and has made my educational journey much more enjoyable. I have gained new perspectives and ways of approaching art and art making from a variety of teaching faculty and their eccentric methods of teaching.

One of the biggest challenges was obviously adjusting to new systems and methods of operation being used in both school and in everyday living. Registration was quite difficult because it had to be done in person. The structure of the curriculum is very loose and open in the Fine Arts department. If you are a person who needs structure you probably will have a difficult time adjusting. But the more you work, the easier it gets. Most of the studio courses were only offered in Hebrew, so I was fairly disappointed about that limitation. Overall, the positive experiences far out-weighed the challenges I faced.

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?

Preparation for my exchange was quite smooth. Living in Israel can get quite expensive so it's definitely a good idea to budget and plan out your expenses. Funds are accessible through most banks and ATMs in Israel with a Canadian debit/credit card. However, the local Israeli bank and your home bank may charge you a small bank fee depending on which bank you are with and what type of account you have. That's why it is a good idea to increase your daily/ weekly withdrawal limits to avoid withdrawing often and to keep your cash in a secure place when not in use. Visa applications, fees and requirements are all found on the website of the Israeli embassy which is located in downtown Toronto. It only takes about a week for the visa to be processed and can be mailed or picked up by you. You must make an appointment online to apply for the visa. In terms of school preparations, the exchange coordinator at Bezalel will inform you of everything you need to prepare to get ready for your semester. In retrospect, I would have started to look for a place to live a bit earlier than I did. It would have given me more options but in the end it all worked out.

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

If you are a Fine Arts student, it is a good idea to bring any small tools (e.g. sculpting tools, paintbrushes, drawing materials) and supplies that you can fit in your luggage to avoid unnecessary costs. There are art supply stores in Israel and at the school if need be. You should carry your letter of acceptance from Bezalel with you from the time you land in Israel up until the time you receive your student card. After passing customs, airport security will sometimes ask to see the letter of acceptance. You will also need the letter the first time you enter the school's campus to get through security. Once you have received your student card at orientation you will no longer need the letter to pass security; just show your student card. Most everyday items you will need can be found in any grocery or drugstore. Some hygiene products like soap, shampoo and toothpaste are a bit expensive compared to prices in Toronto, so if you can fit some of those items in your luggage, at least enough to start off with, it could help reduce some of your costs. As an exchange student at Bezalel, it is mandatory for you to purchase health insurance from a local insurance company. Any travel and health insurance that you have prior to your exchange could be used as additional coverage, so be sure to bring proof of coverage and any other insurance documents.

3. ARRIVAL

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

There was no one at the airport to meet me. I kept in contact with my roommate in Israel and he told me exactly how to get to the building where I was going to stay. Again, most people know how to speak English in Israel and the airport signs were in English as well. So I really

didn't have any difficulty navigating my way through the airport. There are 10 seater taxis outside the airport called Sheruts that will take you directly to your destination depending on what city you are staying in. So have the address ready to show to the driver. Costs 65 Shekels. I would not recommend taking a regular taxi as it is much more expensive. There is also public bus transportation but it's much easier to take the Sherut, especially if you plan on bringing more than one luggage. It is also very important to note that the Jewish holy day or Sabbath (day of rest) is every Friday late afternoon to Saturday evening, so public transportation will not be operating at that time. However Sheruts and taxis still operate at those hours. So plan accordingly if your arrival date falls on those days and hours of the week.

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

I arrived about one and a half weeks before classes started. This gave me an opportunity to get my bearings and also get used to how things operated, like public transport for example. Arriving early also gave me the chance to travel and see the sites before school consumed most of my time. Of course, there is always time during and after the semester is done if you planned not to go home right away. In summary, I feel it is best to arrive at least 1 week prior to the start of classes just so you get the chance to adjust not only to the time difference but to life in Israel. It definitely helped ease the transition and satisfy some of my wanderlust.

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

Yes, the orientation was a day before the first week of classes. I attended the orientation and many important things were discussed at this time. Things that were discussed were available facilities and their rules and regulations, fire and safety protocol, various administrative processes, student union benefits including help with obtaining a bus pass, etc. Students were also made aware of potential dangers of travelling to certain parts of Israel and Palestine. During this time, important agreements were signed and also documents sent to me prior to the exchange were to be given to the exchange coordinator. Once all documents were in order, I received my student card and mandatory health insurance documents. In addition, there was also a representative from a local cell phone company that offered students temporary SIM cards on the spot. Attending the orientation also gave me the chance to get acquainted with over 75 other exchange students from all around the world. With that said, I feel it is absolutely essential to attend the orientation.

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?

Yes, there is a coordinating office. Sarit Morad is the main exchange coordinator who you will meet at the orientation. She is more than accommodating and will help you with almost anything you need in order to make your stay in Israel and at Bezalel as comfortable as possible. She will also help you with any academic needs you may have and will direct you to people who can help you with more specific issues. Peter Maltz is a faculty member in the Fine Arts department. So if you plan to enroll in Fine Arts at Bezalel, Peter will be available to help exchange students with course selection and answer any other questions regarding courses, studio space, facility and equipment use, etc.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived in an apartment located next to the City Centre or Downtown Triangle in Jerusalem in what is known as the Russian Compound. I was quite pleased with my accommodations as it was

located in a very convenient area. Shops, restaurants, bus stops, grocery stores and even popular tourist sites were all within walking distance of my apartment. Most days it only took about 15 minutes to get to campus by bus.

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

At the beginning of my search I found it quite challenging to find a place that suited all my needs including budget, location and length of stay. But with enough persistence I was able to find an ideal place through Airbnb. I also joined a couple Facebook groups called Sublet Jerusalem to help me with my search, but most people in that group did not offer their spaces for the amount of time that I needed and some of the listings are only in Hebrew. However, it is still worth a try to join this group. The host institution did assist with finding accommodations. The exchange coordinator periodically emailed listings and contacts as they became available. Students still experiencing trouble finding accommodations after the semester started were directed to the Student Union office for further assistance.

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 and challenge: Fair

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 15 hrs

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): 8- 10 hrs

Studio-based work: all classes had at least 1 or 2 studio based assignments

Written assignments: none in Fine Arts

Interaction between students and professors: All professors were accommodating and were available to meet if need be. They even offered to continue a dialogue about future works after the exchange was over.

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?

No specific events for exchange students besides the orientation but there was a photography course made available specifically for exchange students that gave us a chance to see Jerusalem more intimately. There were always little trips and get-togethers planned amongst the exchange students. Also, a few exchange students organized their own exhibitions in the city.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The library and computer facilities were good. Quite similar to what we have at OCADU.

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 received a special exchange bursary in the amount of 4k; that was a huge help in terms of paying for tuition. It's a very simple application process. The rest was entirely out of my own savings.

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

In general, the cost of living is quite similar to that of Canada. Rent in Jerusalem's city center, (most exchange students lived here) can be anywhere from \$700-\$1000 CAD/month. Also, particular food items seem a bit more expensive than in Canada. However, if you look hard enough, budget well and are willing to make some compromises you'll be able to find something reasonable and live comfortably during your exchange. Not to mention, views are amazing in Jerusalem!

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1 CAD = 2.74 NIS (New Israeli Shekel)

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): 10/ 2016- 02/2017

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

I probably spent more mainly because of where I chose to live. But that doesn't include the trips I took before, during and after the semester.

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):** \$3,400
2. **School supplies:** \$100
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ 975/month
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month
 - D) **Other (specify) cell plan:** \$45 /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$100 /month
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** (provided by roommate in Israel)

7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = (included in apartment)
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$200 Student Rav Kav card (bus pass) for the semester
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$175
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$200
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$ none
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$1000
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$700
14. **Student visa:** \$60
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** souvenirs for friends and family \$200

Estimated Total Expenses: \$8,200

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?

Yes, I experienced some level of culture shock and I gladly received it. It’s always interesting for me to observe and immerse myself in other cultures and often good and memorable experiences result from it. The Middle East is such a dynamic part of the world and you will see things (plain –clothed teenagers with assault rifles for example) that just don’t make sense in your world. But take it as a learning experience and try to soak up as much of the culture as you can. It is also a common observation that generally the locals in Israel aren’t the most polite people. They display what is referred to as the “Mediterranean attitude” and they can be very aggressive and direct with you. But try not to take anything personally, and you’ll be fine.

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?

Generally, the local students like to stick with the other local students and the same could be said for the exchange students, but depending on your personality that could easily change. I was able to make friends with many Israeli students. You just have to take a little initiative in introducing yourself.

Did you have any unforeseen problems? Was there anything that you felt was strikingly different from what you expected?

There weren’t any real unforeseen problems that I encountered. In general, I expected the obvious; that things and how things were done were going to be very different than what I was used to. With some things, I just didn’t expect how complicated they would be, like getting a bus pass for example. Shabbat (Jewish holy day from Fri. afternoon- Saturday evening) also took some getting used to since almost everything in the city was closed during this time.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Try not to let the negative media portrayal of Israel and the harsh realities of the Middle East in general influence your decision too much. I felt just as safe in Jerusalem as I do in Toronto. If you ever want to talk in person, I'd be more than happy to share my experiences in greater detail, just shoot me an email. 😊