



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

Host University: California College of the Arts

Host Country: United States

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Architecture

Semester: Fall 2016

Date of Report: January 5, 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?

I chose CCA because I really wanted to be in an architecture program while I was on exchange, rather than interior, spatial, or environmental design, since architecture is where my interests are and where I would like to take my career and education. The only schools that would let me attend an architecture program were in the States so I looked first at the most reputable, and then eliminated them based on location.

I ultimately chose CCA because it's a small school in San Francisco, which meant I got to spend time in a beautiful city I had always wanted to visit, and I was guaranteed very small class sizes. CCA also offered the use of really amazing facilities for free, and offered courses that would teach me things that I wouldn't learn at OCAD this term, and would challenge me in a way I hadn't been before.

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

CCA gives an enormous amount of work, and moves through it really fast, so I was completely caught off guard when I arrived. I only found out when I got there that it is in the top 15 for highest work loads among art schools in the US and Canada, which was a detail I missed when applying. The adjustment to the increased class time, and workload (which were both easily double what I have at OCAD), took most of the semester, and I struggled a lot to keep up, especially since studio culture there is very very different than OCAD's. The adjustment to using new software (Rhino, Maxwell, and Grasshopper) was also a big challenge.

However, despite feeling like I was being dragged in the mud behind the rest of the class most of the semester, I learned a tremendous amount and don't regret my decision to go to CCA at all. I got more one-on-one time with professors than I've ever had at OCAD (triple what I'm used to having), had free use of a CNC router and laser cutters, and my own studio space to work in so I didn't have to do all of my assignments at home. I produced more work in one semester than I ever have before, and I think it's the best work I've ever produced because it was so closely guided by my professors and fellow students. In 14 weeks I learned how to 3D model with Rhinoceros and Grasshopper, render with Maxwell, cast concrete, use RhinoCAM to use a CNC router, 3D print, and create modules and models using laser cutters, and produce the largest studio project I've made to date, which is more than I've ever done in one semester at OCAD.

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 worked with the international office to get my paperwork in order, which wasn't too complicated because they were so helpful. Any visas and documents I had to apply for were surprisingly simple to get since I was going for school rather than for work. I didn't set up a bank there and just withdrew cash in large amounts from my accounts in Canada. The process was pretty painless, except I didn't have a credit card so having to live off of cash was a little awkward.

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 left most of my larger supplies at home, and only brought my smaller items with me (rulers, drawing supplies, x-acto knives, etc.). Since I was living in the States the available products were pretty much the same as what I can get back home so I didn't have to worry about not being able to get the things I was used to. However, one thing I forgot was my documents for academic accommodation, which I had to have brought to me when my parents came to visit.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I've travelled a lot before, so arrival wasn't as scary as it could have been. I arrived a few days early and stayed in a hotel, and then moved into my residence a couple of days afterward. I didn't really experience any difficulties.

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

Arriving early was definitely a good decision, because I got to wander around for a couple of days and familiarize myself with my surroundings before school started. When you arrive really depends on how much exploring you want to do before school starts. I had about a week after moving into residence to get settled.

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

Orientation at CCA was excellent, and really helped me feel comfortable in the school before starting classes. CCA has a huge international student body, so they were well practiced in giving information that is important for those from outside the US. They told people where to buy groceries on various budgets, what banks to use, what buses to take, how to get to and from school safely at night, etc. There were a number of great panels run by students explaining student life, consent, and how to take care of yourself in a stressful studio environment.

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?

The international office at CCA is great and very helpful for exchange students. Most of my communication was with Joyna Heinz, who was excellent at directing me towards the people I needed to speak to, as well as keeping me informed about school events to attend to meet new friends.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived in the Harriet Street residence while at the school. Housing in San Francisco is VERY difficult to find, so it was a relief to have residences to house me. My apartment was small, and a shared room with another student, but it was very nice and cozy. I spent most of my time at school, but I liked living there.

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

Residence spaces were first-come-first-serve, so I had to make sure I knew where I wanted to live before room selection happened (which was in June or July I believe). The school was really good about informing me about housing options through the school though.

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:

CCA is a very challenging school, and it gives a *lot* of work. I found the transition between OCAD and CCA very challenging, and there were definitely times when I didn't think I would make it through. I honestly don't know if I would have passed if I hadn't dropped a class.

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

24 hours of class time, but we were expected to spend the 3 hours before studio in class working, so it was more like 33 hours.

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week):

Basically any time that I had was spent working on assignments. Studio was supposed to be minimum 36 hours a week but it actually accounted to much more. Design Media was about 6-8 hours minimum. My humanities class was about 4-6. Any time that wasn't spent in class, or on other assignments, was spent on studio. I was usually at school for 12 hours every day, but I would say about 48 hours on paper, but it was usually more.

Studio-based work:

Studio life at CCA was so different from OCAD:

- I had my own desk at school where I could work and leave my stuff
- My class size was 10 people (20 across 2 sections)
- I had two professors to work with
- Studio was 3 times a week for 4 hours each, as opposed to once a week for 3 hours
- We moved through content so much faster because studio class was so frequent
- Pin-up critiques were frequent, and guest critics were brought in often to comment on work
- Because everyone in the year was in one studio at the same time, as opposed to spread across several studios, and because we shared a work space, I got to see everyone's projects progress throughout the semester
- Skills that I was taught in other classes fed directly into what was being covered in studio
- Lectures were given in class to cover content to assist with the current assignment
- Documentation of work was mandatory so we had something to put in our portfolios
- There were class wide projects that we had to coordinate ourselves (casting concrete or using CNC routers in groups, and creating a class site model)

Written assignments:

Written assignments were pretty similar to what I would do at OCAD. We had to do descriptive pieces about our studio assignments, but most of my writing was done in my humanities class where I had to write several short essays, and one long essay based on research and readings throughout the semester.

Interaction between students and professors:

Interactions with professors didn't differ too much from how things are at OCAD, except for the fact that it was much more frequent. Since I had so much more class time I got to see my professors multiple times in a week to discuss work, rather than having to wait a whole week to see them again. Almost all of the professors I had were readily available by email, and were great at answering questions and sending feedback, which is sometimes inconsistent at OCAD.

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?

CCA was really good at hosting school events throughout the semester, but I was often too busy to attend any. The international office hosted a ton of events for international students though, which was really amazing to see. Unfortunately, since it's such a small school (only about 2000 students) there were not a lot of extracurricular activities, and no sports teams.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The school library was great and had a large selection of architectural and non-architectural content. They also had several large computer labs which could be used 24/7 throughout the week. Small and large scale printing were self-serve, and so was laser cutting. Wood and metal shops were well equipped and pleasant to use.

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 split the cost of the trip with my parents. I worked two jobs over the summer and pulled from my savings to pay for living expenses, travel, etc., and my parents helped cover tuition and residence. I was not eligible for many bursaries. I am taking some time off of school right now to make up for the trip, since it was a really expensive city to live in.

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

Cost of living in San Francisco is VERY high. I was expecting it to be similar to Toronto, but housing and food costs are much higher than I expected, and the exchange rate was pretty brutal at 60 cents to the dollar.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: Between 70/60 cents to the dollar over the four months

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

August 24 2016 – December 20 2016

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

I would say that I spent more because of the exchange rate, but since I got to pay OCAD's tuition instead of CCA's enormous tuition (\$45 000 a year), I think I spent less than most. It was still very expensive though.

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):** \$3300 (roughly for the 1 term)
2. **School supplies:** \$450 on supplies, plus another \$400 on printing costs
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = \$2 000 (including utilities, laundry, maintenance, furniture)
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** N/A
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /66
 - C) **Cable:** N/A
 - D) **Other (specify)** N/A
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ / 140
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = 50
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$0 (laundry was provided in my residence)
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$60 (mostly Uber to get home late at night)
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$ 130
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$ 1000
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$ 600
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$0
14. **Student visa:** N/A
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$200-250 / month
(roughly on take out when at school, which was basically all the time. I sometimes would be there for multiple days so, I would eat three meals a day at school on many occasions)

Estimated Total Expenses: \$10 000 (roughly, excluding tuition)

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?

I was in a city that was pretty similar to what I was used to, so I didn't really experience any culture shock. I made sure to stay in close contact with family and friends though, to keep off home sickness.

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?

Most of my class were international students getting their degree in the US, so I was far from the only one who wasn't local. I made sure to talk to lots of people in my class, mostly by visiting people at their desks and asking questions about their work, or asking what they did for fun. Friends at school came slowly, but I made some really great friends by getting involved with groups for my hobbies outside of school. I made sure to ask my school for their recommendations on how to get involved and meet people around the city.

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

A lot of ATMs had difficulty reading my debit card, so taking cash out was really cumbersome at times. Having to use pennies again was pretty annoying too.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

CCA was a really really hard school to transition into from OCAD, and as a result of the VERY heavy work load I didn't get to really explore the city very much. Considering I was there for four months, I really didn't get to see that much. It was the most academically rewarding and challenging semester I've ever had, so if that's what you're looking for, I can't recommend CCA enough. If you are looking to have a relaxed time at school and spend most of your time abroad travelling around and experiencing the local scene, I would highly suggest you pick another school, because you won't get much time at all to do that if you go to CCA.

Academics Experience: 9/10

Exploration and Travel Opportunities: 3/10

Please email your report to International Student Services at international@ocadu.ca.