



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

Student Name:

Host University: Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design

Host Country: Scotland

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Illustration

Semester: Spring 2017

Date of Report: August 1st 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 wanted to be in an English speaking country so I wouldn't feel too isolated, so I looked at Scottish schools and found through online research that the illustration program at DJCAD was more aligned with my interests than the Glasgow School of Art (it is smaller and more hands-on). After I applied to three schools but was not yet accepted, I met a Scottish exchange student from DJCAD at an international meeting in the fall semester at OCAD U, and she told me a lot about the school which gave me a better idea of which one to go with if I got accepted.

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

I learned to come out of my shell both socially and with my art. The biggest challenge was overcoming fear in a new place where I didn't know anyone, but this was also a positive experience because it forced me to branch out as much as possible. I was also nervous about working in front of other people in the studio since most my OCAD work is done at home or around peers I already know, but this was easy to get used to and I really think it improved my art in the end.

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?

Fortunately I didn't need a visa to go to the UK for under six months. I kept my Canadian bank account which was fine except that cash withdrawals were \$5 each, so I had to take out large

amounts at once. My debit card transactions were free and I never had issues with that. Before I left I made sure I had a hard copy of my proof of residence at the host institution, proof of funds (a screenshot of online banking accounts), and proof that I would be studying in the UK. The customs officer gave an exchange student in front of me a hard time because she lacked these documents, so I was glad I had planned that. I also printed out my health insurance documents – I have the health/dental plan at OCAD and had to contact them to tell them I'd be going on exchange. I totally forgot about this and did it last minute and they were unhappy and it was stressful.

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 wish I packed less – I should've kept in mind that most things I'd need could be purchased there for the same prices or less. If I went on exchange again I'd bring the bare minimum – small art supplies only, few toiletries, etc. because I know now I will always buy a lot of stuff I want to take home. Depending on where you're going you may want to bring comfort foods/items from home, but I didn't see the need because the UK had most of the same products.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I arrived at Edinburgh airport on my own and unfortunately there is no direct bus from Edinburgh airport to Dundee – you have to take a bus into the city of Edinburgh to the central train station, and from there you can either take a train or a bus to Dundee (the bus station is a short walk from the train station, but kind of difficult with bags so in hindsight I would have just spent a bit more on a train ticket.) Once I arrived in Dundee I intended to walk but had no idea where I was going, and again, my bags were heavy, so I got a taxi from Dundee Bus Station (the school sent info on this as well) and the driver knew exactly where to go and was very welcoming. Make sure you take out local currency as soon as you arrive at the airport, just in case you find yourself needing a taxi!

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

I arrived three days before the start of classes and was happy with this amount of time – I had enough time to settle in and there were plenty of meet ups on the weekend leading up to classes.

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

I actually missed the orientation session because by that point I felt settled in enough and had made a few friends that I decided to hang out with that night. The international meetings were more like social events and I went to a few of them. There were no mandatory meetings but instead we were instructed to contact the school if we had specific questions.

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 University of Dundee had lots of resources for exchange students including DJCAD exchange students, as it is a bigger school that is connected to DJCAD. All of the exchange events were organized by the University, so many of the students I met were not in the art or design. Within DJCAD itself there is also a small office that only dealt with the art school exchange students so they knew all of us and were very welcoming. I was the only exchange student in the illustration department so they exchange office made an effort to help me feel comfortable.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I stayed in student halls because it was the most convenient for me. I was quite happy with it – the room was a good size and I had my own washroom and shower. My only complaint was the price because I paid much more than I do in Toronto, and I realized I could have found somewhere much cheaper if I had just done some extra research, and I still would have met lots of exchange students through international events.

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

The University had plenty of student accommodation and seemed to prioritize international students, so it was really simple. Applying on their website was also really easy and quick and I received my acceptance quickly as well.

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: Difficulty/challenge was the same, just in different ways. There were fewer deadlines and fewer mandatory classes (most of class work was independent work in the studio) but the expectations for the final product was higher. I only had three illustration assignments all semester, but these assignments were more in depth and took much longer to complete. They also expected more research and sketchbook work.

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 5 hours per week on average for class meetings, critiques (not including independent studio work time)

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): In studio, about 10 hours per week. At home, about 5 hours per week

Studio-based work: Rather than 5 courses per semester as at OCAD, DJCAD has one studio based course, and one liberal arts course. We had three major studio assignments that are designed to be worked on for a longer period of time. You are expected to do your work in the studio 5 days a week, but it is only mandatory that you sign in for two of those days (so technically, you could sign in for those days and do the rest of your work at home if you prefer).

I chose to do some work at home because I work well at night, but a lot of students would treat it as a full time 9-5 job and have evenings off. Sometimes I would sign in and rather than spend my time in my studio, I'd use the workshops to do woodworking and ceramics which I contributed to my end of semester hand-in - they wanted to see the three assignments, research for the assignments, and personal work, which for most students accounted for 50% or more of their portfolio. Because of this, I had much more room to explore than I have at OCAD.

Written assignments: I only had to write one essay (6000 words) for my one liberal arts class – there were weekly lectures and tutorials but no exams/tests. There was no homework to hand in, but we had to do research in our own time for the final essay.

Interaction between students and professors: About 1 hour – we had critiques much like at OCAD, but less often, and we were encouraged to check in with our tutor who often had tons of time to review and discuss our works in progress.

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?

I didn't take part in very many but I had friends who did. At the beginning of the semester there is a traditional Scottish dance called a "ceilidh" and there were also parties at the student union (which has a bar!). A lot of my friends suggested a three day tour of the Highlands, which was a separate tour company that advertised at the school. Most exchange students including myself went on this tour and it was amazing. There is also a Rucksack club that organizes camping and hiking trips and with a membership you can borrow camping gear, so we took a few tents and had a weekend in the forest.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

DJCAD has their own small, cozy library with tons of art/design resources, study space, and a few computers and printers. We also had access to the University of Dundee's library which was huge, had lots of study space including silent study rooms and dozens of computers and printers which do black and white and colour, plus have amazing scanners. The printing system is really easy to figure out and is better quality than at OCAD, in my experience. For professional colour printing for design assignments you can go to the Print Unit in DJCAD and you pay them cash for your job. They can also make books, pamphlets, and print on several different materials and it wasn't too expensive for the quality.

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 help from my parents for rent and groceries, and as a gift they paid for my return flight. I had OSAP grants/loans for my tuition as well. I paid for my travel and recreational expenses on my own, I worked part-time (20 or so hours per week) for the school year leading up to my exchange, and full time during my summers. I knew it would cost a lot but expected it to be worth it, and it was.

In general, was the cost of living in your host country higher, lower, or similar to that in Canada? Please explain. Similar. Some things were more expensive and some were cheaper. For the most part, groceries and every day items evened out to be the same. If you rent a car, however, gas prices are about double what they are in Canada. Beer is cheaper, so is food in restaurants plus you don't need to tip in the UK. Taxes are also included in prices rather than added at the register as they are here, so it's easier to budget because you know exactly what you'll be spending on something in a shop or on a menu.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 0.6

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): January 10 2017 - June 1 2017

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

I definitely spent much more simply because I was unsure where to get the cheapest prices – for example, I learned once it was too late that UK phone plans are much cheaper and don't require long term contracts like at home, so there really was no need for me to buy a top up phone card. On top of that I was spending a bit of money on cash withdrawals, and extra money on transportation as I tried to explore during my free time much more than a local student would. I also didn't really enjoy cooking in my kitchen since I shared it with 5 others and we didn't have many cooking supplies, so I ate out a lot more than I would at home.

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):** \$3795
2. **School supplies:** \$100
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$865 /month = \$4324
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$0 /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$0 /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$0 /month
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$0 /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$50 /month = \$250 (not including meals out)
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$10 /month = \$50
7. **Laundry:** \$13 /month = \$65
8. **Transportation:** \$100 /month = \$500 (includes trains to Glasgow/Edinburgh)

9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$100/month (includes tickets to events)

10. **Travel health insurance:** \$365 (cost of one full year with OCADU's health/dental plan, included in tuition)

11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0

12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$1000 (Flight home was booked from Paris, not round trip)

13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** roughly \$6000

14. **Student visa:** \$0

15. **Other expenses (please specify):** Top up cell phone: \$68/month = \$343 (a regular phone plan would have been much cheaper)

Estimated Total Expenses: \$16,500

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 UK is very similar to Canada, so it was easy for me to adapt. Of course all places have different food, slang, and traditions and it's important to try them out. When I first arrived in Dundee I struggled to understand my taxi driver because his accent was so thick – this worried me a lot but I found that most people I interacted with were a bit easier for me to understand. Luckily they could understand my accent just fine since the Canadian/American accent is so common in global media.

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?

The best way I found to develop friendships in Dundee was to show up to the studio as much as possible, even if it isn't a mandatory meeting it's good to just be present and make art with your peers. I also went out to some pubs where I met lots of other exchange students and locals both at University of Dundee and DJCAD.

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

University in the UK is much more self directed so it was difficult for me to stay disciplined without the strict guidance I received at OCAD U. At times I had no idea what to make because it was so open ended, but I quickly learned to use this as an opportunity to experiment. Other than the structure of the course however, I felt it met my expectations. I ran into financial problems because the exchange rate was easy to miscount especially for things that cost different prices than in Canada.

- 9. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:** Exchange was 100% a positive experience for me. I feel I really grew as a person, and didn't realize it until I was home, but my art improved drastically as well. Because the curriculum and teaching methods at DJCAD are almost opposite to those at OCAD, I really feel I am at an advantage for experiencing and adapting to both.

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