



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

Student Name:

Host University: ECAL – École Cantonale d'art de Lausanne

Host Country: Switzerland

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Cinema

Semester: Winter 2017

Date of Report: July 27, 2017

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor **Excellent**
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8.5 9 10

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

I chose to go to ECAL because it was one of the few schools that offered Cinema that were in Europe. I wanted to do an exchange in Europe because I figured on weekends or weeks off I can visit the surrounding countries. After looking into the program, I liked how ECAL really focused on only cinema and nothing else, whereas my program at OCAD (Integrated Media) is a mix of different practices. When applying to university I originally wanted to get into a program with only Cinema, so I thought this would be nice chance to see what a strictly cinema program would be like.

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

One of the most positive experience I had with my whole exchange experience is my housing. I stayed at the FSLE which is a housing for International Students because with 3 Major Universities, Lausanne is University City. ECAL has a partnership with the FSLE which holds the whole first floor for all their exchange students for the semester. Right away we all became super close, we were all on the same page, all new to this country and the school, all a bit lost, so we instantly became really close trying to figure out life in Lausanne. Each of us were all in different programs at ECAL which was good when we needed a second opinion for our work. We always all hung out in the kitchen every night, cooking and working together and then spending weekends having BBQ's by the lake. The people in my housing were definitely one of the main reasons I had such an amazing time.

Before coming to ECAL I wasn't aware that it was one of the top Design schools in Europe. I later learned that with the quality of work I saw around the school and from my roommates. ECAL does a lot of commissioned work by companies which I think is a great opportunity for students to get a feel of what it's like in the real world working for different companies. It is also a very small school, after the foundation year, for your next 3 bachelor years, everyone in your program and your year have the same schedule. At ECAL they already have a set class schedule for each year and each program therefore, you don't have any options for electives.

Before coming to ECAL I was also unaware that their Cinema program is completely different from all the other programs at the school, they even pay a different tuition rate. Just like at OCAD, for each semester you have the same schedule every week. However, in the Cinema program, their schedule is more done in blocks. For example, for second semester my class was getting ready to shoot and edit a short film that they had written last semester. For the first week we had a class on how to work with actors and then the next month and half was blocked off for you to schedule and organize your shoot, the next month and a half to edit, the next 2 weeks to edit sound and so on. So pretty much, every week was different unlike the rest of the programs at ECAL where they all had the same schedule every week.

This is what I found a bit confusing and a challenge at ECAL. I didn't know that Cinema worked like that, and my program coordinator didn't exactly explain how my program worked so for the first week I was really lost on how my semester was going to play out. What made it also more confusing was that I wasn't put directly into my year. All my roommates were put into 2nd year (equivalent to 3rd year in Canada) and followed the same schedule as their classmates. For some reason, I got mixed into their 1st and 2nd year classes.

On my first day, I met with the Cinema Program Coordinator and she said that I could choose to be put into 1st or 2nd year courses, but in the end she ended up choosing for me and putting me into mainly 1st year courses with some 2nd year ones. I had told her that my main focus in cinema was editing so, in that case she created a personal schedule for me to do a lot of editing. There were only 10 students in 1st year Cinema, they were all super friendly and helped me try to understand my schedule.

As I mentioned above, all my classmates had written scripts first semester and this semester were shooting and editing them. In that case, I did not get to make my own work. Because the scale and quality of ECAL's work is very good, there would not have been enough time for me to write and prep and shoot a short film in one semester. Therefore, for the majority of my time at ECAL I was assigned to help assist edit one of my classmates' films.

A great thing I liked about ECAL were the facilities they had for Cinema. They have a huge shooting studio and a bunch of professional standard equipment. Also, in Cinema, each student is given their own editing suite, equipped with a dual screen computer, speakers, good quality headphones and your own key. It was your own personal space for you to work. I believe the Cinema program was also one of the only programs that got funding for their work. My roommates spent a mass amount of money on printing and materials. The films that my class were working on were commissioned by a film festival and so, they gave each student 1000 CHF to produce their film. This was nice because a lot of my classmates shot their films either all around Switzerland and France and the costs were paid for. One of the shoots I helped out with was filmed in Saint Brais, which is in La Jura of Switzerland, traveling within Switzerland is expensive so that trip ticket cost around 100 CHF but it was covered because of the budget they got for their films.

ECAL really encourages their students to participate and attend art shows or festivals that are going on in the area. During my time there, there was a big Design Exhibition in Milan

and for that week, the majority of the design department had left for that event. For Cinema, there was a week long Film Festival called, Vision du Reel in Nyon. I got to attend the festival with the 2nd year Cinema students. Again, my train ticket there was paid for, we got a pass that allowed us to see any movie we wanted at the festival and they provided a place for us to stay the whole week. We also got to have a one on one masterclass with one of the featured directors of the festival.

Another thing to mention was that, for movie editing they use Avid and sound editing they use ProTools, I had used Avid a couple times but not really, and never used ProTools so learning a whole new editing software was a bit challenging, but you are editing everyday so you pick up on it quickly. The school also doesn't provide you with these 2 programs for your own laptop, and so you can only work at school in your editing suite.

Although it was a bit frustrating not being able to make my own work and having your schedule somewhat dictated by the person you are working with (There were multiple times where I had days off because my partner didn't need my help) I did learn a lot at ECAL. Because of the scale and quality of their films, they really take you step by step on how to make a festival ready film. Each step from shooting, working with actors, editing, sound editing is all taught with great detail. There's definitely a lot of steps I've learned that I can't wait to apply to my own work once back at OCAD. What was also really nice was that since my program was so small, the professors are able to put a lot of attention into each student's needs.

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 had been living at home and working part time for the past 3 years at OCAD and I knew I wanted to do an exchange in University so I had been saving up for a while. My parents also helped me out a lot with a lot of the living expenses. I didn't think it was worth opening up a bank account there, so I just brought a lot of cash over to avoid withdraw fees.

You do need a visa to study in Switzerland for over 3 months. The process is for the most part straight forward with all the different documents you need to include. However, the most frustrating part about the visa was that they give you a heads up that it takes around 3 months to process, and I received ECALs acceptance letter close to 3 months before the start of the semester so getting my visa in time was a bit frustrating. There isn't much you can do about that because you need a letter from the school to apply for your visa, however, ECAL is aware that some students need visas so they should send your acceptance in time. My advice would be to get all the other documents ready for your visa package, so that once you get accepted you just have to add that letter and then you can send it off right away.

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 was in Cinema, so I just brought my cameras, laptop and I also brought my drawing tablet as I took some animation courses at OCAD and was hoping to take some here, however, they do not offer any type of animation in this program. I didn't end up needing my camera because I didn't make my own work. However, the school is fully equipped with any type of production equipment you need. To rent them, it's just like at OCAD where they have a tech department and you sign stuff out.

3. ARRIVAL

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

No one was there to meet me at the airport. The main airport is in Geneva, and from there you take a train to Lausanne that takes 40 minutes to an hour. From Lausanne's train station to my apartment, I took a cab, arrival was fairly smooth.

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

I arrived just about a week before the first day. I wanted to get there a bit early to settle myself in before school starts. The first day was February 27th and the FSLE allows you to rent out for half months, therefore I was able to move into my room as early as February 15th. I would recommend moving in a couple days early just to settle yourself in and familiarize yourself with what's around the area. It's also nice to get there a bit earlier if you're staying at the FSLE as you can get to know your roommates beforehand.

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

There was a brief orientation the first day with all the exchange students for that semester where we had to sign some documents we were then separated and taken by the program coordinator of each of our programs for a small intro. I later found out that some of the other exchange students got a brief tour of the school and learned where everything was from their program coordinator, however, I did not. I was also unaware that the day of orientation was also the first day of classes.

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?

Marina Bigler is in charge of the exchange students, her office is right at the secretary's office and she's fairly easy to get a hold of.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I stayed at the FSLE Fondation Solidarité Logements Pour les Etudiants. It is a bit expensive but I do recommend it because you'll be living with other ECAL exchange students and as I mentioned above, the people I lived with was the main reason I had such a positive experience abroad. The place is ideal as there are 4 different grocery stores all within a 5 minute walking distance from the apartment, as well as a pharmacy. It's about a 7 minute walk to the bus stop for school then the bus ride is about 5 minutes and stops right in front of ECAL. There's the subway stop Malley right in front of the building that takes you 10 minutes to Lausanne's

city centre. The building was also a 15 minute walk to the lake, which was super nice to go to after a long day at school, then also BBQ on weekends as they have BBQ pits there. Also to mention, the building is right in front of a big roundabout which was a bit frustrating for some of my roommates as the rush hour honking would be really loud in the mornings. However, there are obviously windows that block the noise and also depending on what room you get, you hear it less or not at all.

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

Once you get your information package from ECAL in the mail, they give you a list of places to find an accommodation. I did research ahead of time and knew they partnered with the FSLE so I had no problem finding a place.

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:

As I mentioned above, my experience at ECAL was very different from the others as they were directly integrated in their 2nd year class while I was given a mixed program, and I was also in Cinema which is completely different from the other programs at ECAL.

Level of academic difficulty and challenge:

I would say the standards and quality of their work are higher than OCAD's. It's hard for me to say that from my own personal experience as I was just assigned to help people with their work so I didn't feel as much pressure because I just had to follow what they wanted for their own work. But, from what I observed from my classmates the quality of work expected was higher, their films had to be film festival ready. Their grades are different as well. The grades go from 1-6 and 4.5 being a passing grade.

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

For the most part, school is 8am-5pm every day for all programs with lunch from 12-1:30pm. For Cinema, whenever we did have a scheduled class/lecture the day would be 9am-5pm. However, like I mentioned above, the majority of the semester is open time to work on your films, so you come in when you want and leave when you want.

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

0. For me, I couldn't work on any projects at home because the editing programs we had to use were only on the school's computers. And as I said, I was only assisting people with their projects so, if need be, it was them doing all the planning outside of class and then they would tell me the next day at school where we could work together. However, I did do a couple film shoots but, only around 4 for the whole time I was there, and depending on my part in the production it would be around 2-10 hours a day but, that would only be for like a day or 2.

Studio-based work:

My class was only working on 1 major film that semester and so, it was all done as part of studio work. Everyday you're either in the shooting studio, editing suites or recording studio refining and fixing every part of your film.

Written assignments:

My class did have to take a somewhat art history course but, because I had already taken multiple at OCAD I didn't have to take it. They also had to write a paper on their experience on planning, shooting and editing their films however, I did not have to. They don't have liberal courses like at OCAD where you have to write multiple essays.

Interaction between students and professors:

Because my program was so small, the interactions with the students and professors was much closer than at OCAD. The professors really get to know the students and how they work. Because you work on your own time, the professors do regular checkups here and there to make sure you're progressing well. We had our professors phone numbers and you could text or call them whenever you needed help with something. I found that really helpful because they really did do the most to help you with your film.

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, there was none hosted by ECAL. However, I believe there is some sort of European Exchange Association which organizes events for exchange students. Unfortunately, ECAL didn't take part in this Association. The other 2 major universities in Lausanne did, EPFL and UNIL and luckily we made friends with some other people in our building that attended those schools who told us about some of the events the association hosted for exchange students. I believe there was a trip to Geneva, to the Cailler house of chocolate, a boat party and some BBQ's. So, if you want to attend any of these events and you're staying at the FSLE, get to know the people on the other floors who attend those schools so they could let you know what events are happening.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

I had my own editing suite with a dual screen computer and speakers. In general, the school does have open computers for students to use but, most people bring their own laptops. They have a library around the same size as OCAD's however, you aren't allowed to take books out but, they do have free photocopying so you can just photocopy parts of the books you want.

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 had known I wanted to do an exchange in University since high school so I had been saving up since then. I lived at home for the 3 years so that saved me a lot of money. My parents did help me out a lot with the major expenses of the exchange. I didn't receive any bursaries. However, OCAD does offer one for students doing the exchange but the scholarships are mainly for people who are on OSAP.

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

I only found out once I had been accepted to ECAL that Switzerland was the most expensive country in Europe. Rent for a room in Toronto is around \$1000+ and that's around how much I paid for my place so I would say renting a room is around the same price. Groceries aren't too bad; for produce, the cheapest grocery store would have prices equivalent to a nicer grocery store here such as Loblaw's but for smaller quantities. Going out to eat is very expensive, even a McDonalds meal is around \$25. I went out to eat maybe 4 times, the rest of the times me and my roommates all cooked together. For transportation, the monthly pass that gets you all around Lausanne isn't too bad, it's around \$70. However, traveling to different cities in Switzerland is expensive. From the airport in Geneva to Lausanne which is around a 40 min to 1-hour commute, cost around \$36 one way. Also, going to the movies was super expensive, around \$20 a ticket. There is one theatre in Lausanne where ECAL Cinema students (Your ECAL student ID has your program written on it) get to see movies for free however, they aren't new movies they play more classics and international films. Overall, the cost of living is higher in Switzerland.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1 CHF = 1.4 Canadian

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): February 2017 – June 2017

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

I spent more or less the same amount of time at ECAL than at OCAD. Although, the rest of the school finished June 16th, Cinema students have to stay an extra 2 weeks to finalize their films and go over what's expected the next year. Luckily I didn't have to be at school for the 2 weeks, but I did stay in Switzerland and came back to watch the film that I worked on at the end of the month.

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):** \$3775.07 (OCAD Tuition)
2. **School supplies:** \$0 I only had to edit films on the computer, and the school has all the production supplies I needed if we had to re shoot
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = 760CHF = \$1064
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month: Included in Rent
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month: \$30 – I got a Swiss number and plan
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month: N/A
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = \$280
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = \$50
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$0
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$72
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$0
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$0 – I went with the OCAD insurance which includes an exchange
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$83.46 One way from Toronto to Geneva
\$268.90 One way from Paris to Toronto (I traveled after the exchange and Paris was my last stop.
My mom has aeroplan rewards which is why I got really cheap plane tickets.
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** I traveled during the week off and after the exchange but wont include it in the costs as it wasn't part of the essential expenses.
14. **Student visa:** \$0
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$
 - Residence Permit \$201

- Biometrics \$28 (Not sure exactly what it was, but the school informed us that we needed to get this document signed, they gave us the papers for it)

Estimated Total Expenses: \$ 11, 073

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 didn't find too much of a culture shock in Switzerland but there were things here and there that I had to get used to. I was in French immersion in Elementary and High School so my French was pretty strong, other than their own slang I didn't have a hard time understanding or communicating with people, though the majority of them do speak English. When being introduced to someone they kiss your cheeks 3 times, right, left, right. Also, everything is closed on Sundays, shops, grocery stores etc. That got some getting used to, I always had to make sure I had enough food to last through Sunday and Monday.

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?

Staying at the FSLE really helped with making friends. Our floor was reserved for ECAL exchange students for that semester and as I mentioned above, we all became super close friends really quickly. Also as I mentioned before, at ECAL everyone in your year and your program are in the same class every year plus, my program was very small and so, they've been together for 2 years already and were really close. Since it is a small class and you spend every day with your classmates, it is easy to develop friendships with them. For me I found it a bit hard to make friends with my classmates as they were all already close to each other so, I felt a bit like an outsider at times. Also, since me and my roommates became so close, at times I didn't feel the need to try and interact with my classmates because I already had a close nit of friends. But nonetheless, if I did try harder, I could have developed a stronger friendship with my classmates, they were all super friendly and loved hearing about what school and living is like in Canada.

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

There were no major problems but the thing that was way different than what I expected was how the school runs. Like I mentioned, everyone is in the same class every year, class is 8am – 5pm Monday to Friday and your schedule is planned out for you, there is no room for electives. And on top of that, the Cinema program is completely different from all the other ones as they run on a different schedule, and are only working on 1 major project throughout the year. It took me a while to get used to how their program ran

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

If you are applying for the Cinema program, depending on what you want to get out of your Exchange experience, I would say to get in contact with the Cinema Program Coordinator ahead of time to see what kind of classes you would take. I was fine being an assistant editor for peoples projects as that is something I want to do in the future, but it may be different for someone who's wanting to produce their own work. Like I said, Cinema was completely different from all the other programs at ECAL so if you're applying to any of the other ones, apart from the "school work" section of this report, it should all be the same. My roommates were all in different programs and all had a different experience than me in the school work section. If you want to know what the course work is like in the other programs feel free to send me a message and I'll be glad to get you in contact with one of them in the same program as you 😊 Or if you have any questions about my experience there I'd be glad to share more with you 😊 I had an amazing experience studying abroad, and I believe anyone will and really do recommend it.

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