



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

Student Name:

Host University: Ecole Cantonale D'art de Lausanne (écal)

Host Country: Switzerland

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Visual Communications/Media Interaction Design

Semester: Winter

Date of Report: July 25th, 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?

Since I was in highschool I have wanted to do a school exchange abroad, and a few years back I kept seeing my Facebook friends all going away and having the time of their lives. I thought that I am finally financially able and am willing to take the risk to live abroad, and so, the search began to find out which school I wanted to attend. As a Digital Futures (BDes) student at OCAD U, there isn't many programs like mine so the amount of institutions I could go to were limited...I had schools either in Design related in France, or more media based in Australia and Finland. I saw that Switzerland had a program that was very similar to mine at écal, and went online to view the students work, the professors works and also the alumni's work...and I was thoroughly impressed. The work was very similar to that of my programs but the type of work involved was more directed towards the path I want to take as an artist and from there it became my first choice.

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

The amount of passion and hard work the students there possess is quite incredible. The work load is very intense, and the amount of classes is rough...but if you really want to better your work and face a challenge...this school is it. From having 8:30-17:00 classes...it gets quite rough if you aren't prepared, but like I said, if you like a challenge you can see yourself grow in knowledge from the beginning of the semester to the end. The people there are kind and helpful, but not to mention the city that surrounds it is breathtaking and always will have you in a good mood.

The biggest challenges I faced was adjusting myself to having classes everyday from 8:30-17:00. After getting into the groove of that, of learning to do work at school, then coming back home to eat and then a bit more work, getting a good nights sleep (if you can) will benefit you. Also, having classes in French would've been a bigger challenge but I have been taking it since I was 4 years old so I am quite fluent, but also most of the students and teachers speak English so you can approach them for help if needed.

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 would suggest getting the application for the Visa (Type D), which is free for students, done early. For the Switzerland Visa, you need to send it to Montreal and it takes around 3-6 weeks for it to be done...so once you get that acceptance letter...get that done. I had to rush it and mailing everything there and back from Montreal was quite a pain, and back and forth calls and emails from the Visa center was not the best when you have less than a week left. If you aren't able to get the Visa you can also get it in Switzerland if your home country allows it. Canada has a 3-month (90 days) travel throughout Switzerland without Visa.

Also, try and book a plane ticket sooner than later since it gets quite expensive. I actually booked a round trip flight to Paris and then took a TGV Lyria Train from Gare de Lyon to the Gare de Lausanne. The flight, busses and train was actually cheaper than taking a flight into Geneva or Zurich...and not to mention the views from the train was incredible. I would suggest still looking for flights to Geneva if you can since it is quite a trip for just one day.

For banking, I took all the cash in both EURO and CHF (Swiss Francs) that I could financially and then kept it there. I used my Mastercard for other purchases and had that as my expenses and would just pay it off online as one does. You can open up a bank account, there is one called UBS and it does student accounts for free and they give you a free Debit and Credit card, if I am not mistaken, but you need an Attestation/Record that you live in the address that you do, and also either your passport of your Pass de Sejour. I didn't personally do it, but I would've for the next time to keep my cash organized.

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 would take what you usually have with you. I took most of my electronics and physical computing supplies since I knew that there wasn't really an electronics/robotics shop close by. If you have allergies, I would definitely pack a lot of those since it is very expensive to just buy simple allergy meds at the pharmacy. Stores are usually closed at 18h-19h, and also aren't open Sundays so plan your weeks accordingly.

3. ARRIVAL

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

You should be able to plan out your trip ahead, but most places do have Wi-Fi if you are lost and don't be afraid to ask anyone for help if you need it. I didn't experience any problems myself though.

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

I arrived 5 days before the start of classes and I thought that it was an ample amount of time to settle down, adjust to the time change and also do some exploring (if that is what you want to do).

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

There was a quick orientation before the start of the classes, I did attend. There were 6 other exchange students and each from a different program, so they let you sign some papers if you haven't already, and also they send down an assistant from the program to show you the studios and space. Ask as many questions as you need to the assistant.

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, Marina Bigler is the one who helps with international students and she is very nice and accommodating.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

At the beginning, ecal sent us a package that had all the information as well as accommodation. I stayed at one of the student houses at the FSLE. It was pretty decent, it was close to school and to the centre-ville, but outside there was a round-about that was very noisy. The price was a bit high, but you can't expect things to be cheap really in Switzerland. I would say it's pretty good for just a semester.

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

See above.

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: High

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 42.5 hours of class

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): 25hrs+

Studio-based work: Most projects are studio-based for my program

Written assignments: There were around 4 different written assignments, with presentations and one essay.

Interaction between students and professors: Was quite great, the professors were helpful.

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 too much time to do extracurriculars, but enjoy the time with the friends you meet there and also plan ahead to make your weekends worthwhile. Try on Sundays to either work or go outside and enjoy the landscapes since most/all stores are closed. There are some things organized by ERASMUS at EPFL and UNIL (other universities in Lausanne) so check on Facebook for those. Sometimes it's open for exchange students to attend, but sometimes you need tickets from someone from those schools to go but I'm sure it is easy to arrange if you really want to go.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The library was small, but the amount of interesting and up to date books, magazines and thesis papers was quite amazing. There are a few computer facilities around the school, but sometimes classes are in them so just ask your program teachers or classmates to see how to arrange to use them if you need to use them for renders overnight or etc.

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 worked full time during my first year and a half along with school, then kept working throughout the summer and picked up commission work when I could. I would never say no to a job (unless it was actually too difficult to keep everything organized). I didn't receive financial awards, but try to look on the Swiss website for scholarships that they have for Canadian students. I also got some help from my family, but it wasn't a lot...but everything helps!!!

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

Living in Switzerland is very expensive and everyone knows it. Depending on your diet, it is easy to save money by getting things that are on sale, or pasta and pasta sauce. The food there is very high quality and you can find bio foods in all of the supermarkets (MIGROS, Denner, ALDI, co-op). If you spend correctly, it should be okay.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1.345 CAD -> 1 CHF

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): End Feb/2017- Early July/2017

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

I spend more on materials as they were harder to get. You need to find materials for yourself, but sometimes there are stock items that you can ask the Atelier to have...but that is only open a few times a day so make sure you go at the correct time to get the materials.

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):** \$3,531.07
2. **School supplies:** \$500
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ 1027/month = \$4108

I Airbnb the first few days, then checked in at the residence. I then stayed at friends at the end of June.

4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month

**All included in the rent

5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ 250-300/month = \$1500
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ ~20/month = \$125
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$ ** Included in rent, but shared laundry detergent with other residents

8. **Transportation:** \$ 74/month = \$296 +250(Half-price SwissPass)
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$50 + ~120(For biometrics permit)
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$800
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$600 (between different cities, also traveled 2 cities in Spain, Milan(Italy), northern and western Suisse, and Paris(France))
14. **Student visa:** \$220 (For the controle des habitants and paper work after you arrive)
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$400

Estimated Total Expenses: ~\$11,450.07

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 Swiss are very similar to Canadians on how polite they are, but they are much more reserved and kept to themselves than Canadians are. The culture shock wasn't really big, just that you learn how much they love to work but also to enjoy life. They are a very healthy bunch of people and are very family oriented.

I would just say, to be friendly to everyone you meet, and enjoy your time there. There are a ton of exchange students in Lausanne as it is a university city. You will meet lots of interesting people, and perhaps friendships that will last lifetimes.

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?

It depends how you integrate with the class, but I would say for the most part everyone had a lot of interaction between the local students and international ones. The class sizes are always with your program, so they are relatively small...as is the rest of the school. With the amount of time you spend at school, you'll meet a lot of people and also friends from other departments as well.

Just don't be afraid to make friends, to practice your French and to work hard.

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

Just the amount of fees you have to pay and get in order, and how everything is closed at 7pm and almost everything is closed on weekends. But, it makes you organized and able to spend time with friends or doing work on Sundays.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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