



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

Student Name:

Host University: Edinburgh Napier University

Host Country: Scotland

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Interior and Spatial Design

Semester: 2nd

Date of Report: August 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 study in Europe because of the ease of travel between countries, so I could use this experience to see many different places. I chose Napier because the program seemed to align well with what we were studying at OCAD and Edinburgh seemed like a beautiful city to live in.

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

Through this exchange I met so many incredible people and made some new friends. I also got to explore new parts of Europe I hadn't been to before. It was also a great learning experience living on my own in a new country.

It was a bit of challenge getting set up when we first moved to Scotland, because we were there for only 4 months so some people were reluctant to rent out flats to people for only 4 months. Also setting up wi-fi was a bit difficult because contracts were typically for 12 months and our apartment didn't come with wifi.

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?

For the amount of time I was going to be in the UK I didn't need a visa, I checked on the government of Canada website to see what was required. I printed out some documents to show at the border when I arrived, such as bank statements but the only paper they really wanted was my student letter (which I needed every time I left and returned to Scotland when travelling abroad to other countries).

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

Most of the materials that you have at home you can purchase there. I took some notebooks and my design markers, pens, exacto knife etc. And while I was there I ended up purchasing more notebooks and a cutting mat and some glue as well as materials. It doesn't make sense to bring too much stuff because you won't necessarily need everything you will take with you, but I would suggest bringing things such as illustration markers or other items that are expensive, if you already own them. In terms of food stuff, they have really big grocery stores such as ASDA which is basically like Walmart which has tons of international foods and spices so you don't really need to bring anything with you.

3. ARRIVAL

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

Arrival was really easy, they organized a pick-up service for us at the airport, so someone met us at the arrivals terminal and we were dropped off to our accommodation. It was really convenient as we didn't have to figure out our way around a new city just as we arrived, it was also a nice opportunity to meet new exchange students who were also attending the school.

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

I arrived the day before induction as that was when the flight was cheapest. If you are looking for accommodation when you arrive then I would recommend coming a few days earlier so your schedule is more open to attend flat viewings before classes start, but that being said I didn't have any difficulty arriving the day before induction.

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

They did have a mandatory orientation but it was just a presentation with general information. We also had an orientation for our individual programs during which we chose our courses, it was really casual meeting with the program head.

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?

There are exchange coordinators that you can email at the host institution but there were different people I was redirected to based on the question that I had.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I was offered accommodation within the student accommodation but I was travelling with a friend from OCAD so we both decided to find a flat together. We were really happy with our accommodation in the end.

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

We decided to find accommodation when we arrived in Edinburgh as we were advised that it was better to see the accommodation before signing an agreement. Me and my friend booked an Airbnb for a week while we tried to find accommodation, it ended up taking longer than a week however, so we had to book another Airbnb until we could move into our permanent accommodation. The host institution did offer some information online regarding finding private accommodation and had information services to help if you had questions about finding rentals.

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:

I found that it was easier than at OCAD, we only had 3 courses in the semester, however while you are away you are also busier with experiencing a new place so it ended up working out well.

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

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): Depends on the week, before deadlines we would spend multiple days working but some weeks only about 8 hours.

Studio-based work: All of my courses were studio based, for our set design course, and designing public spaces course we got to go on a school trip to Berlin for the weekend to study the public square that we were designing for.

Written assignments: We had the flexibility to choose our courses so all the courses we chose were studio based so we didn't really have written assignments but some of the other course options did have essays to write.

Interaction between students and professors: Quite a casual relationship, similar to OCAD the classes are about 20 people so you do get to speak directly to your professor and they are always there to help.

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?

They hosted an international mixer at the union bar for students to meet other exchange students which I would recommend going to, it was a good way to meet other people. There are also companies that email exchange students regarding day trips they organize to visit different parts of Scotland.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The facilities are different depending on which campus you are located at, at the Merchiston Campus which is where the Interior and Spatial Design program is located, the computer lab is massive, and is open 24 hours. The library is also pretty large.

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 applied for an exchange scholarship at OCAD and was awarded that which helped cover some of the expenses. My parents also helped pay for my other expenses.

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

Some things were cheaper such as the phone plans, rent is quite similar to apartments in Toronto but spaces are generally quite a lot larger for the same price. Groceries were about the same.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: 1GBP=1.7 CAD

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): January 2017-May 2017

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

I think in general exchange students spend more than a local student because we were there for such a short time and wanted to see and try a bunch of different things we went out more, and went for trips and excursions while we were there. As well we were just starting out in a new country so we needed to buy some basic supplies, and since we didn't have access to all of our materials back home, we had to buy school supplies as well.

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):** \$3000
2. **School supplies:** \$150 (including printing)
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = \$800/month (my half of the rent)
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month : included in rent
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month: \$40/month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month: included in rent
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = \$300/month (groceries roughly)
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = \$30
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = There was a laundry machine in our apartment.
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$72 for the monthly bus pass
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$300
10. **Travel health insurance:** I was covered under my regular insurance.
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$900
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** Very roughly \$3500 but I took about 6 trips while I was there, travel within Europe is generally cheaper than Canada as is the accommodation when sharing Airbnbs and staying in hostels.

14. **Student visa:** I didn't need a visa

Estimated Total Expenses: roughly \$12,800

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?

Scotland is very westernized so there wasn't really any culture shock, it is quite similar to Canada in many ways and since there was no language barrier it was very easy to adapt to life there.

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?

My program had quite a small class so it was not hard to get to know the local students quite well. We also went on a class trip at the beginning of my exchange term where we went to Berlin, so that was a great way to get to know the local students. While we were there we shared an Airbnb with some of the girls from Napier so that helped us get to know them quite quickly. The people at Napier were friendly and were very accommodating and welcoming and always offered to help if we had any questions. The best way to develop friendships with local students is to just talk to them, especially if you have any confusion about how things work they can help explain how things operate at the school.

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

I went into my exchange not really having any expectations of what it would be like so there weren't any situations that felt very different or caught me by surprise.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

I had an incredible experience on my exchange and it is something I would highly recommend to anyone who has the opportunity to do it. I experienced so many new things, expanded my global outlook and met incredible people. I would definitely do it again if I had the opportunity!

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