



2013-2014 Student Mobility/Exchange Program Returning Undergraduate Student Report

Student Name:

Host University: Maryland Institute College of Art

Host Country: U.S.A.

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Interdisciplinary Sculpture

Semester: Winter 2014

Date of Report: July 28, 2014

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor **Excellent**
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please explain your rating.

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

MICA has been pushing its reputation hard to make the lists for prestigious arts institutions in America. They have a well-rounded curriculum similar to OCAD but with fabrication courses like *Warped Wood* and *Digital Printing on Fabric* which aren't offered here at OCAD. The real reason I chose MICA was to check out the city of Baltimore and its reputation for a burgeoning arts scene fizzling with DIY independent arts and music. The idea of being in close proximity to New York, Washington and Philly was also very exciting.

What was the most meaningful thing you learned while studying off campus?

Every city has a totally different arts scene and broadened my perspective as to where I could work and make art. Where I would consider showing and where I might want to live. Also, being alone in a foreign city is a real mind trip. Bring valium.

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

1. A skillset I can't get at OCAD. Through *Warped Wood*, I learned the simplest and most effective ways to steam-bend. The OCAD woodshop has some bending machines but more designed for small-scale products.
2. I became really close with a few new friends. Four months isn't really that much time to make a lot of great friends, but enough to get close to a few.
3. Experiencing the city like an inhabitant. I racked up some local haunts in Baltimore and now miss them dearly.

-- 1. Depression. Being away from my partner, my best friends, close friends, acquaintances, every familiar face or thing I've gotten used to in Toronto – brought on a pretty serious depression.

2. Making new friends. I have amazing friends in Toronto. When I first got there, I felt like I didn't need any more, that I could buckle down and focus on studying. Everyone at MICA was at least ten years younger than me, between the ages of 18-21, spoke, smelled and dressed like sloppy, insecure teenagers.

3. Being so poor. Our student visa stipulated we couldn't work off-campus. There were on-campus jobs but they were really hard to find (there's no job board, Human Resources asks you to approach every single department to see if there's an openings) and by the Winter semester, most jobs are filled.

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?

Everything went surprisingly smoothly. I had all my travel documents in order well before the deadline.

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

If you have any prescriptions, make sure you have a well-stocked supply for the time you're in the States because they require you to co-pay for your prescriptions after the insurance deductions and it is still very expensive. The art stores around MICA are plenty but strangely, I couldn't find pads of bond paper anywhere. They only sketch on newsprint pads in Baltimore.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I flew into DCA airport in Washington and I travelled alone. The subway system was a little confusing at first, but made it to the train into Baltimore on time. There are two trains and I accidentally boarded the MARC commuter train instead of the AmTrak but it turned out just fine. Because I was toting four months of the heaviest checked bag I've ever had, if you can swing a cheap flight, I would recommend flying into BMA. The distance travelling into the MICA area is easier and shorter. However, flying into DCA is the cheapest.

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

I arrived a few days before the orientation, which is a couple days before school actually starts. That's a fine time to arrive. I was lucky to start renting a place mid-month in January so my arrival time was dependent on the available move-in date. It would have been nice to have had a few days before school started to get to know the city in a no-pressure roaming kind of way. Once school started, life got really busy.

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

There was an orientation and it was terribly juvenile. MICA orients the exchange students with the freshmen so I found myself playing Name Games and Human Twister whilst listening to privileged teenagers cry about not having anyone to wipe their ass for the first time. Eventually we found out there was an option to opt-out of certain activities of the orientation, which was not communicated to us, and I would suggest inquiring about that at the beginning of the orientation.

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 office for international/exchange students at MICA is amazing. Nora deals with the immigration side. Mary acts as your academic advisor. Both are warm, welcoming and full of funny stories.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived off-campus in a warehouse turned studio loft building called The Copycat. It was an amazing piece of history, filled with artists and independent galleries.

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

I lucked out finding this posting on Craigslist and on MICA's Off-Campus Housing Facebook page. MICA can only help you with on-campus housing.

If you lived on-campus, which residences would you recommend? Are there any that should be avoided?

N/A

If you lived off-campus, do you have any recommendations for future exchange students? For example, does rent include hydro and other utilities, or are they extra? Which location in the city is ideal for exchange students?

The transit system in Baltimore is underdeveloped in comparison to Toronto. I would recommend living close to MICA so you're within short walking distance. The school provides free evening shuttles within a certain range around the school, so I would inquire about that and make sure you're within that range. The neighbourhoods of Baltimore aren't safe ever.

At the Copycat Building, we paid rent + hydro + the worst proprietary internet since 1992 dial-up.

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 & Challenge: 8/10

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 24 hours. All studio, seminar and fabrication classes are 6 hours long. Liberal Arts classes are 3 hours long.

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): 30

Oral presentations (Individual and Group): Only in critiques.

Written assignments: Fourth year liberal arts classes demand a lot.

Studio-based work: Great

Interaction between students and professors: Most professors were willing and accommodating to cater to the needs of each student.

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?

N/A

What were the libraries and computer facilities like?

The library was more extensive than OCAD. There was free printing in all computer labs.

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 the Mobile Exchange Bursary, every possible bursary, OSAP and prayed that someone would let me have enough money to go. Even with all those savings, I still didn't have enough and managed to get an on-campus job which paid basically nothing. (\$9/hr)

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

The U.S.A. can be much cheaper (booze) but Baltimore's prices were pretty much the same.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: Approximately 1.40

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

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

Less time.

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):** \$3500
2. **School supplies:** \$1000
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$550 /month = \$2200
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ 40/month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ 65/month
 - C) **Cable:** \$0 /month
 - D) **Other (specify) \$ /month**
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ 200/month = \$400
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$50 /month = \$200
7. **Laundry:** \$20/month = \$80
8. **Transportation:** \$ 10/month = \$40
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9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$400

10. **Travel health insurance:** \$1800 - They required each exchange student purchase MICA's health insurance regardless if you already had some.

11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$50
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$300
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$500
14. **Student visa:** \$110
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$

Estimated Total Expenses: \$10,285

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?

Not really. One or two good friends are better than a lot of acquaintances because when things get hard you need a good support system to get through it.

Was there a lot of interaction between local students and exchange/international students?

Yes. Every class.

What is the best way to develop friendships with students from your host institution?

To engage with people in class.

Did you have any unforeseen problems? Was there anything that you felt was strikingly different from what you expected? If so, is there a way that you could have prepared yourself?

I didn't expect to feel so homesick.