



**2015-2016 Student Mobility/Exchange Program
Returning Undergraduate Student Report**

Host University: Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt)

Host Country: USA

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Art History

Semester: Winter 2016

Date of Report: June 29, 2016

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

Poor

Excellent

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 X

Please explain your rating.

I had a wonderful experience at MassArt. I found the transition between Toronto and Boston very easy, the exchange coordinators on the Boston end made everything very smooth. I loved the whole vibe of the city; there are so many different universities and colleges in Boston that it feels very young and progressive. My classes were great, the professors were fantastic, I am keeping touch with a number of them as I continue my studies. I lived off campus in an area called Allston which was full of restaurants and bars and was relatively cheap. I truly only have good things to say of the experience.

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

As a student in OCADU's new BA program I was limited basically to institutions in either Canada or the United states so that was a key factor. I applied to two institutions in Boston and one in Chicago and my choices were based both on research into the institutions and discussion with a faculty member with knowledge of the institutions.

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

My most positive take-aways from the exchange would be the chance to take classes that I would not otherwise have been able to take at OCADU as well as the relationships I was able to build with my professors while there. Additionally by living off campus with roommates I met people I would not have otherwise had the chance to meet from a wide variety of backgrounds.

I honestly did not experience too many challenges. The biggest was probably the fact that while I was there the Canadian dollar was doing incredibly poorly in comparison to the US dollar. I had saved a considerable amount of money but the exchange rate changed that a lot because everything was still priced roughly similarly to what one might find in Toronto.

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?

In terms of banking I opened up a US Dollar account through my bank and applied for a US Dollar visa card. That way I could make all my purchases with the visa card and then pay it off from the US Dollar account and only get one transaction/conversion fee a month.

The process for Canadians to study in the US is very simple, you don't actually get a visa, just a form. I basically applied for it as soon as I decided which school I was going to. You do it all online and it is super easy.

With MassArt I had the option to apply for on-campus housing but opted to find my own accommodation instead. I joined a bunch of 'Boston Roommate' search groups on facebook and ended up finding a young girl who was also heading out on an exchange for the semester so the timing was perfect. I previously attempted to find a place through craigslist and encountered a number of scams so I'd suggest the facebook group route.

I also take a specific medication that I had to organize a travel supply for prior to my trip. I did it rather last minute so if that is something one has to deal with I would suggest starting to make arrangements probably more than a week before leaving...

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

There was not anything I was lacking in the US.

3. ARRIVAL

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

Travel from Toronto to Boston is incredibly easy. The flight in only an hour and a half. From the airport public transit is very straight forward. I chose to take a taxi to my apartment as it was my first time being there but yeah, the public transit is super easy.

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

There was an orientation day prior to the start of the semester that the exchange coordinator will contact you about. They encourage all exchange students to attend so you are expected to arrive prior to this event. I think I arrived basically the day before because it was the cheapest flight I could get. I don't think it would have proved beneficial to arrive earlier unless you wanted time to explore the city solo I guess?

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

Yes there was and yes I did attend. It was fine, you meet all the other exchange students, play some ice breaker activities, learn about the health services and go on a tour of campus. You also meet with the immigration coordinator to make sure all your paperwork is in order. It was useful in getting one's bearings.

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 is a coordinating office for international and exchange students. The key person I was in contact with throughout the exchange was Amy Holland and she was great. There are a number of other people in the office though that were all very helpful.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived in an apartment in an area called Allston and it was fantastic. The neighbourhood was great, the apartment was huge, I had three roommates and we all hit it off. It was right on a bus line that went right to the school but I could also walk there in about 35 minutes so when the weather warmed up I did that.

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

I had a little difficulty at first with scams on craigslist but after joining these roommate search groups on facebook it was super easy. I was also lucky in that I have a cousin who lives in Boston so they were able to go and see the apartment in person and make sure it was alright. However, MassArt does have on-campus options and out of the 14 exchange students only myself and one other had accommodation off-campus so I assume Amy could easily help with on-campus accommodation.

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 would say basically on par with OCADU, as a third year student I took a second year class and it was maybe a little on the less challenging side.

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

5 classes x 3 hours each = 15 hours per week

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

Approx. 30 ? I was in all academic classes and all were very reading heavy thus most of my class work outside of the actual classes was reading and annotating.

Studio-based work:

n/a

Written assignments:

I wrote four 3-5 page papers, three 5-7 page papers and two 8-10 page papers.

Interaction between students and professors:

As previously mentioned I had really great professors that I was able to build great rapport with during and after class as well as over email.

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 were intramurals available between the 'Colleges of the Fenway' which are six colleges that share cafeterias and fitness centre facilities. There was also a group thing organized to watch the Boston marathon with all the exchange students however I did not participate in either of those...There were constanting posters and emails sent out regarding school events but to be honest I was content with doing my own thing while I was there. But the opportunity was there.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

Library and computer lab were both amazing. I love OCADU but they were a lot better than what we have here.

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 receive student loans both the the government of Canada and the government of Alberta, I also have a job here in Toronto so I had managed to accumulate about \$9000 before I left. That being said when I converted my funds to US dollars I lost about \$2000. I did receive help from my parents, they covered the cost of my rent, I paid for travel, insurance, books and supplies, utilities, phone etc.

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

Cost of living was basically the same, although I would say that groceries seem a lot more expensive here in Toronto since I've been back. However, rent, utilities, phone bill, restaurants, bars, etc. were all very similarly priced.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

It fluctuated while I was there; the worst was when I arrived in Jan and it dipped to 1 CAD = 0.686 USD, the best was close to the end of my trip in May when it rose to 1 CAD = 0.798. It was not the most ideal time financially to be a Canadian in the States.

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

Jan 2016 - May 2016

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

I spent more I think but you wouldn't necessarily have to. It was a combination of the exchange rate being in the toilet and my own shopping tendency. Plus being a new city I wanted to go to concerts and eat out at restaurants. I could have been a lot more frugal.

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):** \$3196.10
2. **School supplies:** \$150 (my only supplies were books)
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = 700
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$45/month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ 66/month
 - C) **Cable:** n/a
 - D) **Other (specify)** n/a
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = \$60
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$250 (I'm including clothing shopping in this, I shopped a lot more than I should have)
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$6
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$70
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$250
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$?
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$1300 mandatory insurance
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** I bought two one way tickets because my dates were flexible, each was about \$200

13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** I went to NYC for a week, the bus round trip was \$60 I think, I had free accommodation and probably spent about \$500 on food and drink and a talk at the BAM.

14. **Student visa:** \$180 for the DS-2019 form

15. **Other expenses (please specify):** n/a

Estimated Total Expenses: approx. \$11500

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?

Boston is probably the least AMERICAN American city I have visited. The people were super friendly, as a Canadian I had zero culture shock.

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?

I ended mostly bonding with other exchange students and my roommates but I am generally a pretty introverted person. The community at the school provides tons of opportunity to interact with students of all background and discipline.

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 had a very smooth exchange experience. No unforeseen difficulties, no crazy surprises, excluding the abysmal performance of the Canadian dollar.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

I really had the best time on this exchange, I would encourage any student to do it. It is expensive but I genuinely believe it is worth it.

Please email your report to Susan Kemp, Student Mobility/Exchange Coordinator, at skemp@ocadu.ca