



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

Host University: L'École de Design Nantes Atlantique

Host Country: France

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Industrial Product

Semester: Winter 2017

Date of Report: August 15, 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?

One of the big deciding factors for me was that I had studied in France before (I did an exchange when I was in high school to learn the language), so I was excited to go and see my French family and to continue exploring France.

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

On the education side of it, the positive experiences that I had were very much related to the communication between professors. Each course that we had related to one another. The courses were very well curated to build up to the final project we had. Our professors all spoke to one another and tailored their lectures to what we were working on in our long project course.

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?

Before the exchange I had to get a Visa, all my banking information in order to do a wire transfer once I arrived in France, renew my passport and get lots of passport pictures taken. There's nothing in particular that I would've done differently. Maybe just do things a little bit earlier rather than waiting until the last minute, but otherwise everything was really smooth.

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

During the program you are required to take a visual arts course which requires some art supplies, but there are plenty of places in Nantes that you can pick these up for cheap. You might want to bring a fork, knife, spoon, etc. with you because it's really hard to find a place that sells them individually.

3. ARRIVAL

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

They have a mentor program through the school and every international student is assigned a mentor. I landed in Paris, but once I got to Nantes my mentor was supposed to pick me up from the train station but didn't. I managed to get myself places fairly easily just by using Uber and other ride sharing apps.

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

I arrived just over 2 weeks earlier than the start of the semester because I wanted to do some travelling before the semester started because I wasn't sure if I'd have much time during the semester. I arrived back from my travels 4 days before my first day at school and I think it was the perfect amount of time to get settled in, discover a bit of the city, and meet some of the people in my program.

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

They had a 2-day orientation session that was mandatory for all international students before the semester officially started. It was very helpful because they talked about how to set up a French bank account, French insurance, what we'll need for the semester, etc. It was also a great way to get acquainted with a lot of the other students who you're going to be studying with.

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, they have an office dedicated to just international students. I would recommend talking to Oriane. She's in charge of the exchange students coming from abroad and is extremely kind and very helpful. Zoe is also really good, but she tends to focus more on the current students at the school who are planning on going abroad.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived in a residence called Chanzy. It was really good. It was the one recommended by the school, and the majority of the exchange students stayed there, so it was really easy to plan outings and events. The staff are also very helpful, and a few of them spoke English fluently which helped a lot.

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

The host institution assisted me in finding accommodations. They have an arrangement with a residence called Chanzy, where they have rooms saved specifically for students who come for an exchange.

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: It wasn't as challenging as OCAD U

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): 30hours

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): 5hours

Studio-based work: It was really good, but they have very small facilities.

Written assignments: There weren't many written assignments.

Interaction between students and professors: Very casual, and the professors are very accessible.

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 a few activities scheduled for exchange students. At the end of the first week there was a boat tour on the river that goes through the city. Throughout the exchange there were also many events scheduled to go to bars (for example, St. Patrick's Day). There is a student who is part of the school's student council that is in charge of international student events.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

There computer facilities were fantastic! They had multiple computer labs, including one that just had Wacom Cintiq computers in it. The only downside is that all of the computers are windows, not Mac, so it was a learning curve. They don't have a library, but they have an agreement with the libraries of neighbouring schools to allow us to use theirs.

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?

For the exchange I saved up quite a bit of my own money. I worked a lot the summer before as well as during the fall semester to have a lot for the exchange. I wish I had applied for

scholarships or bursaries because it definitely would have helped out a lot. Nearing the end of the exchange my money was running out so I had to get some financial help from my mom and grandparents.

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

The cost of living was definitely higher in France. Mainly because 1 euro was equivalent to \$1.40 cdn, and while I was in France they elected a new President and the euro went up to \$1.50 cdn which completely threw off my budgeting. Restaurants and such are similarly priced to those in Canada, but after you consider the exchange rate a cheap 8\$ burger becomes an overpriced 12\$ burger.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: \$1.40/\$1.50

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): 6 months

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

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):** \$3600
2. **School supplies:** \$50
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ 400/month = \$2000
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ 0/month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ 20/month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ 0/month
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ 0/month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ 150/month = \$750
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ 15/month = \$75
7. **Laundry:** \$ 20/month = \$100
8. **Transportation:** \$ 50/month = \$250
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$0

10. **Travel health insurance:** \$0
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$1200
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$1500
14. **Student visa:** \$90
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$0

Estimated Total Expenses: \$10 915

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 had a bit of culture shock at first because not too many people are able to speak English and my French was a little rusty, so there was sometimes a language barrier that I had to overcome when ordering food or going to the grocery store. The French way of life is also quite different from in Canada, they are a lot more relaxed. My best advice is to learn simple French sayings, like how to order food, or ask for directions.

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?

There was little bit of interaction between the local students and the exchange students, but the French students mostly grouped together. The exchange students though became a very close group and we hung out together all the time. I'm still very good friends with a lot of them, and a few of them are coming to Toronto in November to visit. The best way to develop friendships is to stay in the residence that the school suggests, because most of the exchange students will be staying there and it makes it easier to plan events when you're all under one roof.

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

The biggest unforeseen problem was the exchange rate changing drastically that threw off my budgeting. A few things that were different than what I expected was that people there go on strike about 6 times a month, and there is a riot every few weeks, and apparently it's normal according to the French students.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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