



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

Host University: Oregon College of Art and Craft

Host Country: United States

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Metals

Semester: Winter 2014

Date of Report: December 13, 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.

The school was very small (around 200 students total), which was a nice change from OCADU's seemingly large and exclusive student population. The folks at the school are all very kind and extremely willing to help you for whatever reason need be (professors, staff, and students alike). The school was outside of Portland's key spots, with not much around the school (other than trees), so if you're hungry, you better have packed a lunch. Sometimes there is no one around after class hours, which makes it difficult when you are new and have many questions with no one to answer them.

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

I chose this institution because I was ready to downsize in terms of the school size and city size. Portland appealed to me because you had the option to be downtown, to be on the outskirts, or to be amongst old growth forests, or the desert, or the ocean, the mountains, etc, whereas these options certainly are not available for OCADU students. The school fulfilled my lust for something smaller and more low key/outdoors oriented, as it is located amongst trees, in separate little cottage-like buildings, and professors seem to be inspired by their outside environment and encourage other students to explore that option as well. Also the fact that the school places a strong emphasis on what most seem to be a dying "art"- craft.

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

That I wasn't restricted to my program major, even if it has set me behind in terms of required credits. I felt able and encouraged to explore other materials/methods.

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

Three most positive experiences:

1. Seeing and being a part of (even though brief) how much the landscape of Oregon influences the professors and student's art and craft
2. Spending time away from the campus to explore Oregon
3. Being away from very high pressures that OCADU places on students and further from the elitist, artist class.

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 opened an American bank account as it cost too much to use my Canadian card here. I was required to get my F-1 visa, I-90, and a few other little documents, which were easy to obtain as I was guided through the entire process with a lot of amazing help from Susan Kemp. I wasn't even required to show the border security at the airport my visa forms, simply my passport and reason for travel (though of course that is a case by case situation). IMPORTANT- if they don't check your visa papers at the border, make them look at them! Because of them not looking at my student visa papers, I was marked as a visitor which, long story short, totally fucked up my passport and border crossing situation.

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

Portland is pretty similar to Toronto in terms of food options, art supplies options. Definitely try to bring any health items though as dealing with finding medications/supplies in another country is pretty stressful in general, let alone during the school year.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I arrived at the airport, no one met me, but there were absolutely no difficulties. I was able to take a taxi for \$30 to my house in southeast Portland.

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

I arrived in Portland the night before my orientation the next morning, which was a little hectic, but I had a few days after orientation before the semester started to establish myself a little bit and explore. I don't think I would have benefitted much more from arriving earlier.

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

Yes, I did attend. It was mostly only helpful for navigating around the winding paths on campus, not too helpful with much else.

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 no one individual who knows most everything about international/exchange students, but rather everyone in the “red house” knows what’s up and can direct you to someone else in that house that can help you. Super easy.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived off campus, about an hour away from the school by bus. Despite the long travel time, I was so happy with my decision as there is not much to do or see around campus. I lived in Southeast Portland, which is a less expensive than living in southwest or northwest Portland (if you look hard enough). I moved to Northeast Portland after the semester, which is even better than southeast Portland. I found a room in a small 3 bedroom house, which was \$550/month (a nice change from expensive, cramped apartments in Toronto).

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

I didn’t hear from OCAC about being accepted until less than a month before the semester started, so getting everything together in time was hectic and stressful. By then, because it was so late, on-campus accommodations had been filled up. The school did not provide any warning of this happening and did not aid in finding alternative accommodations.

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?

Rent usually does not include hydro and other utilities. You kind of have to make a sacrifice between living close to school and having to travel far to do or see anything interesting, or living a little ways out from school and being close to great things (people, food carts, parks, bars, etc)

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: The expectations seemed significantly lower, which actually allowed for more exploration and a sense of freedom.

Time spent in class (# of hours per week): around 20 hours per week

Time spent working on projects outside of class (# of hours per week): around 30-40 hours per week

Oral presentations (Individual and Group): Oral presentations, whether it be individually or done in groups, was rare as the class sizes are so small already.

Written assignments: The level of formal documentation needed for assignments was almost non-existent.

Studio-based work: Most of the work done was studio-based work, and depending on your area of interest, can also be done off campus.

Interaction between students and professors: Minimal as the professors generally are not available on campus after school/class hours. Their office hours are pretty much the only time you get can face to face interaction with them apart from in class time, which is usually an hour before the class, or an hour after the class.

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 was almost no acknowledgment of the fact that I was an exchange/international student, which can be a struggle as sometimes you are simply expected to know how things work within the school. The way that I learned was by asking other students, which is hard sometimes when you are new.

What were the libraries and computer facilities like? Even tinier than OCADU's library if you can believe that. I never once used the library as it seemed like you had to source most of the books you'd want from a library in another county of Oregon, which takes about a week, and everyone knows that students always have too much on their plate to account for things like that. There is one computer lab, which has about 15 macs, and its never ever full. AND FREE PHOTOCOPYING!

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 received a mobility student bursary which paid for a few courses, while the rest I had help from my parents. There is the option of work study, which means working on campus (the only way you can legally work in the US on a student visa) and helping with things such as front desk help, café help, studio cleaning, etc.

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

Lower! Rent is cheaper than Toronto, and you get more bang for your buck. Also if you meet the right people and look hard enough, there is so much free food available in Portland (food not bombs every Monday in Southeast, Southeast food porch on SE 33rd just south of Hawthorne, Northeast food porch, etc). While I was in Oregon, the Canadian and US dollar were not very far off from one another, yet the prices were much cheaper in the US for things such as food, alcohol, cigarettes, etc.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: \$0.94 US = \$1 Canada

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): 01/2014- 07/2014

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

At first, more, but once you talk with folks and figure out where cheaper options are, it gets way cheaper.

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):** \$-6270
2. **School supplies:** \$500
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$550 /month = \$2200
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ 25/month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ 50/month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ -/month
 - D) **Other (specify) \$ /month**
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ 60/month = \$240
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ 10/month = \$40
7. **Laundry:** \$ 5/month = \$20
8. **Transportation:** \$ -/month = \$-
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$ -
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$-
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$-
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$800
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$-
14. **Student visa:** \$-

15. Other expenses (please specify): \$-

Estimated Total Expenses: ~\$10,370

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 only “culture shock” that I experienced during my exchange was realizing how much more multicultural Toronto is than Oregon. This felt very strange as Portland’s cultural communities seem very segregated, and the “popular spots” feeling very similar to a smaller version of Toronto’s Queen Street West (white, upper-middle class, and pretentious). Adapted by learning the realities of Oregon’s history of racist core beliefs and practises, and working on not perpetuating any of it. And also a shock of how beautiful the northwest is!!!

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?

The local students, though few in number, are all super friendly and helpful. Create friendships by hanging around the school.

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?

If you fall in love with the people, if you fall in love with the place, remember that border exist and are there to tear your heart apart. Protect your heart.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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