



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

Host University: Otis College of Art and Design

Host Country: USA

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Architecture/Landscape/Interiors

Semester: Fall 2016

Date of Report: January 31 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?

Originally I had been unsure to even attend an exchange. I had researched many schools which overlapped and matched with the criteria of courses at OCAD which I enjoyed. The research narrowed down to two schools, MICA and Otis. Both schools had the best course descriptions which matched with what I would be studying at OCAD. This was the major factor which influenced me to choose which schools to apply to. I had been accepted at both institutions, but after further research I found Otis would be more beneficial. The program and campus was what I was looking for and I accepted.

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

There weren't too many challenges to be faced. The major one would be the conversion, to only work in Imperial standards, which after a while became natural to work with since I was immersed in it every day. The entire exchange overall was extremely a positive experience, as all the programs exceeded my expectations. When I was finally within the programs, the environment felt quite welcoming, and I felt like I was gaining more knowledge just being within the environment and learning one on one.

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?

Going to the US wasn't quite difficult. The school gave me directions, and were very helpful to answer any questions I had in preparation. I had to renew my passport, and that was probably the longest waiting time. Since it is America, I didn't have to get a VISA, just have proper F1 Student documentation when crossing the border. I went to my bank, and created an American chequing account linked to my Canadian account, and got a credit card as well. The process was quite simple working with my bank to achieve these.

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

When I left, I brought all materials which I relied on for making projects and models. Once I arrived, I talked to my peers about where to go for supplies, and there was a store called Blinks, which was the equivalent of our Curry's. There were a few nearby the school, and other types of supply stores where students could go. As well, across the street, there was a store called Ralph's where students went for food. Down the street, was a organic food store, and there were many fast food restaurants nearby as well.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I arrived with my dad, we both flew over there to help get me set up. The most difficulties were figuring out where the stores were to find what we were looking for. The airport was extremely close to the school, and my father rented a car, and stayed for a few days to help me gather any supplies, and drive around the area to become familiar with it.

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

Since the application was later, the host institution had not given me a formal date to move in. As I was international, I booked my flight just less than a week before my classes said they were starting. Later I found out that I could move in sooner since there was orientation week. This year was the first year that Otis actually had a residence hall, and they were still trying to figure out when students could arrive. Once I arrived at the school, the residence coordinator met with me and helped set me up with my student ID, and within the dorms.

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

There were different orientation sessions at Otis. When I arrived, I had missed the original first year orientation day, but was met with a head from housing who helped me around and set up my identification card, and showed me my room. I received more information regarding help and where to find what at Otis. On top of that, I also attended an international student orientation which explained how our visas worked and went through all possible options for international students attending Otis. They accommodated everyone, and had many staff walk around and answer questions in all ranges.

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 was an office for international affairs, whom I spoke with regularly when I had questions. I do not remember a specific staff member, but all the people working there were quite welcoming, and if they did not answer your question when you went directly to them, they would find out the answer and get back to you as soon as possible. Many of my questions I directed at Linda, the program chair for Architecture/Landscape/Interiors at Otis.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived on campus at a new residence hall. I quite enjoyed it, and it was very well done. There were a few minor glitches, of things being put in later, as it was the first year the building had been built. There were lounges on each floor and it was easy to get around and get to know people.

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

No difficulties as I lived on campus. Any questions or issues were dealt directly with the housing staff.

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:

The school load was quite demanding. They expected you to already know some programs, so a lot of the first part of the semester was spent just learning programs and techniques.

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

22.

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

30-60

Studio-based work:

10-20 hours a week. Heavily focused on studio assignments.

Written assignments:

2-5 hours a week. Many of the written components were supplementary.

Interaction between students and professors:

Very easy, any questions and the professor would either respond within the same day if not the next day or so. Any larger questions, and you could go directly to the head of the department Linda, and ask questions without having to make a meeting.

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 extracurricular, however I was too immersed in school to join any clubs. They offered many different activities each month and organized different events during lunch hours as well for all students.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

Much of the school was computer based, and we had access to computer labs in the main building with all types of software. There was a library at the first floor of the residence hall which was easily accessible and had great hours for students to do work at. There was lots of access for students to work, and if someone was in a computer lab, it never closed, or security could open up a lap if it was. Many different labs had different computers and almost all programs relevant for students to work on them.

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 tuition, my parents and I had a savings which we were able to use. I saved up money for myself for spending or supplies during the summer, and also received help from my grandmother. I also got a bursary from OCAD which helped me pay for second semester so I wasn't worried about having a source of income while I was away.

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

The overall cost of living was much more expensive over there, as I had to live on my own. I had a meal plan with the school but also ate out a lot, as there was only one main kitchen for all the students and each room only had a mini fridge. Taxes were lower on items, but since there as exchange, it essentially evened out the same as items back home, even though the price looked to be lower.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country: American Dollar

Time spent in host country (month/year - month/year): Late August to Mid December 2016

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

I probably spent about the same, in terms of housing and rent, I probably spent slightly more, but there was the added bonus of being on campus and having safety on site at all times.

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):** \$ 4,000
2. **School supplies:** \$ 2, 000
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = \$ 10, 000
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month n/a
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month 40 / month cell phone travel package
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month n/a
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month n/a
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = \$ 5, 000
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = \$ 1, 000
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$ 75/entire semester
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$ 200 overall
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$ 50/month
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$ 0 (I was joined to my parents health plan)
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$ 0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$ 600
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$ 1,000
14. **Student visa:** \$ approx. 200 (I only had to get an F-1 document)

15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$ 3,000

Estimated Total Expenses: \$ 27, 395

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?

No culture shock, as America seems to be similar to Canada, and I had spent a few weeks a year growing up in America as well. Only difference was being on the West Coast as opposed to the southern parts of America.

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 school offered orientation week where all the incoming students got a chance to interact and meet each other which was really nice. I developed friends living in the dorms as well, and since my program was so small I became good friends with a lot of people there. I just went up and started talking to people and they talked back, and that’s essentially how I made most of my friendships. Everyone on campus is fairly nice, but since it is a different country there are still some things which are different. I ended up making friends with people who were actually international, but had been there since foundation year, so I didn’t have too many, purely American friends.

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

Nothing seemed too different, many of the problems I faced were really to do with transportation, but that was a problem the city faced. Of the problems that came up, were similar problems I had dealt with at OCAD, or problems everyone living in LA faced.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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