



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

Host University: Ringling College of Art and Design

Host Country: US

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Illustration

Semester: Winter 2016

Date of Report: May 20 2016

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

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

Please explain your rating.

My experience in academics was excellent, Ringling has great facility and faculty and I was able to meet my goals of going on an exchange - to experiment with different artistic approaches and to develop further a direction in my practice, and to grow as a person; but I had some challenges with respect to the living experience, which I will elaborate.

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

I chose Ringling because it has a strong Illustration program and a course dedicated to children's book illustration. I was hoping to have a different experience spending the winter in the south, since I've always lived in the north. Also, I wanted to challenge myself by going to a place far from home.

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

Positive experiences:

The education at Ringling is great; every instructor I had is quite open and supportive, and would also share a lot of professional experience with students about the industry. The studios at Ringling are also very well equipped: classrooms all had sinks, cutting tools, Cintiq tablets, a mac desktop and a b&w printer; in the illustration building, there is also a Cintiq lab and a machine for enlarging a sketch for transferring. The library also has a coloured printer, and there is a pre-set amount of money for printing in everyone's account, making printing quite convenient. The painting studio is very large with easy-to use easels, washrooms, water-fountain, vinyl gloves, and Gamsol is provided by the department.

The highlight for Ringling's illustration program for me was the children's book illustration class, and my illustration instructor also happened to be a children's book illustrator, since I have been considering that for a career I was able to get a lot of insights and resources that were not available at home. There were also presentations by agents, art directors, and artists in the industry throughout the semester, even though I was only to attend one of them because of my health condition. Also, during the winter semester a lot of companies and studios (such as Disney, Pixar, Hullmark, Blue Sky) would come on campus for recruiting, unfortunately I could not intern in the US without a F-1 for at least 1 year, but it's still worth attending their presentations.

Challenges:

I did not foresee that southern winter is actually tougher to endure than in Canada, especially that the AC is really cold in every interior. I was sick almost all the time when I was at Sarasota and also had a lot of allergies. Ringling's attendance policy is that a student can only miss 3 classes without affecting their grade, but the health center on campus does not provide any medical note unless you're sent to the ER, so that really gave me some challenge when I got really sick but had to go to class regardless.

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?

Preparation was relatively easy since Canadians don't need to apply for visa to study in the US, I got an I-20 form mailed to me, paid for the SEVIS fee and got my F-1 visa while crossing border at the airport.

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 is an art supply store on campus but it's relatively expensive and the variety can be limited. The public transport system is not very convenient at Sarasota so travelling to other art stores is not very easy as in Toronto; although if you meet some friends with a car you can ask them to drive you around. I brought water-soluble oil paints since oil is generally used here for painting classes. I was limited by luggage restrictions but if you are driving down I would suggest bringing a variety of media to experiment with.

I would also suggest bring warm clothes and bedding since throughout the year the AC can be quite cold, and noise-cancelling devices if you are living with a roommate.

3. ARRIVAL

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

There was no pick-up service, but I did not experience difficulties, the airport is only a 15 minutes drive from Ringling, it's a small and nice airport with taxi service and the main bus route also runs between school and the airport.

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

I arrived on Jan 8th, Friday, before school started since the move-in date for residence is on Sunday.

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

I spent my exchange during the winter semester so there was no orientation, so I had to figure everything out by myself, but the staff and students there were friendly and helpful. There is an orientation week for fall semester.

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?

Amy Pettengill is the International Student Coordinator; I corresponded with her and Justin Selph, the academic advisor. They are both very nice and helpful.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived at Ulla Searing Student Center. It was at the center of the campus and very close to all the facility and services, such as the main buffet-style cafeteria, the gym, the library; classrooms are all about 5~7 minutes away. Some challenges were that there is only water fountain on the 2nd floor and the tap water is not as good as in Toronto, so a kettle or a water filter is needed. Also, I've never lived with a roommate before so it was a challenging but precious experience: I had a lot of stress dealing with noise and lack of alone time, but also developed much more solid house chore skills from cleaning our living space and bathroom.

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

I emailed reslife at Ringling and the housing assistant JJ Mitchel helped me to find a place. Although when I was arranging my housing it was probably a busy time for them and things were very slow, I was only able to secure a place a few days before I departed.

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'd say it's the same as OCAD, if not easier in terms of freedom to experiment.

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

6 hours x 4 courses=24

Liberal arts courses are 3 hours per week.

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

16~18

Studio-based work:

The type of studio work and level of difficulty are similar to that of OCAD, but assignments were generally more open to students' personal interests. The courses I took were Junior Illustration, Figure Painting, Children's Book Illustration, and Sketchbook Drawing: Nature and Science (I planned to take artistic anatomy but was only notified after I made my decision to come to Ringling that it's not offered in the winter semester, so I took Justin Selph's recommendation for

this course). The works in each course are quite different from each other: figure painting is very similar to observational painting at OCAD, but students can experiment with a variety of media; for illustration, I had assignments that covered personal projects, editorial, marketing, open proposal (including options of licensing and gallery), and a mini-thesis. For children's book, students wrote their own stories, developed storyboards, dummies, sketches for cover ideas, and eventually worked on a few pages of illustrations from the book. For the sketchbook drawing elective, the class travelled to different places (such as gardens, aquariums, the beach, wildlife sanctuary, and the national park) to draw and paint from life; everyone who did not have a car was able to ride with classmates who do.

Written assignments:

I did not take a liberal arts course so the only written assignments I got was to write my own story for children's book illustration, and a few things for my illustration class: proposals, artist statements, licensing contracts, and a response for an article.

Interaction between students and professors:

Professors are all very open and friendly, they gave constructive criticism and are very supportive for students to experiment and explore. Ringling also uses CANVAS but it's not required like that of OCAD, mostly communication outside of class is via email. Another difference from OCAD is that office hours are not very common since most studio classes are twice a week so there is a lot of time to work in class and meet with the instructor.

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 lot of activities and events but not specifically for international students; there was a trip to Orlando during the semester available for interested students.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

Ringling is building a new library while I was there, but the old library had a lot of resources on art and design, along with computers and printers. The library's researcher Natisha Harper is very resourceful in finding the right book for a project. There are computers in every studio that I had class in, and there is a Cintiq lab in the illustration building. Each student is also given a MacBook to use during his or her study.

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?

My mother supported me paying for res&board (which was the major part of all costs), I paid my OCAD tuition with a bursary that I got, and paid travel & other expenses with my own savings.

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

Generally it's similar to Canada but it depends on exchange rates.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

1USD=1.44~1.49CAD

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

01/16-05/16

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

I definitely spent more during my Exchange since I live at home in Toronto and during my time here the exchange rate was unfortunately not on the Canadian side.

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):** 2558 \$
2. **School supplies:** ~300 \$
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = 5550\$
4. **Rent-related expenses:** N/A
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month
 - D) **Other (specify)** cleaning equipment 50\$
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = 4470\$
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = ~150\$
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = 20\$

Washer and dryer on take quarters, so I asked for changes when I when to the grocery store about 15 minutes walk from campus.
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = 50\$

Public transit is free for Ringling students; I only had to pay for taxi when going to and from the airport.
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** ~50\$
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$

OCAD U's health insurance includes a 120-day coverage for emergency travel health care. I would also recommend purchasing the student health care at Ringling.
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** ~100\$
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** 800\$ (for two people)
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** 300\$

During spring break the dining services on campus was closed, so I went on a trip to visit some friends.

14. **Student visa:** 200\$

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

Estimated Total Expenses: 1,5500\$

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 didn't experience any culture shock since the culture in US is quite similar to that of Canada, only the city (weather, flora, fauna, architecture) is very different.

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 were a lot of interactions both in class and outside of class. I introduced myself to my instructors at the first class and all my classmates were warm and friendly. I had a meal plan so when I ate in the cafeteria I would also meet a lot of the students; Amy Pettengill also introduced me to other international students, I was also able to meet someone from Canada.

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?

As mentioned my unforeseen problem was the weather and getting sick a lot more than I used to. If I could I would have brought more warm layers.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

I found my exchange experience to be both challenging and rewarding, as I expected when I applied. I have met some wonderful people, grew as an artist, and mostly importantly I got to know a little more about myself - my strengths and weaknesses, what I want for my career and life.

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