



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

Student Name:

Host University: School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Host Country: U.S

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Design

Semester: 2016 Fall

Date of Report: April 10, 2017

1. OVERALL EVALUATION

How would you rate your exchange experience overall?

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

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

SAIC was one of my first choices when I was deciding my post-secondary in high school. However, the tuition in US was too expensive that I had to give up. The OCAD Student Mobility/Exchange Program was an excellent opportunity to be enrolled in SAIC without having to pay the pricey US tuition.

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

The best thing about SAIC is that they have a pass or fail system which does not include grading system. I personally loved it because I'm the type of student who gets overly stressed on grades. I could focus solely on my work and practice my style of design without having to worry about grades.

The biggest challenge while I stayed there was that I had my wallet stolen at Starbucks. About 550 USD was spent on my credit card, but luckily I realized it fast enough and the bank was quick to stop the transaction from being processed. I still had to contact the police, the bank, and the Study Abroad department at SAIC to make sure I had everything I needed at the moment. Study Abroad team and the financial office at SAIC were very helpful, and I could get an emergency loan of \$300 which I paid back as soon as I got a replacement debit card from my bank.

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?

Banking:

I already had a student account at RBC, so I made a US Canada Cross Border account, which could be joined with my Canadian account. It has the benefit of not having to pay any international transaction fee, and you can close the account any time.

Travel documents:

All you need is the J1 visa document sent by SAIC to present to the immigration officer at the airport. I paid extra \$160 for US embassy interview because I thought I needed to submit DS-160 form as well (which seems like a required document for all exchange students travelling to US), but I later realized that it wasn't necessary.

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

I think everything is pretty much available in Chicago.

3. ARRIVAL

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

No one was at the airport, but I used Uber and did not have any difficulty going to my Airbnb.

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

I went to Chicago a week before the exchange student orientation, which was a week before the classes were in session, so that I could travel around the city. I wish I had gone there a day or two before the orientation and travelled after, because I had the entire week idling before the classes were in session. I do not think it's necessary to go there early, and two or three days before the orientation is fine unless you're planning to search for your accommodation in person.

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

Yes. The orientation was helpful because you could meet all the other exchange students from other countries and be friends with them. The Study Abroad team gave us an information package which included general information about the school, contacts for different departments, important dates to remember, and course registration information.

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 call it Study Abroad. Norman Miller and Justine Quinn, the director and the advisor of the Study Abroad, were very friendly and helpful.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I lived in a studio at Canterbury Court Apartments which is located in the Gold Coast neighbourhood. The neighbourhood was amazing and it was a few minutes walk from the lake. It was safe and vibrant, with bars, restaurants, and various shopping places around. The rent was pretty expensive (1150 US per month), but it was last minute and the stay was only for four months so I decided to take it.

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

I do not remember getting help from the host institution in finding my accommodation, but I'm sure they would have helped if I had asked. I would recommend finding the accommodation in person if possible.

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:

Not too hard. There's no pressure for you to get better grades as they have pass/fail system, and the instructors are always there for you if you have face any difficulty with the course.

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

24 hours/week (6 hours per course x 4 courses)

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

10 - 15 hours (Average of 4 hours per course) per week

Studio-based work:

I didn't take any courses that required me to be in the studio. All the work I had was in digital.

Written assignments: Manageable. My philosophy class required a 350 words reading response every week, and my psychoanalysis class required writing only one 5-8 pages essay for the semester.

Interaction between students and professors: Depends on the professors, but my professors/instructors were always available and kind.

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?

Yes, there were workshops for international students where they invited us to talk about our experience as exchange students to SAIC students who are interested in studying abroad to other countries.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

The library is slightly larger than the one at OCAD, located on the 6th floor of Sharp center. Macs were equipped in the library, several studio classrooms, and hallways. Printers were available in every building.

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 worked throughout the summer (from April to August 2016), got a bit of help from my parents, and got a bursary from OCAD to pay for the exchange.

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 similar to Toronto, but the currency exchange rate made it a lot higher.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

1 CAD : 0.73 USD

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

August/2016 to December/2016

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

I would say I spent as much as the local students did.

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):** \$2464 tuition + \$58 Health insurance + \$159.80 Ancillary fee + \$161.74 Student union fee
2. **School supplies:** \$0

3. **Rent or university residence:** \$ /month = \$1150 USD/month
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$0 /month
 - B) **Telephone:** \$55 USD /month
 - C) **Cable:** \$0 /month
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$ /month = around \$150/month
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$ /month = \$40/month
7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$10/month
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$0
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$100/month
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$950 USD
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** 0
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$287
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$400
14. **Student visa:** \$180
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$285 USD (Technology fee) + \$135 (U Pass (student metropass) fee for the semester)

Estimated Total Expenses: around \$2000 CAD / month including rent and living cost

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?

It's pretty much similar to life in Toronto, and there is no language barrier.

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?

Yes, SAIC has a very ethnically diverse student demographic, and they are very open to various cultures. I did not have difficulty making friends in all of my classes.

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

One thing that I did not expect to happen was the big protest around the election result. I was there during the election and the general mood in the city of Chicago was very depressing when Trump was elected. Protests happened for days, and the students and the faculty in Chicago were very upset.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Few tips:

It's safe to live around the center or north of Chicago.

Rent textbooks from Barnes and Nobles, it's way cheaper than buying used books and you get clean books.

Visit the Art Institute as often as you can, and visit other galleries like the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. They have an amazing collection of art, and most of them are free with your SAIC student card.

Go to movies. The cinemas are way better than those in Toronto. They have spacious reclining seats.

Get hot chocolates from the Goddess and Bakery beside the Sharp building.

You need to get the donuts from the Beavers Donuts food truck beside the Spertus building.

You also need to get the Obama burger from Good Stuff Eatery, which is right beside Sullivan building.

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