



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

Student Name:

Host University: University of the Arts Berlin (Universität der Künste – Udk)

Host Country: Germany

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Product Design

Semester: Summer

Date of Report: September 9th, 2016

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 university was a good fit for me, I was able to experience the incredible city of Berlin and stay on top of my school work. Although I enjoyed myself immensely in Berlin, I did have some structural issues with Udk education, which is why I rate it a 9, not a 10.

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

I chose Udk because I was interested in German product design and wanted to learn directly from them. I wanted to also experience an interesting city, and Berlin is definitely a city to experience. It's status as a cultural hub of modernity while still having an embedded history struck me as intriguing, so when they accepted me, it wasn't difficult to compile an answer for them.

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

The largest challenge that I thought I would have would be to find accommodation because I didn't want to be stuck in a student dormitory. I was extremely lucky to have a connection in Berlin who was living in a 6-person flat and a roommate was moving out for the summer. So I took over his room. This apartment was by far the best decision I made, the flatmates were incredible and I feel as though I have a home in Berlin now.

Although it was resolved for me quickly it was still a big challenge regardless. So for anyone looking to go to Berlin know this, it is a constantly moving city so there is a huge renting culture, but it might be difficult to find anything because everyone is looking. Be persistent and open and you will find a great place to live.

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?

VISA: I didn't apply for a visa before I left because there wasn't enough time to get the paperwork in order. So I had to go through a couple different processes to be a legal resident of Germany. When you find a place to stay, you will have to REGISTER YOUR ADDRESS, apply for a RESIDENT'S PERMIT, and DE-REGISTER YOUR ADDRESS. Germany loves it's paperwork.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: I bought a standard Blue Cross Travel Insurance for 5 months away.

GERMAN BANK: I opened a free bank with Deutsche Bank to pay my rent and use a Debit Card. This was only possible to do after you REGISTER YOUR ADDRESS.

In retrospect, I would have tried to get my RESIDENT'S PERMIT and REGISTRATION of my address earlier in my 4 month stay. It got a bit hectic at the end when I realized I still needed to get that visa.

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

All the supplies were easy enough to buy there. I would recommend printing every document you think is necessary (eg. Acceptance letter, banking info, etc.) so you have hard copies on hand.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I arrived at Berlin, Germany via train from Warsaw, Poland in the Central Station. I already had my apartment and was headed straight to it once I arrived. I arranged for a flatmate to be there to let me in beforehand. No difficulties.

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

I was told to arrive on April 1st, I arrived on April 11th or so. The first meeting was April 13th so I was cutting it close but it was definitely okay.

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

Orientation took place on the 13th, it was barely informative but a great place to meet the rest of the Exchange/Erasmus cohort.

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?

My contact person (Ursula Reiter) was exceptional! Their welcome package and first steps were easy to follow and felt very grounded when I needed to do any paperwork with her.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

Lived in Charlottenburg in Berlin. It's a slower neighbourhood so I always felt safe. It was a 6-person flat and my flatmates are incredible people. I could not have been happier.

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

As I mentioned before, I was lucky to have a contact that had a roommate moving out. It takes some a lot of timing and luck to get an opportunity like that. UdK offered a single bedroom at a dormitory but I knew I didn't want that.

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:

You will find yourself finished your work quickly. Their academic level is lower than OCAD's

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

~12 hours in class per week.

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

~20 hours per week

Studio-based work:

ALL

Written assignments:

Only written assignment were to compile books for their end of semester show.

Interaction between students and professors:

Very free interaction, they were always available and welcoming.

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?

Trip to Dresden, Germany was exceptional! This was planned at the start and was a great way to connect with others. A bus to travel to and from organized as well as a hostel for us to stay in.

What were the library and computer facilities like?

I only went to the Library for the food. Sorry I can't expand more than that.

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 family funded this trip.

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

I was in Berlin for 4 months and can say that it a very livable city. I think in every aspect of daily life (grocery shopping, rent, food) Berlin is cheaper than Toronto. I needed about ~4,500.00 EURO to live there.

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

1.00 CAD = 0.68 EUR (September 9th, 2016)

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

I spent 4 months in Germany (04.16 – 08.16)

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

I think I spent less in Berlin than a student staying in a similar apartment, commute, needs in Toronto.

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):** \$6,600
2. **School supplies:** \$200
3. **Rent or university residence:** \$438 /month = \$1,752
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** \$ /month (INCLUDED IN RENT)
 - B) **Telephone:** \$ /month (N/A)
 - C) **Cable:** \$ /month (N/A)
 - D) **Other (specify)** \$ /month (N/A)
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$1,000 /month = 4,000\$
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$10 /month = \$40

7. **Laundry:** \$ /month = \$ (INCLUDED IN RENT)
8. **Transportation:** \$ /month = \$ (INCLUDED IN UDK STUDENT FEES)
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$ FREE
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$ 220
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$ N/A
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$990
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$150
14. **Student visa:** \$70
15. **Other expenses (please specify):** \$N/A

Estimated Total Expenses: \$ 13,600

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?

Berlin is very good at speaking English, so not much culture shock there, but I would advise to learn as much German as you can! Everything will help. Udk organized German for Beginners course for us, it was very valuable.

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?

Go to every trip, exchange meeting, after-class event you can. You will build a strong relationship with others around you if you put yourself out there.

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?

You will have a great time away, but what you wont expect is how much has changed when you arrive at home again. You will change while you are away, but so is everyone else back at home. Be prepared to be different, and to accept different people when you return. That was and still is the most unexpected thing I have experienced and it is good to welcome it.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Berlin is an intriguing, exciting, shifting, open, surprising city that you will easily slip into. Knowing English is just as useful as German there so it was easy to integrate into the Berlin lifestyle. Also, accept its lifestyle; you will be at school all day at times and out all night with your friends. Be open to making adventures that will fuel your conversational anecdotes for the rest of your life. My time in Berlin was incredible, my time at UdK was a great compliment to it, but my expectation of what this exchange has changed since I started it. I thought this trip was about going to another school to learn their ideologies and trade secrets, and its not, it is about learning out one's self and personal growth. The people I met, the places we saw, and the things we did along the way were all players in learning more about yourself.

To all who are still unsure if this is for them, I would recommend that if you have even the slightest inclination of traveling for school, do it.

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