



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

Student Name:

Host University: Universität der Künste Berlin

Host Country: Germany

Faculty/Department at Host Institution: Visuelle Kommunikation

Semester: summer

Date of Report: 22 August 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?

I chose Universität der Künste Berlin as I have been to Berlin two times before and have loved everything about the city. I knew two fellow school friends who also went here on exchange and both had wonderfully positive experiences as well. They were very insightful when I asked them about the school and we had some discussions that really had me excited. My classmates were very supportive in helping me get organized.

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

Positive:

My most positive experiences were the friendships I created. I met a group of people who I clicked with immediately on the international student weekend trip to Leipzig. I see them almost every day here and I am so glad that I was able to connect with them. I also really enjoyed going on the weekend trip to Münster and Kassel with another class. Being able to experience Documenta14 and Sculptur Projekte Münster with these students was absolutely amazing. (They are a performance and Installation arts class). We all created a lovely bond and shared ideas together. Overall, being around the people I met during my stay, and continuing to meet others as we went to events together was truly the most positive and inspiring part of my experience.

Challenges:

The biggest challenges I faced were the teacher-student communication. I found that a couple of my teacher's communication towards myself and the other international students was slightly poor. We all seemed to be confused and unaware of things that were going on, as we didn't

speak German very well. Unfortunately, the teachers were not as supportive as we may have needed them to be. They were however, extremely kind and patient with us!

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?

For about 2-3 months ahead of my exchange, I did a lot of research on what I needed to have done before I left (or when I got there). I wanted it to go as smooth as possible and have a plan for when applications or forms were due. I created a small budget, got all my forms together (and translated if in German), had my apartment, and had a plan for any bureaucratic things that needed to be done! This made it really easy for me to get all the important things done and enjoy more of my time when I got there.

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 would recommend looking at all the forms that you need including Visa, banking (for instance with Deutsche Bank), apartment registration, etc and translating them yourself (and filling out as much as you can). This way you won't have to scramble or stress out when the people in the offices don't speak as much English as you do.

3. ARRIVAL

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

I met my landlords friend at Berlin HBF to grab my keys, but since I knew the city pretty well beforehand, I knew where I was going from there. My travels went very smooth and there was no delays or complaints from me!

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

I arrived about two and a half weeks before my school started (April 1st). This was so I could get comfortable, acquainted and get any bureaucratic work done before. It was also just in case anything went wrong, that I had time to fix it before school got busy. I also recommend students to leave this or even a little bit more time, just in case! It was nice to be able to have the time to figure out how long it would take to get to school, or know the neighbourhood a bit better, etc.

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

There was an orientation session prior to classes for the international students. Here, the organizers presented us with the classes we could take, trips, office things, locations, a general introduction and a meet and greet. It was nice meeting everyone for the first time and getting to know the school a bit better.

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?

I was assigned to Ursula Reiter, who was extremely helpful and kind throughout my stay. I believe that students are assigned to someone in the office pertaining to their home country.

4. ACCOMMODATION

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

I stayed in a 5 month sublet in a neighbourhood called Schöneberg. I had one flatmate, and we got along extremely well! We had a lot of the same interests, so it worked out perfectly. I loved living here since it was so close to school (10 min walk). However, I found that I would spend most of my time in neighbourhoods such as Neukölln or Kreuzberg (most of my friends lived here as well), so I would have liked to live a bit more east in the city.

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

Berlin is quite difficult to find apartments, and especially as a non-native German speaker! The host gave us a good list of apartments to find, but it is known that Berlin is a difficult city to get a flat. I spent about two and a half months sending emails out daily and I only got about 5 responses! I was lucky that my landlord was willing to skype with me. It is awfully difficult to find a flat while not in the city as you shouldn't send money without visitation, etc. Also it is hard to legitimize yourself over the internet or Skype. The competition in the city is quite crazy and you might have to go to a flat visitation with about 10 other people. A lot of my friends moved around at least 3 times throughout 5 months! I got very lucky.

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 found that the difficulty and challenge was slightly less than OCADU. We were given more time to work on projects (one main project in our core classes) and about 9-12 hours of in-class time to work on our works and speak with professors. I enjoyed this time and found this structure to work much better.

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

About 20 hours (depending on the week).

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

About 8-14hours (depending on the week).

Studio-based work:

8-14 approx.

Written assignments:

There were no written assignments other than the writing that I did for my project (optional). About 3-4 hours a week.

Interaction between students and professors:

In my class (Visuelle Systems) we were to speak (optionally) with our professors every week. I chose to meet with them most weeks and we spent about 30 minutes each time discussing my work. In other classes it depends on the week, the class/seminar/workshop, so it may range from 30 mins to 2 hours per week from my experiences.

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?

The international office offered a weekend trip to Leipzig and Weimar for the international students. It was only 50 euros and included the hostel, travel and tour fees. It was such an amazing weekend and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it—I absolutely recommend going on any of the organized trips! This is where I created friendships that lasted!

What were the library and computer facilities like?

I never used any of the computer facilities so I cannot comment on such, but the library is huge! UdK's library is shared with TU's, very close by to the Zoologischer Garten S and U station. I did a lot of my computer work, reading and writing here as the lighting was perfect, it was air conditioned (not common in Germany!) and was quiet. The book selection was great—mix of German and English.

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 created a budget plan prior to leaving Canada to help organize my money. Unfortunately it became a little more difficult with the exchange rate (CAD to EUR). I was extremely lucky to have received the Mariah's Fund Award this year and it was a huge help as it covered almost all of my school fees. For my living and other savings, I had two main jobs and another small side job that allowed me to go on the exchange. My parents were gracious enough to help me with my accommodation and some other costs but I saved up quite a lot beforehand by working full-time. (I had no classes in the winter semester).

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

Berlin itself is actually quite affordable compared to a lot of other major European cities (and Toronto!). Accommodation, groceries, drinks, recreation is a lot more affordable. However, the Canadian dollar is quite weak beside the euro so it does add up! (50 Euro turns into 70 CAD!).

8. EXPENSES

Exchange rate with host country:

1CAD = 0.68 Euro

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

April 1 2017-August 31 2017

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

I would estimate that I spent about the same amount as an average student. Other than going to some attractions and flights, etc, my spending was kept low.

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):** \$3825.60 (-\$2521.00 from Mariah's Fund Award)
2. **School supplies:** \$300 including printing
3. **Rent or university residence:** (550 euro a month) \$814 /month = \$4070
4. **Rent-related expenses:**
 - A) **Electricity/Water:** N/A
 - B) **Telephone:** 20\$ /month
 - C) **Cable:** N/A
 - D) **Other (specify)** N/A
5. **Groceries or Meal Plan:** \$80-90/month = \$400-450
6. **Personal expenses (toiletries/cosmetics, etc.):** \$20-30 /month = \$150
7. **Laundry:** 2\$ /month = \$10.00 (laundry in flat)
8. **Transportation:** one-time fee for student pass (about 300\$).
9. **Leisure (Sports, Entertainment, etc.):** \$40 a week
10. **Travel health insurance:** \$200
11. **Medical expenses in host country:** \$100-200 (I get strep throat very often and I had it 3 times. My insurance will cover these costs however).
12. **Round trip plane ticket:** \$800
13. **Travel/trips during exchange:** \$300-400
14. **Student visa:** \$75

15. Other expenses (please specify):

Estimated Total Expenses: \$9134

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 have visited my host country a couple of times before coming there to do exchange, so for me it was a very natural and easy transition. I think that the best thing to do is to come a couple of weeks earlier (before school starts) and try to immerse yourself within the city.

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?

I found that the best way to develop friends was attending the trips or going to the events provided by the school. The local students were always so kind and welcoming. I found that I never became too close with the local students, but the other exchange students became some of my best friends. From them, I met other people living in Berlin. I also went out a lot to music events and I found that I made a ton of friends from there.

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

I had no major problems throughout my stay. It was one of the best experiences I have ever had and I am so grateful and happy that I was able to do this. I truly loved living in Berlin and I would love to come back. The friendships I created were so strong and I am quite sad to leave them in a couple of weeks.

10. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Thank-you for allowing me to experience this exchange in Germany. I think that students benefit from experiences such as this, especially being in creative practises.

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