

# Student Exchange Evaluation

Every student loves to hear of other's exchange experiences. These forms are very useful when selecting your exchange destination.

Please include as much information as possible. Feel free to use additional pages, enclose photos, links to blogs/ videos etc.

## 1. PERSONAL INFORMATION

**Name:** Emma Black

**Degree:** Bachelor of Commerce (Business Law and Human Resource Management)

**Name of Exchange University:** University of Vermont

**Country:** USA

**Year of exchange:** Semester 2 2018 **Language of instruction:** English

### List courses taken abroad:

BSAD060 Financial Accounting  
EC012 Principles of Microeconomics  
STAT051 Probability with Statistics  
VS052 Sustainable Vermont  
POLS021 American Political System

## 2. EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

How would you rate your overall exchange experience on a scale of 1 to 10?

Poor

Excellent

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10!!!!

### Comments:

I would 100% rate my exchange a 10! It was by the far one of the best things I have ever done and would recommend if you are considering doing it, go for it! I met so many amazing people and have made life long friends. There are so many opportunities to say yes to and step out of your comfort zones! If you are sitting on the fence whether it might be about the money, nerves, the distance and time away from home etc. I would say to try forget about those things and just commit!

## 3. FINANCES

**Total cost:** If you aren't planning on doing a lot of travelling, I think you could budget for roughly \$15000-\$20000. However travelling will definitely increase these costs! Overall I probably would have spent \$25000

**Room:** \$9000 approx. (roughly \$6000 for room and \$3000 for meal plan)

**Airfare to host institution:** \$1500 (this included the STA multi flex pass which I highly recommend if you aren't 100% on what date you want to return home or you meet people you want to go travelling with afterwards!)

**Holidays/travel expenses:** A lot! I spent a month and a half travelling after exchange so it was definitely very expensive!! I may have spent \$5000-\$10000 on travel

**Other:** Overall when you are at college, you aren't really spending that much money as everything is pretty much included. Vermont in general is a more expensive state to live in compared to the rest of America and the exchange rate wasn't the best so I found that once you converted prices and added tax and tipping, it worked out pretty much the same cost as things in Australia, if not more in some instances.

### **Did you spend more than you expected? What was more/ less expensive than you expected?**

I definitely spent a lot more than I expected however I had saved up for exchange for a long time, so I was fortunate to not stress too much about it and be able to say yes to as many experiences and travel opportunities as possible! As I mentioned before, the general cost of things in Vermont was a lot more than what I had hoped but if you are worried about finances, you can definitely limit your spending whilst on exchange. Food is already included when you pay for your meal plans, so the only things you are really paying for on top, are any dining, travelling or going out that you plan to do whilst on exchange.

### **What was the best way of accessing money during your exchange programme?**

Since I was only on exchange for a semester, a travel card worked best for me! I had a Commonwealth and NAB one as well as a credit card in case of emergencies. My NAB travel card worked pretty well because it didn't have an ATM withdrawal fee whilst my Commonwealth one did. I've heard of some people opening up bank accounts whilst on exchange, however I don't think it's really necessary and I think it's more convenient to simply have a travel card. Perhaps if you were there for the full year you would consider it, however none of my friends or anyone I knew opened a bank account. Most people simply used travel cards or debit cards.

### **Do you have any advice about finances, budgeting or the cheapest way of living/travelling?**

Definitely budget and plan out how much you are going to spend! I didn't do this and wish I had! I ended up spending way more than what I had hoped and I didn't do a great job of keeping track of expenses! I would recommend trying to book flights, hotels etc. as early as you can because prices go up dramatically the later you leave it (I learnt that the hard way!) In general, I found that flying and staying at hotels was quite expensive, however we took quite a few Greyhound buses which made it a lot cheaper and you don't have to pay for baggage unlike when you fly!

## **4. ARRIVAL**

### **Was there an airport pickup/ buddy service available?**

There wasn't an airport pickup or buddy service available so that made it a little daunting when first arriving. However they give you instructions on where to get dropped off at and you receive more information about your housing and orientation.

## **5. ORIENTATION**

### **What was Orientation like? Was it useful? Were there social activities?**

The orientation wasn't too bad however it did start to drag on by the end of the week. As international students we were required to arrive on campus 5 days before everyone else and each day we had different orientation sessions and icebreaker activities to get to know other fellow international students. I feel like these sessions probably could have been combined into 2 days however it was nice to have quite a bit of free time to explore the town and get to know other people! Some of the sessions were useful such as the ones on visa and DS2019 processes however others such as travel in the US seemed to be common sense and a bit of a waste of time.

## **6. ACADEMICS**

### **What differences did you find between the UWA system and the system at your host university?**

**Contact hours:** Definitely a lot more than back home. At UWA I usually go to campus once or twice a week only for tutorials. However at UVM I had to go everyday for roughly 3 hours each day.

**Homework:** There is definitely a lot more homework and I felt like I was almost back at high school! 3 of my classes had weekly quizzes and homework we had to complete online. It wasn't very difficult but it was quite time consuming.

**Course (lectures, tests, etc.):** The courses at UVM are combined lectures and tutorials and can range from large lecture style classes with 100 people to small and intimate style classes of 20-30 people. Unlike at UWA, classes are not recorded for online therefore you cannot really miss classes and they are much stricter about attendance. In terms of tests and exams, less weight is placed on exams and it is spread more evenly between in class tests and weekly online quizzes. I didn't mind this because it meant less stress when it came to exam time however it did mean more work and hours put in throughout the semester!

**Workload (heavier/ lighter) and assessment (harder or easier):** I feel like the workload was definitely heavier but a little bit easier. At UWA whilst you can chill out for most of the semester and then cram when it comes to exam time, at UVM you were required to put in work throughout the whole semester. I think it's easier to fall behind if you miss class especially because nothing is recorded and put online. They also grade a lot easier in America! There were many tests that I completed that I knew I probably would have failed or just passed at UWA, that I ended up getting 70-80 on at UVM. Whilst they mark easier, their grade system is a bit different. So whilst a 70-80 sounds pretty good to our standards, to them this is a C at best and to get an A+ you have to get a grade between 97 and 100.

## 7. FACILITIES

### **What were the library/ Wi-Fi/ email facilities like at your host institution?**

UVM had one library in the middle of campus that seemed similar size to Reid Library. It was pretty good however it did get a bit crowded during exam time, which was expected.

## 8. SOCIAL

### **What kinds of social events were there? Was it easy to meet people?**

The International Office that looked after the exchange students, didn't really organise too many social events. However the UVM Bored and other clubs/societies organised lots of different events including a river cruise, FallFest, Ice skating, Bowling, Laser tag etc. I would definitely recommend joining the UVM Outing Club as they put on hiking and canoeing trips every weekend, which is a great way to see the area and meet new people. The UVM ski and snowboard club also put on a few events and if you are attending UVM in the spring semester I would definitely recommend joining the club for discounted ski passes and free shuttles to and from the mountains to go skiing each weekend! It is a very outdoorsy college and if you aren't skiing in the spring semester then you're out hiking and swimming in the lake in the fall semester! In terms of meeting new people, I feel like the easiest way to do this is through classes or joining clubs. I found it a bit more difficult to make American friends as majority of people I was living with were internationals and half the student population lives off campus. Most of my friends were other exchange students however it is still easy to meet Americans in classes and out and about.

## 9. ACCOMMODATION

### **Was on campus housing available? What were the rooms like? Were you on a meal plan or did you cook your own food? Are the residences close to the university?**

#### **Please add any additional information that you think be of interest with regard to housing.**

On campus housing and meal plans were required for all exchange students. Although they were expensive, it was good because everything was sorted for you when you arrived and living on campus meant you were constantly with friends and easily able to hang out. Although the meal plans were expensive it meant you could pretty much eat at any point in the day as many times as you liked, without having to stress about running out of money or food.

In terms of the housing, all exchange students were pretty much placed in the same building in dorm style rooms with shared bathrooms. We didn't get much choice when it came to where we wanted to stay or the roomy type we preferred. The building we were in was fairly old and the rooms were very basic, however they were liveable and you were hardly in your room anyways so it didn't really matter! When applying for housing we were given the option to apply for learning communities that place you in housing with groups of people with shared interests. We were also able to put down whether we wanted to be put in a suite (apartment style living) or a dorm. However despite this, all the exchange students were put in the same building in dorm style rooms with shared bathrooms. It was nice to be in the same building as the other exchange students because they became my closest friends and it was easy to hang out at night or go to dinner together, however it did make it a bit more difficult to make American friends.

## 10. PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

### What was the most difficult aspect of planning your exchange?

Planning exchange was definitely a long and tedious process at times, but it was worth every moment! If you're planning on going on exchange definitely start applying and working things out sooner rather than later. The most difficult parts I found were trying to work out course approvals and finding courses that matched the courses back at UWA. It was a long process to get them approved by my allocated office going back and forth with them. Definitely start this early and don't leave it to the last minute! Another difficult aspect of planning exchange was the visa process! The visa process can be a bit confusing, so definitely make sure you attend the visa session and get the right information so that you can start the application as soon as possible!

### What advice do you have for future exchange students?

The biggest piece of advice I would have, is to just say yes and not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone! It's easy to keep to yourself especially when you're in a new place with new people, however you really need to put yourself out there to meet new people and say yes to new experiences! Take as many opportunities as you can whether they be travelling with new friends, going to parties or simply studying and hanging out with new people! Exchange was one of the best experiences of my life but only because I made it be! It can be easy to not enjoy yourself if you don't put yourself out there and shy away from trying new things! Make as many friends as you can! Everyone is new and in the same boat, trying to make friends! If you're unsure about exchange, definitely go for it! Everyone I have spoken to say that going on exchange was one of the best best decisions they made and it's true!

### What are the 5 most important things to take with you when you go to your host university?

1. Aussie food (Tim Tams, Vegemite, Caramello Koalas) for all your American and international friends to try!
2. Photos of your friends and family from back home
3. A UWA jumper
4. Disposable Camera: One of my friends had one and they're super fun to take out and develop later and remember fun times
5. An open mind and willingness to say yes to new things!

## 11. General impressions

### What were the most rewarding aspects of biggest disappointments of your exchange experience? How has your perspective changed as a result of your exchange experience?

**Remember that students are interested in reading about both good and bad experiences.**

I was uncertain at first going to the University of Vermont because I knew it wasn't going to be like one of the big southern colleges that you see in the movies. However I have no regrets and am so glad that I chose UVM! Vermont itself is a small state and their capital city Burlington which is where UVM is situated, isn't really a city at all. It's a very outdoorsy and beautiful place to be, especially in the fall. The foliage is beautiful and the mountainous scenery is breathtaking! Vermont itself seems very different from the rest of America and a lot less crazy! I got to go hiking, cliff jumping, skiing and seeing snow for the first time, apple picking and maple syrup tasting. Besides from these out of the ordinary experiences, I still got to experience the typical college things such as frat parties, college sport games and living in dorms! Besides from what a great place Vermont was, I met some amazing people who became really great friends and I got to travel with them and hang out on a day-to-day basis. The people that I met on exchange were really a massive factor in making the 4 months so great and I know that I will continue to see them in the future! Going on exchange was one of the best decisions ever! I loved being in a small college town and seeing familiar faces each

day. The University only has around 10 000 students which at first seemed a bit small, however it was great because it meant you would always see someone you know in passing or at the dining hall. I honestly can't think of any downsides to exchange, perhaps only the costs and missing home! If you are thinking about doing exchange, 100% do it! You won't regret it! If you have any questions or want to discuss exchange, feel free to contact me anytime [emmzblack@gmail.com](mailto:emmzblack@gmail.com) I'd love to talk to you!