

Exchange to western university, Canada

During the fall of 2016 I went on a four-month exchange to Western University, London – Canada. Going on exchange was defiantly a great choice and I would strongly recommend that every student should do it. Furthermore, I really enjoyed my time at Western, met great people from all over the world and explored many parts of Canada/America.

Main reasons why you should consider going to Western:

- Student atmosphere: Canadians are a lot more social, having a ten minuet conversation while standing inline at Tim Hortons (Canadian version of Starbucks) is normal.
- Location: London is well situated for weekend trips to Canadian nature but also for visiting Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, Toronto and flying to New York.
- Campus life: It's very different compared to the EUR that everything happens on Campus. Living, eating, sports and parties all take place on an amazing huge campus. Western also has a lot of sport teams: the Western mustangs. Take a look at their website as they have many sports events which you can all see being played on campus www.westernmustangs.ca.

Preparation

In the beginning going on exchange sounds like a lot of work/research but preparing well pays off when you arrive. First you need to decide whether to go on exchange and check if you meet all the ese requirements of going on exchange outside Europe. Make a shortlist and write a motivation letter on why you made these choices/ what motives you to go on exchange. New next year for Western, is the requirement for an English test. Keep in mind that it takes several weeks to plan, take the test and receive your scores! I personally took the Toefl-test because this was necessary for my second and third choice of exchange locations. I thought the test wasn't that hard. If you can watch an English movie without subtitles and write a letter in English, you should be fine.

After hearing that you have been selected for Western, their exchange coordinator will send you an email in which you can find all the steps you need to take before coming to Western (register for courses, arrange on/off campus housing, etc.) They can also help you find a house off campus. If you have any problems, they are quick to respond to emails and you can call them during office hours. Pay attention to the deadlines and registrate for courses as soon as the registration period opens, many courses fill-up quickly!

As for housing I decided to live on-campus. It is more expensive than living off-campus, but I wanted the full campus experience. If you can afford it, I would recommend living on-campus. It's easier to meet other exchange students and generally more fun because everyone lives in your building. If you prefer off-campus housing look for a place between London and the campus as most students live in that area.

For entering Canada, you don't need a study permit as long as you stay shorter than 6 months. You do however need to apply for an ETA which is the Canadian equivalent of an ESTA (required to enter the US).

Lastly don't forget to apply for an OV-compensation at least 2 months before you leave and apply for a credit card before you leave as my debit card did not work in all shops.

First days in London

I arrived on the 1st of September at Toronto Pearson airport. Definitely consider staying in Toronto the first night as opposed to going to London on the same day, border control can take a couple of hours and if your flight lands in the evening you won't make it to Western before midnight. On the second of September I took a RobertQ bus to Western. RobertQ is more expensive but drives from the airport to Western where as Greyhound drives from Toronto centre to London centre. The bus drive takes about 2 hours.

As exchange students you are encouraged to come a couple of days earlier before other students arrive and O-week begins. O-week is the introductory week focused mostly on first year students. There are some useful events exchange students can attend so you can get to know some fellow exchange students and get a first tour of the campus. In the evening there are many parties and all the bars in London are packed!

Courses

Western courses are worth 6 ECTS each so you need to take 4 courses to complete your exchange. You are allowed to take a maximum of 5 courses. To apply for courses with a prerequisite you need to email the lecturer and exchange coordinator, proving to them you have enough knowledge to start the course. I started with five courses, planning to drop one as the term progressed. However, I rather liked all my courses and decided to keep them all. Remember that only half of the obtained credits have to be in economics so you are free to take subjects from different faculties as well. To pass a course you only need a 50%, which I found easy to get. You can lookup professors beforehand and read student reviews on <https://www.ratemyprofessors.com/>. For the full course guide: <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2016/pg882.html>

ECON 2124A: Economic development

This course focuses on third world countries and especially how they can overcome the poverty trap. I thought this course was quiet easy as it covered some topics already discussed at the EUR such as: cost-benefit analysis, Lorenz curve and multiple wealth indexes.

ECON 2191A: Risk & financial institutions

Course focuses on the way banks and other financial institutions can differ risk and valuate the risk they are taking. The course is very general and covers many different types of risks. Definitely a good course to take as an introduction to risk and to see if you are interested in the world of risk mitigation/minimization.

ECON 3332A: Financial economics

For sure the most challenging course I took on exchange. The professor didn't use any PowerPoint slides and wrote everything on whiteboards, making attendance pretty much mandatory. The course covers topics such as market efficiency, portfolio choice, futures/forwards, and the term structure of interest rates. Some of these topics are also taught in the major financial economics at the EUR.

POLS 2192A: Capitalism & democracy

I took this course because it covered the American elections which took place during my exchange. It was mainly discussion driven meaning a lot of different opinions were discussed. Furthermore, the course focuses on the link between economical capitalism and political democracy, how they interact and how one can not succeed without the other.

POLS 2140A: Globalization

By far the course I enjoyed the most! In large part because of professor Dan Bousfield: a very enthusiastic professor who teaches in a fun and interactive way. Even though attendance was not necessary to pass the course, I always went to the lectures just because they were interesting and mind-blowing. The course focuses on major global trends: westernization, global financial crisis and the rise of populism.

Finances

The cost of living is slightly more expensive compared to the Netherlands. Especially alcohol and going to bars is a lot more expensive, however eating out is cheaper. Of course the amount of money you spend has a lot to do on how much traveling you do during your exchange. I would advise buying a round trip flight to Canada. I didn't and ended up spending a lot of money on an expensive return flight a couple of days before Christmas. I would also recommend getting a credit card as currency conversion costs are a lot lower and a debit card is not accepted at all shops. Opening a Canadian bank account for four months is not worth the hassle.

Costs		Income	
Housing	€2100	DUO	€1160
Insurance, bus pass, western card	€360	OV compensation	€400
Expensive flight	€1000	ESE scholarship	€500
Trips & Food	€3500	Parents	€3000
Phone plan	€180	Savings	€2000
Total	€7060	Total	€7060

Daily life at western

Western has a huge campus that has a lot of facilities such as: bar, restaurant, cinema, shops and a great fitness centre which is free for all western students. The only reason to leave the campus is to do grocery shopping or for going out to a bar. You can go out to bars/clubs pretty much every night. In the weekend there are many floor and House parties.

Keep in mind that London has a land-climate, September and October were very hot. Most of that time you could wear shorts and a t-shirt! Only in December it started getting cold and snowing. It is not guaranteed that there is any snow yet during the exchange period!

London has a good transportation system meaning you can get everywhere in and around the city fairly easily. When you chose your subjects you can see the timetable on when the lectures take place. I made sure to keep Monday and Friday clear so that I had more time for weekend trips. I joined the outdoors club who plan 'in to the wild' kind of trips. With them I went to Tobermory, Algonquin and Pinery. Google some pictures because these places have some breath-taking views. I also did weekend trips to Chicago, Montreal, Toronto, Niagara Falls and Detroit. If you would like more info, feel free to e-mail me: rogieerhoogeveen@hotmail.com



Niagara Falls



Algonquin



Homecoming



Western campus in the snow