

# **Final Report**

**Liberal Arts and Sciences (Governance major)**

**Canada (Ottawa, Ontario)**

**Academic Year 2019/2020**

**University of Ottawa (Faculty of Social Sciences)**

**CAN-2019-AY314-m**

## **Please give some advice on the living, working and studying conditions which might be helpful for future exchange students.**

My personal and academic interest in the host country rose from my situation as an international student in Freiburg. I wanted to take my student and academic life up a notch by doing a study abroad outside of Europe. This eagerness, combined with my general interest in North American academics, made me apply for the North American section of the university's Global Exchange.

After the application process, I started preparing for my departure around March-April of 2019. I carefully inspected what I needed for my school registration and visa application. I took an IELTS test in the beginning of May and I started gathering my visa documents around mid-June. I applied for the Canadian Study Permit in July and I went to Düsseldorf to give my biometrics. I booked my flight very late, around early August. I flew to Canada late August. Upon my arrival, I stayed in a hostel for five days and scouted for a place to stay. I did not arrange a health insurance beforehand as my registration in Canada comes with a mandatory health insurance plan for international students. My host university's sources helped around during the preparation process. I recommend taking a look at the guides that universities publish for international students. I also tried to understand the cityscape by inspecting the city on online maps.

There are some elements that I disliked about Canada. There is a certain detachedness in everyday life as I did not find Canadians to be very engaging with each other. Other than that, I found the weather as an obstacle for a better social life because the cold can be unbearable in the winter.

Ottawa does not have a very positive reputation for most Canadians, but it does not have a negative one either. It is portrayed as a dull place among people. In my opinion, the city does not offer a lively and entertaining stay compared to very student-friendly and vivid German cities. However, it is a very international city both in and outside of the university and it is an attractive place if you are interested in politics and history. The city is the federal capital and national holidays are observed to the fullest in the country. I ended up shaking hands with Prime Minister Trudeau when I was watching the Remembrance Day in November last year.

**a) General impression of the host institution or the host university**

My overall impression of the host university is positive but there were some points that were unfamiliar and different for me. I did not like commercialization of education at the institution, the campus felt like a shopping mall time to time. Other than that, I think the university provides a very good academic environment and service. There are designated advising departments for mental health and academics that are open to all students.

There were some things that I disliked about my host university. Because University of Ottawa is a bilingual institution that teaches in both French and English, students do not seem to have a fully connected and integrated relationship with each other. Students who do not know French, take classes and do extracurriculars in English are detached from the other portion of students who do not know English. The same applies vice versa. Overall student motivation and mood also seemed low compared to Germany as students that I have engaged with were mostly in their third or fourth year of studies, expecting to graduate in time and to start paying their student loans. Most of them seriously considered doing a second or graduate degrees in Germany as public universities do not require student fees. I also attended game nights and some meetings for international students, which were all very fun and cozy.

#### **b) Content and purpose of your academic exchange**

Overall, I genuinely enjoyed the contents and the topics of my courses very much. I did not feel overchallenged by the courses that I did. As a matter of fact, my major courses in Freiburg were more challenging. Actual coursework and essay writing were the challenging parts of the courses. In my opinion, the topics and themes that we dealt with in the classes in Canada were more academic, important and relevant for my field compared to Germany.

I learned a lot in terms of academics, theory, everyday knowledge, history and culture. I took an introductory course about Canadian politics and although I lacked a lot of knowledge to talk about some of the topics, I found out a lot about Canadian history and society. I observed how people think about issues that sincerely concern them and how people critically engage with them, something that most people do not do generally. My experiences not only helped me know more about Canada, but also other regions and countries as some of the political science classes I took had a very broad contexts, something that most of my courses in Freiburg lacked. Since my study program in Freiburg uses teaching elements very similar to what I have experienced in Canada, the academic style that I was in did not change very much. But I had the opportunity to experience North American approaches to higher education in North America. Academically, my time in Ottawa also helped me to engage in political topics outside of a Eurocentric perspective. This was especially evident in the choice of readings that we needed to do in order to prepare or discuss topics.

My academic aspirations and how I consider my career prospects changed, or more appropriately, enhanced. What I have academically gained is much more other than any other context that I can evaluate my study abroad in. I now consider academia (especially in North America) as an important career entry in the future for myself.

#### **c) Criticism and recommendations**

Overall, the stay abroad was an important and beneficial experience, but it came with very rough patches. Some may think that the benefits may not outweigh the efforts and I understand

that perspective, but I consider all kinds of exchange programs beneficial in a lot of aspects. So, I consider my time in Canada very beneficial not only in terms of academics that I mentioned above, but also culturally, socially, linguistically and cognitively. I have become much more effective and considerate in the way I engage with people from different political and social backgrounds. I became more patient and understanding of what I can change and what I cannot change. Although I thought that I could not better my financial skills in terms of budgeting, I became better at it. I have become better at thinking critically and politically via combining my studies and re-reviewing my interactions with different people.

I barely had had any fears or worries before going to Canada, but I started having some during my stay. The fear of being lonely and isolated was a major one, I could not overcome that feeling until my second semester. The time difference between Canada and Europe was difficult to get myself adjusted to.

I would recommend my study abroad with slight adjustments. First, Ottawa should not be your first choice when considering a study abroad in Canada if you are not fully motivated by the academics of a study abroad. Second, I think the student life in Canada demands a stronger financial situation compared to Germany. I had significant setbacks to my living condition because I thought that price levels and finances would not be very different from Germany. This point is important especially for other international students.

I have recognized that a lot of students from Germany are motivated by non-academic and non-cultural prospects (such as traveling and partying) of doing an exchange abroad. I understand such thing but Canada, especially Ottawa, does not have the potential to fulfill such wants. These motivations also diminish what stays abroad can contribute to you as a student and as a person. Be prepared to experience a complete life like what you have in Germany, not a long-term travel trip.