

Geography, Bachelor of Science, Canada, September 2019 – April 2020, Lakehead University Thunder Bay, CA-2019-602TB-w

Before I got to Thunder Bay, I spend a few days in Toronto and went on a camping trip in Algonquin Provincial Park organized by the OBW exchange program. It was a great way to start the exchange experience and get to know some other exchange students.

The first days in Thunder Bay were really busy. Before the semester started, there were several orientation events for new students. There was a big event for international students with information about studying in Canada, visas, where to look for help at university and so on. Most of the information was for international students who want to graduate and was less important for exchange students. Especially because the OBW program did a great job to prepare me for Canada. Other orientation events were for all new students to get to know the campus and the city of Thunder Bay.

At the same time, I was looking for a room to live in. The dorms are more expensive than housing off-campus. In the beginning, it can be stressful not to know where you will stay for the next months. But there are many rooms offered at the end of August and the beginning of September. I found a house with great room-mates within three days and moved in before school started. Usually, shared flats and houses in Canada are practical and not the “living together with friends” type, but finding a room is really easy, especially compared to Freiburg.

The first few weeks of class were great. It was easier to follow the lectures than I had expected. The professors are really nice and closer to the students. The teaching part is more valued by the professors and they are more engaged to help the students.

The International Office of Lakehead University is sending out many emails with information about the course registration and important deadlines to remember. They are really helpful and engaged for you to get the best exchange experience possible.

There is insurance included in the fees you pay, but if you want to extend your stay for traveling or if you just want to be on the safe side, additional international travel insurance is a good idea. Most of them have to be taken out before you leave Germany but begin immediately so you do not need to apply for them long in advance.

The first few weeks were great and there were several highlights. I saw a beaver on campus. It was the first living beaver I saw in real life. After the first week of class, I realized that I can understand most of the lectures, which was a great feeling. And I went to a music festival in Thunder Bay with two other German exchange students and one of my room-mates.

Even if it sounds weird: the Canadian bus drivers are different. They are so nice! If they see you running towards the bus, they wait or stop again to let you in. They are very patient whenever people have questions or do not understand how to pay, where to get off etc. In return, many people say “Thank you” when leaving the bus. When they get off at the back door, they shout it through the whole bus. When you come to Canada, you have to try it! It is a great feeling.

In general, Canadians are very polite. A question like “how are you?” is part of every welcoming. For me, it took a while to get used to it and repeat it with the same politeness. But I think it will take as long to get used to the direct German way of communication again.

As a foreigner, one should not fear to ask for help. Canadians are always willing to help and often interested in a little chat.

One of the most important words is “sorry”. It can be used in many situations and have different meanings. It can be used to ask someone to repeat what they said. It can be used to let someone know you want to pass where they are standing. It can be used as a simple apology for causing

inconvenience by asking for help, by running into someone or hurting someone. Canadian people even say “sorry” if something is not their fault. There even is a law that says apologizing is not an acknowledgment of guilt, it is called the Apology Act.

Class schedule of the Fall Semester:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30 Geography of Religion	11:30 Sociology of the North 13:00 Indigenous Literature in Canada 17:30 Conservation Geography	8:30 Geography of Religion	11:30 Sociology of the North 13:00 Indigenous Literature in Canada 17:30 Conservation Geography	

The biggest difference to my German schedule is that I have 4 courses instead of 6 but with a heavier workload. Most classes have two lectures per week, 1 ½ hours each. Some only have one three hour lecture instead. The time to prepare for class and to study is longer. In some of the classes, I had to read papers for every lecture, sometimes up to fifty pages. Additionally, there is not one big exam at the end of the semester but several exams and assignments which are due during the semester. The work is concentrated during the semester and the breaks in between are completely free.

A typical day starts at around 8 in the morning. When I have enough time before class, I continue some of the readings for class. It is a ten to fifteen-minute walk to campus, which can be cold in winter but is also a great opportunity to get some fresh air and to wake up. When I have several classes with a longer break but I do not want to go home, I go for a walk on campus. There are some trails behind the dormitories next to a river (as you can see on the pictures below) where I can forget about university for a while or call my friends back home. The reception is great or at least good enough. After my classes, I go home and finish the readings for the next day. Sometimes I eat with my room-mates or watch a movie.



The schedule for the Winter semester

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>8:30 Introduction to GIS</p> <p>11:30 (3 hours) Environmental Sustainability</p>	<p>8:30 Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment</p> <p>10:00 Geography of Canada</p> <p>17:30 Gender Relations in Indigenous Communities</p>	<p>8:30 Introduction to GIS</p>	<p>8:30 Indigenous Knowledge and the Environment</p> <p>10:00 Geography of Canada</p> <p>14:30 GIS Laboratory</p> <p>17:30 Gender Relations in Indigenous Communities</p>	

You should definitely try as many winter activities as possible. The winter can be cold and long, so be outside as much as possible to get used to the cold and enjoy it! Thunder Bay is a very sunny place so even in winter there are many fun things you can do outside. There even is a lake on Campus you can skate on. And one should definitely go to a hockey game. Since there is only real hockey in Canada is ice hockey, they just say hockey. The team of Lakehead University is called Thunderwolves and whenever there is a game in Thunder Bay, the student union is giving away free tickets. The first game I went to was a great experience, even though I did not know the rules and did not know what was happening all the time. But it is a great sport, very fast and something is happening all the time.



German Bread is what I miss most. In Canada, there are two main types of bread: white bread and rye bread. But both of them are like toasting bread and nothing compared to the variety of bread in Germany. If you like German bread, it could be a good idea for you to prepare yourself for the exchange by taking a recipe for bread with you. There are many simple recipes and the ingredients are often cheaper than bread itself.