

Major and Degree	B.Sc. Psychology
Host Country	Canada
Start and end date of the exchange	September 2018 – April 2019
Host University	University of Ottawa
Identification Code	CA-2018-5R7J6-w

Part 1

My personal interest in studying at a Canadian university was partly due to my admiration of the Canadian nature. Three years ago I have already been travelling in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and experienced the country's vast and diverse landscape as particularly fascinating. Furthermore, I was very interested in the Canadian society which is said to be culturally diverse due to the country's multicultural immigration policy. My preference to study in Ottawa stems from the bilingualism of the city and the variety of courses with cross-cultural (psychological) topics offered by the university of Ottawa.

In preparation for my stay abroad, I applied for the study permit which is mandatory if you plan to stay in Canada for two academic terms. Furthermore, I started to search for a cheap flight to Canada. Since I planned to be on holiday in Norway before my exchange year, I was rather restricted on the date and location for my flight. In general, I would recommend to book as early as possible to find a cheap flight. Also I decided to book a one way ticket because I already thought about extending my stay in Canada for further trips on the west coast. I did not have any trouble entering Canada without having booked a flight back to Germany. In my experience proving enough financial means (which was part of the application for the study permit) to afford a flight ticket was sufficient. I was flying with Iceland Air which offers rather affordable flights. However, keep in mind that they do not offer food on the flight.

Moreover, I decided to take out an additional international health insurance to the insurance offered by the University of Ottawa (UHIP) because the Canadian one does not cover special cases such as dental care or travels in other countries. Furthermore, I was told that there is an option to opt-out of UHIP if you have an equivalent German health insurance. However, this year none of the exchange students I met, managed to opt-out of the insurance of the university so we had to pay these extra expenses.

Concerning my search for accommodation, I decided quite early that I did not want to live in a Residence of the University because the rooms are often more expensive than a room in a shared house off-campus. Furthermore, some residences do not have a kitchen because the students are supposed to pay for a meal plan on monthly basis which allows them to eat in the cafeteria on-campus. That is why, I started to search for a room in a shared house in the Facebook group of the OBW program. I answered to the ad of a girl who went to Ottawa in the previous year and who was looking for a new tenant for her room. She gave me the contact details of her landlord and after a brief conversation per e-mail the landlord sent the rental agreement to me. My accommodation was located very close to the university (2-10 min by foot), grocery stores (3 min by foot) and the Byward market (10 min by foot). I paid 665\$ for the 10 qm room in a shared house of six people (girls only) which is a fair price considering the generally high rental prices in Ottawa. Who ever is still looking for a place to stay in Ottawa is more than welcome to contact me and I will be happy to forward the contact details of my former landlord to you.

In the first week of my stay in Ottawa I decided to buy a bike (via the website <https://www.kijiji.ca/>) to find my way around the city. In contrast to the opinion of many Canadians, I find that biking is possible throughout most parts of the Canadian winter because the city is rather quick in clearing the streets from snow and ice. However, riding a bike in Ottawa is far less convenient compared to the great amount of bike trails in Freiburg. There are only a few proper bike trails and the streets are often bumpy, so be aware! Nevertheless, I preferred riding the bike compared to waiting for the bus because I experienced the public transport system of Ottawa as rather unreliable. Therefore, I decided to opt-out of the uPass which allows uOttawa students to use the buses in Ottawa for about 200 \$ per term. In the rare occasions when I decided to take the bus I used a PRESTO card, an electronic bus card which is valid in Ontario and which can be easily charged online. This is a very convenient way to pay for the bus because the bus drivers in Canada do not operate with change which means that you always have to have the exact amount of cash (3,50 \$ in Ottawa) for the bus ticket.

One of the things I liked the most about the university of Ottawa was the rather informal contact with the lecturers and university officials. It was common to address the professors with their first name and they were always welcoming questions about the course content after the lecture. Furthermore, they seemed to be very interested in the well-being of the international students. Another aspect of my host university which I liked a lot was the broad offer of sport courses and university clubs. I started to play squash in the university team and tried different sports such as

kickboxing, volleyball and climbing. Those were great opportunities to make some friends outside of the group of international and exchange students at the university.

Outside of clubs and sport teams, I experienced it as rather difficult to build up real friendships with regular students at the University of Ottawa because they seemed to be very focused on their studies and not that interested in making new friends. Although, considering the high tuition fees at Canadian universities being completely focused on academic success is completely understandable. Furthermore, the ambience in Canadian shared houses is different compared to the German “WG-Kultur”. Even though all of my roommates were very nice, we rarely did some free time activities together. I experienced that shared houses in Canada are more about living together to save money than being close friends. Other exchange students from Germany made similar experiences. Although this situation is different to many German shared flats, I did not mind the difference because I made great friends within the community of international and exchange students as well as in the sport teams and clubs I joined. We travelled to different cities in Canada and the USA, did amazing camping trips to American Provincial and National Parks and enjoyed outdoor activities such as canoeing, skiing, hiking and climbing.



Another aspect I adopted during my stay in Canada is being more spontaneous, discovering the surroundings of the city and using the activities offered in the town. While staying in Canada, I realized that I did not travel a lot in the region of Freiburg and did not really enjoy the many options

of outdoor experiences in the Black Forest. In Canada, I knew that I only had a limited amount of time to realize the things I planned to do and see in the country. As a consequence, I feel that I discovered more special places during my stay in Ottawa compared to my past life in my hometown Freiburg. Taking advantage of the different activities available at the current place of residence even when I know that I will be living in this area for a longer period of time, is an attitude I learned due to my stay abroad.

Part 2

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

In general, I was really satisfied with the study conditions at the university of Ottawa. The lecture halls had mostly a very modern technical equipment. Furthermore, I was very happy with the courses I attended while I was studying at the University of Ottawa. In each term I chose two courses of the study area of psychology and two courses in a different field of studies. The professors seemed to be very knowledgeable and interested in the academic success of the students. Furthermore, I experienced the format of examination at the university similar to German high schools because in addition to the final exams there were exams in the middle of each term and further tests, quizzes and assignments on a weekly basis. Therefore, I had less trouble studying for the final exams because I already knew parts of the course content due to earlier tests. However, the final exams as well as the mid-terms in my courses were mostly multiple choice tests. In my opinion, this test format only demands memorizing facts whereas a deep understanding of the course content is not necessary to pass the exams. I think that a different test format would contribute to an even better learning experience.

While my studies at the University of Ottawa, I had contact with some employees of the international office of the faculty of Social Sciences. For example, I received assistance in changing or dropping courses. Furthermore, my professors always encouraged the students to ask questions if necessary. I used this service in the course “Cross-Cultural Psychology” because the mid-term as well as the final exam were online tests, a format I did not know from my studies in Freiburg.

As mentioned above, I did not make friends with the (Canadian) fellow students in my classes. However, I experienced them as very nice, interested and helpful during discussions in lectures. Furthermore, we shared class notes as well as scans of text books. Before the exams I usually met up with some friends from my squash team or the group of international students to revise together.

During my stay at the university of Ottawa I listened to some TED-Talks such as a discussion about the rights of First Nations in Canada offered on-campus. Furthermore, I was invited to present my essay about “The Ancient Yemeni Civilization” which I wrote as final take-home exam in the course “Arabic Culture I” in front of a committee of students and lecturers. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the congress because I was not in Ottawa during the designated weekend.

b) Content and purpose of my academic exchange

During the first weeks I experienced listening to the lecturer, taking notes and checking unknown vocabulary as rather challenging. However, I got more and more used to English as instruction language and enjoyed improving my English skills a lot. In general, I consider the workload of the four courses per term which I took as just right. I had a steady weekly routine at the university but I also had enough time to travel on the weekends, do sports and discover the city. Compared to my studies in Freiburg, I experienced the courses I took as slightly less difficult. However, the workload during the semester was higher due to the regular assignments.

While studying at the university of Ottawa, I enjoyed the most, taking courses outside of my main field of studies. In the first term, I attended the course *Arabic Culture I* and *Introduction to Aboriginal Culture and Society*. I appreciate getting insight into different cultural backgrounds and global perspectives. Furthermore, I encourage everyone to take a course about Canadian history. I did not know a lot about the systematical discrimination of Indigenous peoples in Canada which is (partly) still ongoing. In my opinion, everyone, especially those studying, living and working in Canada, should know about those periods of Canadian history which are less present in the global public discourse.

In my second term at uOttawa, I worked on improving my French Skills in attending a French Language course which focused on conversation as well as oral comprehension. Furthermore, I took *Violence, Conflict and Insecurity in Africa* a course from the subject area of Human Rights and Conflict Studies. In my opinion, I developed a better understanding of the conflicts and wars in African countries and their ties to the colonial past of this continent.

In general, I am convinced that my stay abroad proves beneficial for my further studies as well as my language skills. During my studies at the university of Ottawa I gained confidence in having English conversations not only in my private life but also in academic and scientific context. My speaking as well as writing skills are far more fluent and professional compared to my English level before my time in Canada. Furthermore, I am planning to focus on cross-cultural psychology in my

master program. Therefore, attending a course in this subject area as well as courses from different fields of studies which focus on different cultural and societal models greatly contributed to my preparation for my further studies.

c) Criticism and recommendations

Studying at the University of Ottawa reinforced my fascination of my studies in psychology. While studying in Freiburg, I was often focused on the exams which demanded to memorize many facts and definitions. Of course we also had literature which encouraged a deeper understanding of the course content but due to time pressure I did not always take the time to read every recommended textbook. In Canada, I started to focus more on the readings and realized that it made following and understanding the lectures much easier. Furthermore, due to the frequent quizzes, assignments and essays during the semester I was engaging with the course content on a regular basis and had less trouble remembering most of the things I learned in class. For my further studies I want to keep this understanding-based learning approach.

In the forefront of my stay abroad, I was worried that I will be homesick especially during the long winter month. However, even though I missed my friends and family in Germany from time to time, I never thought about leaving Canada earlier than planned. Due to the many trips and activities I did with my friends in Canada, I did not really have the time to be homesick. I enjoyed meeting people from different countries and fields of studies, trying new sports, travelling Canada and basically just living in another country a lot. I am more than happy that I decided to participate in this exchange and think that I benefited a lot on a personal as well as on a academic and interpersonal level.



In addition, I encourage everyone to stay two terms (if possible) because the time abroad is passing very fast and I would have been sad to leave Canada already before Christmas. From month to month, I felt even more at home in Ottawa and got to know my group of friends even better. Furthermore, I recommend everyone who has time and some money left to do further travels in Canada after the end of the exchange. The country has so many great activities to offer and different landscapes to see. I decided to go on a camping trip to the West Coast of Canada with some friends I met during my exchange. Six weeks after I returned to Germany, I am still amazed by the beautiful and diverse nature we experienced. All in all, I definitely do recommend my stay abroad and I am happy that more students will have the chance to experience an equally great and enriching year in Canada or somewhere else around the world.