

Destination: University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George
Exchange period: VT 2015

Choice of the destination and courses:

I found my destination in the list of exchange programs on international office's webpage. Since I only speak Swedish and English I wanted to go to a country where most people speak English and I would have a large variety of courses to choose from. Canada seemed like a suitable option and since I also been longing to do some skiing (I had not skied for ten years), it was perfect. The university seemed very good and it was easy to find out what courses were available just from their website. I did not really care beforehand where in Canada I ended up so the fact that I got a good feeling about the university was a major factor in my decision.

Describe shortly the preparation process before the departure:

Since I was only going away for one semester and not planning to work or anything when I was abroad I neither needed Visa or a "Study Permit" (required if the stay in Canada is ≥ 6 months). And my passport had not expired so I did not have to renew it. Also, I applied for accommodation on campus which was pretty easy and I did not have to arrange much myself. My preparations mainly consisted of buying plane tickets, train tickets and to make sure I was properly insured. It is good to be as early as possible to buy the plane tickets as prices increase when the departure date gets closer. It is also important that if you want to travel around a bit before or after your semester, check the conditions for changing your departure date so you won't have to pay a lot of unnecessary fees. Buying necessary equipment such as a suitcase was also part of my preparation. And applying for some scholarships. If you put some time on your application it can basically pay for your whole semester abroad.

Contact with receiving institution:

The contact with UNBC was very good. I had regular contact with Annick Pereira at their international office. She could answer most questions that came up or redirected me to the right people. Whoever I was in contact with, they were all very friendly and helpful. A lot of information was also available on the university webpage, but sometimes hard to find.

Support from Umea University:

I could have gotten more information on what was expected of me after my return to Umeå. Also, often it is a bit hard to get in contact with the people on International Office sometimes. It is hard to tell what is really their job to handle and sometimes when I came with questions I felt like they were thinking "It is not my job to know/do/help you with that".

Arrival information:

To be honest I was a bit disappointed at arrival. I arrived late on Thursday January 1st (school started Monday the 5th) since we were recommended to arrive a couple of days before school to have time to get rid of some jetlag. However, the whole university was closed down, only a few people stayed in

residence (on campus accommodation) that weekend and the city center was not within walking distance but luckily there were busses running. I was lucky I met one of my roommates on the way to university, otherwise that first weekend would have been terribly lonely and boring. We had an orientation on Monday and a few things arranged later on during the semester but that was pretty much it when it came to activities for exchange students. Everyone was always helpful if you had any questions though which was invaluable. I think there are more "welcome activities" if you come at fall.

Accommodation arrangements:

I lived on campus and it was easy to apply for a spot. I don't remember if I got any information about this accommodation or if I found it myself on the webpage. However, once you start to apply for a spot you get some guidance through the process. Note that you have to pay a non refundable administrative fee in the first step of the process. A lot of information about on campus living can be found in the "Residents handbook" available at unbc's webpage. What can be useful to know is that beddings and towels are usually not included but the housing office is very understanding toward exchange students and provide you with some. You don't get a full size towel though so that is one of the first things you need to buy if you don't bring one (assuming you want to be able to shower). Hangers are also a good thing to buy closely upon arrival, both for clothes storing and for drying them after laundry since the washing machines and dryers are coin operated and you never seem to have enough quarters. Save all your quarters for laundry! Also, the kitchens come with no serving utensils or cooking equipment so unless you have a roommate that has been staying in the flat the previous semester and is cooking you need to buy the stuff you need to be able to cook. There are no grocery stores within walking distance, but the buses operate regularly. On tuesdays there is a farmers market on school where you can buy some groceries. If you don't want to cook, you can sign up for the mealplan but regarding what it says in the handbook, the mealplan is optional for exchange students. I did not sign up for the mealplan since the food was pretty much the same every day with a few courses varying.

Transportation:

The easiest way to get around cheap was to go by bus since you get free bus transport through the academic fees you pay to UNBC. The buses run a bit irregularly at weekends and stop early at evenings (unless it is a weekend) though so if you can't take the bus, pretty much the only option is to get a taxi. The city of Prince George is very spread out so it is hard to walk to wherever you want to go like you can do in Umeå. It is a good idea to befriend someone with a car, or if you're planning to get a bit outside the city, rent a car together with a friend you trust.

Budget:

A lot of expenses were included in academic fees you pay before/upon arrival, for example gym membership at a big gym on the university area, so living expenses were not very high. The rent for living at residence were payed all at once and corresponds pretty much to a student room in Umeå. Groceries were possibly a bit more expensive and taxi a bit cheaper. In general though, costs of living was comparable.

However, the "only" way of getting your course literature was to buy or rent it from the bookstore

and I found the literature pretty much necessary for all my courses so that can be a big expense.

Social activities:

There were not a wide variety of arranged social activities but often at least something happened. A couple of things a week were organized at residence where you could often get some free food as a bonus. Like watching superbowl and have pizza, there were once a open mic event, pancake breakfast, a cook of etc. The university had a lot of clubs you could join, I recommend the outdoors club who organize among else ski trips, hikes, ice climbing and much more.

In general you have to be a bit forward when it comes to social activities, join in in arranged activities, make up own plans with friends and don't shut yourself up in your room.

Recommendation :

I would absolutely recommend the university. I'm very satisfied with all the courses I took, all my professors ver good and the staff at the international office and service desk is very friendly and helpful. The study experience part of the exchange was therefore very good.

The city however is a bit ugly and boring and the closest bigger cities are Vancouver and Calgary, both around 800 km away in driving distance. But for outdoor life it is quite nice, there are some walking trails behind the residence at university, you can rent snow shoes at the sport center during winter and the school arrange some ski trips to close by ski resorts.

I think my stay was a bit clouded by the fact that the teachers went on a strike for 2,5 weeks and all activities at the university were on hold for that time but I couldn't really go anywhere since the strike could end on just a days notice.

Practical things to think about:

If you just want to go to a nice and good university and don't care to much about a big cultural range it is a good place to go to. You can also save some money here and then travel a lot when you finished all your exams.

However, if you want to live in a bustling city with a lot of things going on all the time, this is not the best exchange for you.

General information about academia:

The largest difference is that you take around 3-5 courses simultaneously during a semester compared to at home where you take 1-2 courses, finish them and start new courses(at least I do). Also, the final exam accounts for a smaller proportion of the final grade than at home since some weight is put on midterms and written assignments or quizzes instead.

The language when you speak to your teachers are more formal in Canada than in Sweden. Most professors have worked hard and are very proud over their title so unless they tell you to address them by their first name they are "Dr" or "Professor" when you speak to them, or write an email. Most professors had clearly stated office hours when they almost guaranteed that they would be on their office and since the university was fairly small you got a great connection with your teachers.

There were also Teacher assistants who only corrected your work in some courses and you could get help from with the structure of your writing in other courses.

Courses attended

Course 1:

Introduction to Database Systems.

Content: Storage structure and access methods, data definition and data manipulation language, relational algebra and calculus, and SQL. An introduction to database design using entity-relationship model, functional dependencies, and theory of normalization were provided.

Teaching methods: Lectures were very important and helpful and the teachers asked a lot of questions that would improve understanding. Some material that were only given orally on lectures were tested.

Workload and examination: It was a highly work intensive course. There were many elements to the examination including: quizzes, written assignments (some based on the solving of a problem, some theoretical), a team project, and written exams (midterm and final).

The literature was good (Avi Silberschatz, Hank Korth, and S. Sudarshan. Database System Concepts 6/e. McGraw Hill, 2011). Available online as pdf.

If you want to take this course be prepared to work and don't take a lot of hard courses at the same time. I highly recommend the course, you learn a lot.

Course 2:

Applied Business Computing.

Content: The course covers database design and information retrieval techniques with emphasis on web-database integration, advanced features of spreadsheets, recoding/analyzing basic business transactions using a variety of accounting software, and implementation of selected financial models

Teaching methods: Lectures were held in computer labs so you could easily follow along in all examples and got a good foundation for the labs that you were later supposed to hand in.

Workload and examination: There are a lot of assignments on the course but they are not particularly hard. There are quizzes, labs, midterm and final exam.

There was no required textbook for the course, material was instead provided online which contained necessary information to solve the labs, pass the quizzes and written exams.

If you want to take this course it is useful and not to complicated but a lot of assignments. Make sure to read instructions carefully to not loose points on tasks.

Course 3:

Introduction to Literary Structures.

Content: This course provides an introduction to the reading of the three major genres: poetry, fiction, and drama. The course introduces the students to the basic structural principles and rhetorical strategies of literary texts by observing structural and rhetorical theory applied to specific poems, fictions, and plays.

Teaching methods: Lectures contained a lot of discussion time where we discussed the material we had read in advance.

Workload and examination: The workload was pretty moderate. As long as you read the required texts before class it is easy to follow along at lectures. The examination consisted of quizzes, midterm and final exam, a major essay, as well as class participation since some exercises were done in class.

The literature (Mays, Kelly J. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. Portable eleventh edition. 2014) is a collection of short stories, poems and dramas. It also contains information about different literary elements and the authors of the texts. It is very good and entertaining reading.

To think about if you take this course is to pay attention during class because a lot of the questions on quizzes and exams are based on the material covered there or questions discussed during class.

Course 4:

Introduction to Gender Studies.

Content: This course explores the ways in which human beings think about gender and sexuality, and how they behave in gendered ways.

Teaching methods: The lectures included powerpoint presentations as well as watching movies. Discussions were also a central part of lectures.

Workload and examinations: This course does not contain many assignments. It has midterm, final exam and a couple of essays. However it is important to put some time on the essays so they turn out good and go through the lecture slides and/or read the book to be able to pass written exams.

The teacher at the course contributed in writing the course book (Michael Kimmel and Jacqueline Holler, *The Gendered Society, Canadian Edition* (Oxford, 2011)) and was therefore very familiar with its content. It was very interesting and helpful in the beginning but it is sufficient to read the slides to save time.

If you take this course, don't be afraid to join in class discussion or ask the Teacher Assistant for feedback when you're writing your essays.

Course 5:

Additional Courses:

Did the university provide language courses? Could you receive ECTS points for them? What was your experience of such course?

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