

# Student Exchange Questionnaire

**Name:** Antonia McGhie

**Massey Degree:** BSc Zoology

**Host university:** University of Calgary

**Semester and year of exchange:** Semester 1, 2016

## **Why did you choose this particular university and/or country for exchange?**

I had always wanted to visit Canada for its wildlife and scenery. I chose University of Calgary because it was near the Rockies and is an area I had not considered visiting before.

## **Did it meet your expectations?**

Definitely. Travelling after the semester finished we saw places which look like they are straight off a postcard which was amazing, and there was plenty of snow and squirrels; my only disappointment was not managing to see an aurora. I am used to New Zealand towns so Calgary was a really nice place to live because it isn't too big and it didn't have the social issues many of the more populous cities have.

## **What papers did you study while on exchange? Would you recommend them?**

Paleobiology of Vertebrates and Evolutionary Biology were my Zoology papers, and I took Archaeology & Popular Culture and Geography of World Affairs as electives because they sounded interesting. Although evolutionary biology was not what I had expected and I found some of it difficult, all the papers were good. If you are interested in Dinosaurs, Alberta is a great province to be in, and Paleobiology is good course with a really passionate professor. I would highly recommend Archaeology to anyone if you have space for an elective because it is a really interesting and fun course which you definitely won't find in New Zealand.

## **Were there differences in the teaching methods and academic environment at your host university, compared to Massey University? If so, what kind of differences?**

The biggest difference for me was that in some of the higher level courses there are marks for participation in group discussion, which was a timeslot allocated like a lab or tutorial would be. They asked you to read specific published articles or papers before class, pose questions, and then contribute in a discussion led by a professor or teaching assistant. This was quite challenging for me because it can be difficult to understand the technical language when reading them on your own, and it has to look like you are participating sufficiently, but the discussions were very interesting and useful.

## **Did you stay on-campus or off-campus? What was the accommodation like?**

I stayed on Campus in the Newest hall, Aurora, which accomodates upper year undergraduates. It is self-catered so each 1-3-bedroom apartment had a kitchen and bathroom. You could give a preference for the number of rooms plus if you wanted to be on the top 2 floors. It is slightly more expensive, but I was on floor 9 so I could enjoy the view even while I was stuck in my room studying. It is never cold indoors, and there are underground passages between the buildings so you don't have to go outside when it is minus 20 degrees. There are also some activities so you can get to know other people in

your building. Living on campus without having to worry about bills and transport made everything really simple and I would highly recommend it.

**How did living expenses compare to in New Zealand?**

Things cost about the same to what I am used to; you get a transit pass for the term for \$120 which gives you unlimited train and buses (which run frequently and until very late). The only thing that stood out was some fresh produce bring pricey. A great thing about Alberta is it has the lowest tax so everything is cheaper than it would be elsewhere.

**What extra-curricular activities did you participate in at the host university?**

I made sure to go ice-skating because there are outdoor rinks in town, plus the university has the Olympic Oval which students can use for free. I found a university group which works with a local dog shelter, so volunteered walking dogs once or twice a week. There were also a number of outings organised for the exchange students which included learning how to curl, going to the Edmonton mall (which has an amusement park, swimming pool, and skating rink inside it), and visiting the zoo.

**What's one thing you learnt about your host country or culture?**

Canadians are really nice people, it's not just a stereotype.

**What were some of the highlights of your exchange experience?**

One of my best memories would be ice skating at the rink by the river at night while it was snowing (there a fairy lights on the bridges and trees). It was also cool experiencing the different student life there; they have a pub on campus which becomes a nightclub on Thursdays, and the Bermuda Shorts Day is a massive party on the last day of classes. I met lots of new people, and made friends with an exchange student from Waikato uni who travelled around Canada with me when we finished exams.

**What did you find challenging?**

I found some of the courses quite difficult because I didn't have the same foundation knowledge as other students (because their degree is 4 years, they had done more in papers beforehand).

**What do you feel you have learnt or gained from going on exchange?**

It was quite different not having friends in my courses to discuss assignments and study with, so I had to improve my work ethic and talk to professors when I had questions. However, having finished, I feel much more confident in my abilities academically. I also feel more independent knowing I am capable of travelling overseas alone, and while it is a great country, the time away gave me a new appreciation for New Zealand.

**Do you have any tips for future students intending to travel to the same country or university?**

Plan your study early and I recommend going in your first or second year rather than your 3<sup>rd</sup>. Their semester 1 is Summer, which starts mid-year.

Getting a phone number there is not as simple or cheap as it is in NZ, but it is probably worth the effort so you can have data to check bus routes and call taxis etc. However it is possible to get by with downloaded google maps, GPS, and free Wi-Fi on a phone.

You must watch a hockey game, and I also highly recommend lacrosse (which is the national sport).

Public transport is good within cities. Things in Canada are very far apart and few hours on the greyhound bus is fine, but I don't recommend overnight trips if you can fly instead.

In winter, have a pair of shoes to keep your feet dry in the snow and a travel mug for hot drinks to warm your hands.

Take enough money to travel because it is a beautiful country!

**Do you have any comments on the support provided to you by Massey University and/or by the host university before/during/after your exchange?**

I changed some courses when I arrived and found some difficult, but staff at both universities were really helpful and supportive. Massey was always quick to respond if I had a question, and at Calgary you could just walk into the international office to meet with someone.