

## **Daniel Simpson – Exchange to Trent University, Canada 2009**

***Pre-departure*** include info about visa/passport arrangements, support from partner institution and CSU before you left:

I already had a valid passport and was not required to renew it before departure. I didn't require a visa to study in Canada as my exchange was less than six months. I travelled through Europe before I arrived in Canada and did not require any visas for the amount of time I spent in each country. However, I did require a visa for the USA as I visited in September and again on the way home from Canada in January.

The visa waiver arrangement did not cover my circumstances as I had spent more than 90 days in North America, of which Canada is included. The visa I needed was a B1/B2 and I had to attend an interview in Sydney to obtain this. I suggest emailing the consulate of the countries to be visited to confirm visa requirements. I also registered with the government "Smart Traveller" website and received notifications of developments in each country throughout my trip.

My partner institution was extremely helpful in helping to arrange my classes. I was in regular correspondence with the international office there and, on the whole, was provided timely and accurate information which was very beneficial. It was sometimes difficult to get a straight answer to questions as it had to be directed to a specific department and could take some time. Certain final details needed to be clarified on arrival at the university and the first week was quite stressful in trying to get everything organised, such as my timetable.

CSU supported me pre departure by providing past student exchange details and information on who to contact at Trent. However, my course had been through major changes at that time and some of this information was irrelevant, which made it more difficult to organise my exchange.

***Travel – flight information*** e.g. best deals, flying tips, luggage restrictions or lack of:

I arranged my flights through Harvey World Travel in Bathurst after comparing a large number of travel agencies, not just in Bathurst. I had a number of flights to book, as I travelled to Germany, Finland, Italy, the USA and Canada. I found that the "One World Alliance" was a much cheaper option than an "around the world" ticket and the earlier the tickets were booked, the cheaper they would be. I flew with reputable airlines (British, Qantas, American) and was extremely happy with the service and overall price. I paid around \$3000 altogether for 9 stops.

Luggage restrictions through Europe are half of what is allowed into The Americas, which was okay as I brought home more than what I took. There is no way to prepare for long flights, other than to drink plenty of water, take an iPod and be prepared to be bored! Security was much tighter in Canada and the USA than the rest of the countries I visited and I had to be at the airport an hour earlier than normal in these locations to board my flight on time. Relevant documents, such as the acceptance letter into the university, should be kept accessible for customs.

***Insurance*** travel insurance, health insurance, medical tests/forms to be aware of:

I bought my travel insurance through a company called Vero, which was organised through Westpac bank. It cost just over \$600. It was significantly cheaper than the insurance offered to me at the travel agent (\$2000) and was provided by the same company, which was a little confusing. This insurance covered me for all major categories such as medical, among other things, which was a concern when visiting the USA. I did not use my travel insurance though. In Canada, health insurance is compulsory at University and costs approximately \$60 per month for international students. I visited the doctor once and required a prescription, both of which were covered by the insurance. It is a very similar system to 'Medicare' in Australia.

***Campus accommodation & meals recommendations, campus layout, accessibility:***

The Trent campus is similar in size to the Bathurst campus. The dorm rooms are average sized and include the basics. Bathrooms are close by. I lived in Champlain College, which I would recommend

as being the closest to most facilities, such as the library and main bus stop. Most of my friends lived in this college too.

The college it set up differently to Bathurst and it was hard to find a 'common' area to meet with friends, unless it was in someone's room. Each area has a student 'don' who is in charge of that area and can be approached for help or advice. It was sometimes difficult to find classrooms and I had to ask a number of times where rooms were in my first few weeks.

Classes can be held in areas of the library and can be confusing to find. The campus is 15 minutes out of town, but is served well by a regular and free (for students) bus service. It was never an issue to get into town. I would suggest going on a board meal plan, where you get a certain amount of meals per week. The other option is the flex plan, where the student card is used like a debit card and deducts money after each meal (I was given \$1200 for the semester on my card which is included in tuition fees). Either option does not allow you to eat three meals per day, 7 days a week. The food is similar most nights and fairly standard. I found it hard to make it to breakfast on time and my college's dining hall was closed on weekends.

Dinner also finished at 7pm, which was quite early for me. My college had a bar, which also closed at 7pm and was not popular among students, as the CSU Unibar can be.

**Course information** *subject list, restrictions, comparisons, pre-requisites, study advise:*

I am in the Paramedics/Nursing programme and could only study nursing subjects at Trent. It was the most difficult aspect of my exchange to organise the subjects I needed to take. I had to alter my progression at CSU and take a subject by distance whilst I was there (NRS195). I ended up taking 5 subjects in total and had problems with my enrolment at CSU while I was at Trent, particularly when trying to access work for the distance subject.

I also had to complete clinical work on the weekends at Trent which was not credited to my degree at CSU as it is not recognised by the NSW Nurses and Midwives Board. This was frustrating for me as I felt that I could have better spent my time on other assignments or on seeing parts of Canada that were within reach. I will now complete this placement during my holidays back in Australia.

The process of matching subjects is very long and I went on exchange at a time when my course was undergoing major changes. I am still unsure whether my subject choices will be accepted by the NMB at the completion of my degree, although I have been told that progress is being made in this area.

I did contact the Board before going on exchange and was informed that it would be best for me to remain at CSU and to not pursue the idea of an international exchange if I wished to be registered as a nurse. This made it even more frustrating for me as I felt like my time may have been wasted at Trent. I can only suggest that the best way to overcome these problems is by keeping in very regular contact with the course coordinators and international office. Emails and face to face appointments were the most effective methods and I now await the outcome.

**Transport** *public and around campus:*

Transport in Peterborough was free for students and regular (every 20 mins during the day on weekdays). The campus is small enough for everything to be within walking distance. Transport to Toronto was accessible from the University by way of bus, but tended to be slow and expensive (approximately \$17 each way).

Personally, I spent a lot of time in Toronto and found the subway to be excellent, such as getting to the airport or around the city. If you needed to go anywhere else, the Greyhound bus was an option, but again was quite expensive.

**Expenses** *university associated fees, personal expenses, exchange rates, where to shop, best prices, money saving tips:*

- My tuition fees at Trent were waived as I was just required to pay my regular fees to CSU, which is part of the exchange arrangement Accommodation was around \$5000 for the

semester and the exchange rate was very good whilst I was there, almost at parity with the AUD for much of my time.

- I had to buy text books, (as I would have done at CSU) which was a big expense.
- Shopping at the local supermarket (No Frills) was similar to shopping at an Australian supermarket and prices were about the same or lower.
- I bought a mobile phone with Virgin which was adequate, but tended to cost a little more per month than in Australia as you have to pay to receive texts and calls.
- Facebook and Skype were excellent in organising outings and keeping in touch, and both are free. Flights and travel insurance were major expenses as well.
- Clothing store's prices are similar to Australia and I would recommend shopping in the USA as it is much cheaper.

***Holiday travel destination ideas, tips:***

I travelled through Europe before beginning the semester at Trent. I had friends to stay with in Germany, but I highly recommend this route to anyone as it was summer and there was a big break between semesters. Whilst in Canada, we managed to visit Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, New York, Washington DC, Detroit/Windsor and Cuba.

Although the work is full on, there are opportunities to get away and visit these places, such as during the Reading Break (which is a one week holiday). We hired two cars to visit Quebec and found this to be a cheaper and more convenient option than the bus as we had a group of ten. Domestic flights within Canada are extremely expensive and there is no similar "Jetstar" company. I would have liked to visit Vancouver or Nova Scotia, but it was just too expensive.

***Social activities university clubs, international student activities, sports:***

There are plenty of sports to get involved in at Trent. I did not join any clubs or sports teams as I was far too busy. The gym is free and very close to residence and is currently being revamped. There are events organised for international students, such as dinners and barbeques.

***Cultural information culture shock, language barriers (if any), do's and don'ts:***

Canadian culture is very similar to Australian culture. There wasn't any language barriers (excluding the province of Quebec) and culture shock was not an issue. Some things are organised differently and there are subtle differences in culture, particularly I found with humour. However, it is easy to overcome these small differences as time progresses and it becomes more apparent.

Canadian University culture is not as socially grounded as at CSU and drinking is definitely not condoned on campus and must be confined to rooms. The campus is quiet compared to CSU. The legal drinking age is 19, which means most first years are underage. It is advisable to catch a bus downtown with friends for a drink in one of the local bars. Tipping is hard to get used to and is expected in restaurants and at bars.

***Weather what to prepare for, how to cope with extremes:***

The weather didn't get too cold until December. Before that time it was adequate to be outside with long pants and a jumper, just as in a Bathurst winter. In December though, we got a fair amount of snow and the weather turned very cold, typically with the temperature never rising above 0C.

The most difficult aspect of living in the snow is walking on stairs, as they become very slippery with ice. However, cold weather is expected when visiting Canada and the only way to cope is to spend a lot of time indoors or to layer up when outside with thermals, gloves, a beanie and coat. It is just as important to keep dry as it is to keep warm. I do not really recommend buying expensive snow clothing, as was suggested to me, as I found it fine to layer clothes I had already bought. A waterproof jacket is a necessity.

***What to bring from home/what not to bring*** luxuries to keep homesickness at bay, unnecessary items bought from home:

Bring as much as possible from home. It was difficult for me to pack 23kg that would be my life for six months. I suggest just packing items that can't be bought, such as photos, laptop etc. Necessities such as toiletries, towels, sheets can be bought on arrival and at a cheaper price than in Australia usually. Remember to keep in mind that Canadian electricity runs on 110V as opposed to Australian 240V, so make sure appliances are compatible before packing them.

Be sure to include a power point adaptor and power board! I didn't feel homesick whilst at Trent as I was always kept busy and had a great group of friends. Having photos in my room and keeping in contact with my family was perhaps the key to this. Skype was a great resource to keep in touch with friends and family. I don't really feel that I took any unnecessary items.

***What you may need to buy*** accommodation needs (blankets, irons etc), clothing:

The international office has a number of items on loan from previous exchange students and I suggest taking full advantage of these offers as it saves a lot of money. Get in early during the first week to get the best things! For example, I loaned a phone, bed linen, pillow and crockery/cutlery. Otherwise, these items must be bought.

The room only comes with a bed mattress, desk, chair and internet/phone portal. I needed to buy a mobile phone, clothes hangers, alarm clock and groceries. I also rented a fridge for the semester from a company called "Campus Coolers" and this was very handy to store drinks and cold food.

***Relationships*** leaving old friends/making new, homesickness etc:

It was easy to make friends at the International Camp organised by Trent. Most of my friends were international students. It was harder for me to make Canadian friends as I didn't meet people in my course until class time, where we were doing work and had no time to talk. I did end up making some very close friends on clinical though and my residence was very friendly.

Most people were extremely interested in finding out more about Australia and I met a number of people who were interested in coming to CSU on exchange. Be prepared to speak about Australia!

Six months is not a long time to leave friends from home and, while it was sad, it was not particularly difficult. It was very hard leaving my 'new' friends though, as it was during the exam period and there was not really a suitable time or place where we could all get together to say goodbye.

Trent also enforces a strict "23 hour Quiet Time" during exams, where no noise is allowed to be made except between 7-8pm at night. Although I missed my family and friends at home a lot, I did not feel homesick and felt I made the most of my time abroad.