

**Shannon Slattery – Exchange to Regina University, 2010*****Pre-departure:***

I applied for exchange through the CSU Global office at Bathurst, after seeing posters up around the Bathurst campus and looking at the CSU Global website. When I was ready to take the next step towards exchange I contacted Louise at Bathurst and found her to be supportive and extremely helpful through all stages of the exchange organisation, from information about partner universities and deciding where to go, as well as getting help with insurance and accommodation problems.

***Visa/Passport organisation***

I did not need to apply for a passport before I left for Canada as I had previously been overseas. However, it should be organised as soon as possible as it can take some time to receive. The only requirement for existing passport holders is to return to Australia with a minimum of 6 months remaining before passport expiration.

It is not necessary to have a visa to visit or study in Canada. As I was not planning on working on campus or staying more than six months I did not apply for a study permit. Also the permits were about \$300AUD and I am highly doubtful that I would have had enough time to apply and receive my permit. It can take between 6 to 8 weeks to receive your permit and I did not receive my U of R acceptance documents with this much time to spare, so I did not bother applying. I have since heard this was the same with many other exchange students and perhaps could be a concern for future CSU exchange students to UR.

I organised my flights through Air New Zealand as I wanted to have the most direct flight to Vancouver that was possible. I also was advised not to travel through America, which was a real benefit to me, as it was a time when American airport security had a terrorist scare and all travellers through America were subjected to high security measures which would have been very inconvenient.

It is likely flights to Canada will be fairly expensive, I paid over \$3000 for my flights and I had checked online for deals for months. I would definitely recommend Air New Zealand, as they have direct flights from Auckland to Vancouver with the same airline so I did not have problems with changing airline luggage limits.

***Luggage***

I flew premium economy Air New Zealand as I got a really good deal, which meant I could take 2 pieces of luggage maximum of 64kgs and 2 pieces of carry-on luggage. However, I flew home in economy which still allows 2 pieces for a maximum combined weight of 48kgs.

***Insurance******Travel Insurance***

I choose to use CSU Travel insurance, as it was by far the cheapest and most convenient option for me at \$300 for 5 months. This was the best deal I found and it has very good inclusions. It was also very easy to acquire as Louise at Bathurst CSU Global, handled all the paperwork and took the payment out of the scholarship, which was a very big help.

***Medical Tests***

There are no vaccinations, shots or medical tests needed to for travel to Canada. However it would be advisable to have a check up before leaving to get any extra advice or prescriptions you might need.

**Campus**

The University of Regina campus is fantastic. It is a very new and modern campus with all areas easily accessible.

*Accommodation*

It is advisable to apply for residence as soon as possible perhaps even if you haven't made up your mind 100%. I had some issues with getting residence and only secured a place after Louise intervened with the UR International office, who in turn, got in touch with the Residence office at UR and emailed me directly offering me a place. However, it was not a sure thing which, after speaking with other exchange students who also received very similar problems, I feel may be an issue with future students.

In this way, I feel the UR International office should be better synchronised with the Residence department, as it seemed they were very un co-ordinated, and un-organised which became a frustrating issue whilst at UR.

It is also worth applying for an apartment in Collage West (5 room sharing same sex) and at Luther Collage (single rooms – shared bathrooms). There is no application fee to apply at Luther Collage.

*Meals*

I stayed in a self catered apartment which comes fully furnished, which allows one to prepare and cook their own meals. These apartments are generally 3 or 4 person shared, same-sex or co-ed. If someone stays in a dorm style room, they are required to buy a meal plan card, however, people I knew on this plan did not have very many options and many options were very unhealthy.

Luther Collage has a compulsory meal plan, which can still be very unhealthy. However, I believe it is a much better option than the meal plan card on UR campus.

**Course information***Subject choice/Approval*

This part of the exchange preparation was very easy for me, as I am doing a Bachelor of Arts degree so it was no major problem for me to email my course co-ordinator and get permission for subjects which would fit in with my Major/Minors. I had to get approval for a second time after some subjects I chose were not running in the winter semester, but again, this was no real problem.

*Pre-requisites*

I had some subjects at UR which required pre-requisites however, I simply emailed what I believed were my comparisons subjects and I had no issues with being able to enrol in all the subjects I had chosen.

*Study Advice*

I believe study at UR is very simple and quite comparable to study at CSU. The only real difference is that UR does not have a tutorial system. It is either lecture based or has lectures and "Lab's". Lab's are like hands on practicals which are mostly science based experiments but could also be language/group activity based and which may run for up to 4 hours.

**Transport**

This wasn't a big problem for me or many of the other exchange students at UR. Regina has a very good transit system which covered the entire city. There is also very helpful website to help people plan their trip which was very handy.

There is absolutely no problem with getting around the UR campus. It is very simple, it is organised as one big circle with every section colour coded for directions. The entire campus is enclosed so unless

you live in Luther or have classes there, there is no reason to go outside. This was extremely helpful as I exchanged in winter with constant  $-35^{\circ}$  to  $-45^{\circ}$  temperatures, and found the weather to be no problem at all to cope with.

### ***Expenses***

Finances can be a big deciding factor in doing an exchange. However, with my exchange to Canada I had the opportunity to apply for a \$5000 scholarship through CSU, which was extremely helpful. I also applied for an OSHELP loan of \$5, 500. These payments made up the bulk of the money I needed to exchange to Canada.

I was also eligible for Centrelink Youth Allowance, which was very helpful in topping up my finances after large payments like Residence costs. With these finances behind me, as well as having some of my own savings I was very lucky to not have any major money issues whilst in Canada. However, I would advise sticking to a budget.

### ***Prices***

Many things such as; food, drinks and clothing are much cheaper in Canada relative to Australia, which was quite helpful in sticking to a budget. Accommodation costs are quite expensive at about \$2400CAD for the semester if you live in the North or South Towers. It is a little cheaper in Collage West and in Luther Residence you have to be on a compulsory meal plan so it is slightly more expensive (\$3500CAD). Every residence at UR has internet costs covered with your Residence so there are no extra internet costs, only printing costs at around .7-.10cents CAD per page.

I did not have to pay any UR University fees, as I pay the CSU fees at home. However, there were some exchange students who had trouble with getting some fees cleared from their account at the end of the semester. This seemed to be more evidence of UR International not being completely integrated into the other areas of the University administration.

### ***Exchange rate***

The exchange rate should be something any Australian exchange student should keep an eye on as it can save a conscientious traveller quite a lot of money, when considering fees and charges. I bought pre-paid travel money MasterCard (through the Commonwealth Bank) and it was very good I would definitely recommend it.

### ***Holiday travel***

I did not organise much holiday travel as I considered my whole experience to be a kind of holiday. However, I did many activities whilst in Canada and took some trips with friends. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do much travelling to the East coast of Canada as flights in Canada are very expensive. Due to this, I would recommend travelling by train if you can, or Greyhound buses, which are the most convenient transportation as they really do go everywhere, although some trips can be multiple days.

### ***Destination ideas***

I would definitely recommend visiting Vancouver; all up I spent about a month in Vancouver which is a very beautiful city with many different things to do. I would also recommend visiting Banff and Lake Louise. I travelled there with some other exchange friends during the semester break and it was truly an amazing experience – especially being winter.

### ***Social activities***

There are many different social clubs, societies and sports teams at UR. Sign up for these sports teams is at the beginning of the semester. I personally didn't end up joining any of the clubs or societies at UR as I tended to organise different activities with my friends. There are a lot of activities organised by UR International and by the Residences. These events can be really fun, and I would recommend exchange students to participate in them.

UR International organises some Canadian experiences which I would not have been able to participate in had they not organised it. These included; ice skating on a frozen lake and curling. The Residence office also had a trip to Moose Jaw and the famous hot springs there, which I would absolutely recommend participating in (especially in winter).

### ***Cultural information***

As Canada is an English speaking country I didn't experience any real culture shock. Some miscommunication is coming due to different word usage. Mostly it was the small things which were different such as driving on the wrong side of the road. Also, Canadian money has one cent and 25 cents (no 20c or 50c) also they do not include tax in their prices which can be quite frustrating.

### ***Weather***

As I exchanged to Canada in winter, I experienced quite extreme weather. It is essential to have a very good winter jacket. I also took good quality rubber soled ugg boots (which I water proofed before I left) these would have to be one of the best things I took with me to Canada. The trick to the extreme cold is learning how to layer, if you go outside in -35° you should be wearing thermals and proper waterproof shoes/ugg boots and wind/water proof gloves or mittens.

*During the winter months;* January, February and half of March, there is always a thick layer of snow. However, living on campus the extreme cold will not be a major issue, as the entire campus is connected with walkways which is very well heated at a constant 21°+.

### ***What to bring from home/what not to bring***

- I would suggest packing lightly, as you will mostly likely buy some things in Canada and want to take lots of things home. I exchanged in the Canadian Winter so I brought a lot of winter layers, which in hindsight were unnecessary, as I didn't need to be so worried about the temperature as I thought I would.
- I would recommend bringing some photos and even videos from home, to help with home sickness and to show your new friends your home and family.
- Something to be aware of is that the power in Canada seems to be much lower than at home, so things take a lot longer to charge up and some things may not work properly eg. Blow dryers or hair straighteners.
- Also remember to bring a few adapters to leave in your room and take with you when you are about campus with your laptop (although there are computers available at UR I would very much recommend you bringing your own laptop).

### ***What you may need to buy***

You will need to buy (or bring); a towel, linen, blankets and pillows for your room and maybe an alarm clock if you want. You should check what size you need for your linen as the different residences have different sized beds. You can borrow irons from the residence office but it might not be necessary if you use the dryers and a fabric softener. Other things to buy are cutlery and some basic kitchen appliances, though it is worth asking to borrow off roommates as well. Other things you may want buy should be available in a shopping mall in Regina.

### ***Relationships***

Simply, it is true what people say, that leaving home won't be nearly as bad as leaving your new friends in Canada (or in my case, from Canada and around the world).

I personally, have met so many amazing people, both Canadian and other exchange students, who have taught me so much about myself and the world, which I could not have hoped to learn myself. It will be hard to leave them but due to the exchange and living especially through winter, you will probably have friends who are more like siblings.

These people might end up being your friends for life, which is an excellent excuse to go travelling again, to go and visit them – or have them visit you!

Things like Skype, face book and msn will be very helpful for keeping in touch back home, especially when considering the 17 hour time difference. The considerable time difference can be very annoying and frustrating, when trying to keep in touch, so you might find yourself contacting friends and family less than you imagined.

