

Liberal Arts and Sciences (BA)
Kanada, University of Ottawa
August 20, 2017 – April 30, 2018
CA-2017-OBW12-w

Final Report University of Ottawa

Why Canada?

Already at the beginning of my Bachelor studies in Freiburg, I knew that I wanted to spend time abroad – either for an Erasmus semester, or even better for a year at a university outside of Europe. For me the quality of teaching at the foreign university was important, I wanted to choose courses that I could not take in Freiburg and thereby broaden my academic horizon. At the same time, I wanted to live in an exciting country that I didn't know before and have the chance to explore abundant nature. Canada is a country that fulfills both criteria, and the University of Ottawa offers a broad range of courses that really interested me. Furthermore, I really liked that the country is bilingual. I had the chance to study in English and at the same time improve my French through extracurricular activities. In the end, I could not have chosen a better country. Even though I was a bit scared of the long winter (and it is very long and very cold!), the friendly Canadians, awesome nature, fun activities and the many great people that I met created a wonderful year for me.

Preparations, preparations, preparations

After I had chosen Canada as my destination, I applied at the International Office and was chosen for the OBW (Ontario-Baden-Württemberg) Program. Within this program, I then had to apply again for one of the universities that participated, in my case the University of Ottawa. I was very happy when my application was successful, and the last step of applying (again) directly at the university was then very easy. Although the application process was quite long and included many steps that were sometimes repetitive and tiring, I am glad that I chose to do it. What helped me was keeping an overview of the deadlines, so I always knew what was to be organized next. This gave me time to consider steps that took some longer planning (such as the TOEFL test and letters of recommendation) and things that I could do in shorter time.

After I knew that I was accepted at the University of Ottawa, the practical planning could begin. The first thing I did was apply for the **study permit** (a student visa that is necessary if you are staying in Canada for more than one semester). The study permit needs some time to be processed, and the required documents also include a proof of financial means. It is advisable to start collecting these documents a bit in advance, so that you can apply for the permit early enough. The website of Immigration Canada is very helpful and provides a lot of relevant information on the application process. Furthermore, I organized a **credit card** at the DKB which turned out to be extremely useful. For instance, I could withdraw money without fees at Scotiabank in Canada and rent cars, which is not possible without a credit card (also prepaid credit cards don't work!). For an **insurance**, I had to have three in total: my German insurance because I was still enrolled at the Uni Freiburg, the obligatory UHIP that all Ontario students have, and an additional travel insurance in case I was traveling outside of Canada or after the semester ended. For my travel insurance I chose the ADAC, because Canada and the US are already included in the package and it was the cheapest option in comparison to other insurances.

The **housing** market in Ottawa is quite relaxed, especially in comparison to Freiburg. I was very lucky and found a shared flat three months in advance through a friend that had lived there

before. But I also knew people who only started looking for places after they had arrived in Ottawa which was not a problem either. Most of my friends found their places through Kijiji.ca (the Canadian Ebay Kleinanzeigen) or through Rentaplace, which organizes tours through rooms in Ottawa. There is also the option to live in residences on campus. However, it is very expensive compared to private housing and quite restrictive regarding quiet hours and bringing in guests. The shared flats in Canada are a bit different from ours in Germany because the landlord chooses who lives together, not the students themselves. Therefore, the cohesion is often a bit less and it is more of a living next to each other than living together. But this really depends on the people, I was very lucky and found my Canadian family in my flat mates.

I booked my **flight** to Toronto about 2-3 months in advance and found a direct flight with Condor from Frankfurt for 350€. I did not want to book my return flight right away, because I did not know when and where from I would be flying back. In the end that was a good idea, because I ended up traveling for two months after the end of the second semester and was still able to find a cheap flight back. When it comes to **luggage**, I would advise you to pack more winter than summer clothes and, if possible, leave some space for the additional stuff that you will definitely have at the end of the year. I did not bring a winter jacket or winter shoes and bought both in Canada. I was very happy with that choice, because the German winter jackets are not really suitable for the Canadian winter and I was able to find cheap and good products during the black Friday sales.

Studying at the University of Ottawa

I really liked studying in Canada. The University of Ottawa was very helpful during all steps of my stay. They especially helped me with the course selection in the beginning which was a bit complicated and required proof of prerequisites, but were also very available during my stay. They always answered my emails within the day and I felt very welcome as an exchange student. There was a welcome day organized for exchange students, and I was also able to participate in the welcome week for the Canadian first year students before courses started. The university also organized little events for their students throughout the year, such as Halloween events, international week, winter fest and many more. These events gave me the impression to really belong to the student body, a feeling which I sometimes miss in Freiburg.

Since I wanted to grow academically during the year, I chose most of my courses in my major Governance and was very happy with the many possibilities and the quality of the courses. Most of my courses were very interesting, and the professors really wanted to engage their students and help us achieve our goals. Courses I took were for instance Nationalism, Canadian Politics, Politics of Development, International Political Economy, and a course about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Little essays and exams throughout the semester meant that I always had something to do for uni, but it also meant less stress during the exam time at the end of the semester. Even though I was sometimes a bit annoyed with the many mandatory tasks that left me feeling regulated, I appreciated the continuous learning which is more effective than a one-time exam preparation. Generally, I found it a bit easier to get good grades in Canada than in Germany. I dedicated a lot of time to uni during my first semester and found it a bit stressful to adapt to the system, but then was more relaxed during the second semester and found a very good balance between studying and enjoying my free time. Generally, I feel that I learned a lot during this year and that I profited academically from the exchange.

Apart from Governance courses, I also took a French language course and tried to talk French whenever possible. In my second semester, I worked in a student café on campus (Café Alt) where I could practice my French, find new friends and have a great job that had nothing to do with studying and thus provided a totally different Canadian experience for me. A study permit allows all exchange students to work on campus, but it must be explicitly indicated on the permit so that you can get your social insurance number. Thus, if you plan on working on

campus, make sure that the boarder agent writes it on your permit when you enter the country. For me that wasn't the case, so I had to call various hotlines and ultimately collect my new study permit at the Ottawa airport. Once I had my new study permit, I could go to Service Canada (some sort of Bürgerbüro) and simply collect my social insurance number which is required for the work contract.

Living and traveling in Canada

The living expenses in Canada are a bit higher than in Germany. My room was about the same price as in Freiburg (500\$ plus utilities), but groceries are more expensive. Especially dairy products and alcohol are expensive, but other foods such as avocados are cheaper. I ended up buying most of my groceries at Loblaws which was close to my home and which has student discounts on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It payed off to get a PC Optimum points card at the beginning (a typ of Payback system at Loblaws and Shoppers) – every time you shop, you get some points that you can then redeem as Dollars at your next purchase.

I also had a bank account at Scotiabank which I needed to pay my rent and then also to receive my payment from work. It doesn't cost anything and can be convenient in some situations, but it is not really necessary if you have a DKB credit card.

Ottawa as a city was the perfect place for me. It is the capital of Canada and thus a lot of political and many cultural events are organized, but it is not a big city where one can easily feel lost. It is conveniently located at the boarder of Ontario and Quebec, so that French is always present. There is abundant nature to discover around the city, and many activities within the city. During summer time, there are two rivers and one canal to enjoy and many outdoor events to attend, and during winter there are winter activities, a winter fest (Winterlude) and skating on the canal going on. It is very easy to get to Toronto and Montréal from Ottawa, and thus a great location for all travels.

Regarding travels, I mostly took Greyhound busses and Via rail trains to get around Canada. Greyhound is cheaper, especially if you have an ISIC card which gives you 25% discounts on travels, while Via Rail is often faster and more comfortable. In the end, I often rented cars with friends because many beautiful places are a bit remote and cannot easily be reached by public transport. I was very happy to be part of the OBW program, where I met many great people that I could travel with and spend holidays with such as Easter or Thanksgiving. I ended up traveling from Ottawa all the way to Vancouver Island in the two month after my second semester, an experience that I will never forget.

My year in Canada was a wonderful experience that influenced me both academically and personally. I profited from the courses at the University of Ottawa, the excellent organization of the university and the OBW program, and the welcoming atmosphere in Canada which helped me settle in very fast. I can only recommend Canada as an exchange destination and especially the OBW program which provided an amazing frame to my year abroad.



University of Ottawa



Ottawa in the summer



Gatineau Park in the Fall



Skating on the canal