

**Liberal Arts and Sciences: Earth and Environmental Sciences, B.Sc.**

**Canada**

**September 2017 - April 2018**

**Laurentian University**

**CAN-2018-Z787U-w**

**Advice on applying, living, working and studying:**

**Before applying:** A stay abroad, especially in a country outside of Europe through the International Office, requires a lot of planning at an early stage. While many prospective students might not yet know if or where they want to go abroad after the first semester, the first half of the second semester (a year and a half before going abroad) is the best time to check out your different options. Make an appointment with the International Office or drop by in one of the information sessions, such as “Wege ins Ausland” to get to know your different options. Thoroughly prepare your application and don’t forget that certain certificates, such as TOEFL can only be obtained on certain dates and requires some planning, too.

**Before departure:** If you get accepted to the program of your choice, congratulations! Don’t leave things like applying for a visa or booking your flight to the last minute (I know it’s hard), as something unexpected may happen or flights during the summer months quickly become very expensive. I can totally recommend you to go to the preparation weekend (e.g. Bad Herrenalb for OBW-Students) if something like that is offered for your cohort. I obtained all necessary information on how to apply for a visa and the other important things that I might not have remembered by myself during these days and also got to meet the other exchange students that were going to the same region or even the same school. Knowing that I already met some people that would live in the same area made me feel more comfortable about going abroad. On a more practical side, check for the climate in your region and think about the different activities you are planning to do during your year abroad in that climate and then pack your suitcase accordingly. It could save you some money if you remembered to bring your warm gloves in August and didn’t have to buy them midwinter when it gets cold.

**Advice on living in Sudbury:** Students at Laurentian University in Sudbury, similar to many other universities in North America, has two options for living: on campus versus off-campus. On campus accommodation is in residences that are adjacent to the other facilities on the campus, resulting e.g. in a five-minute walk to your classes. Most of the residences at Laurentian consists of four students living in single rooms with a shared kitchen, but there are also residences with students sharing rooms or students having their own apartment with kitchen. Unless you live in your own apartment with kitchen on campus, which has the most expensive rent, it is mandatory to purchase a meal plan in the cafeteria. The caf serves breakfast, lunch and dinner with a variety of fast food (pizza, fries, deep-fried stuff) and a decent amount of other dishes including a salad bar. While I didn’t live on campus and, thus, didn’t have a meal plan, I heard from other international students that while the food was okay it certainly wasn’t the highlight of their day to go to the caf after a couple of months. Living on campus is very expensive as the rent for a room on residence is more expensive than living off-campus and the meal plan is very pricey, too. The main advantage of living on campus is that you are close to major hubs of activity as all university-related activities almost exclusively take place on campus.



Picture 1: The Laurentian University campus in surrounded by fall colours.

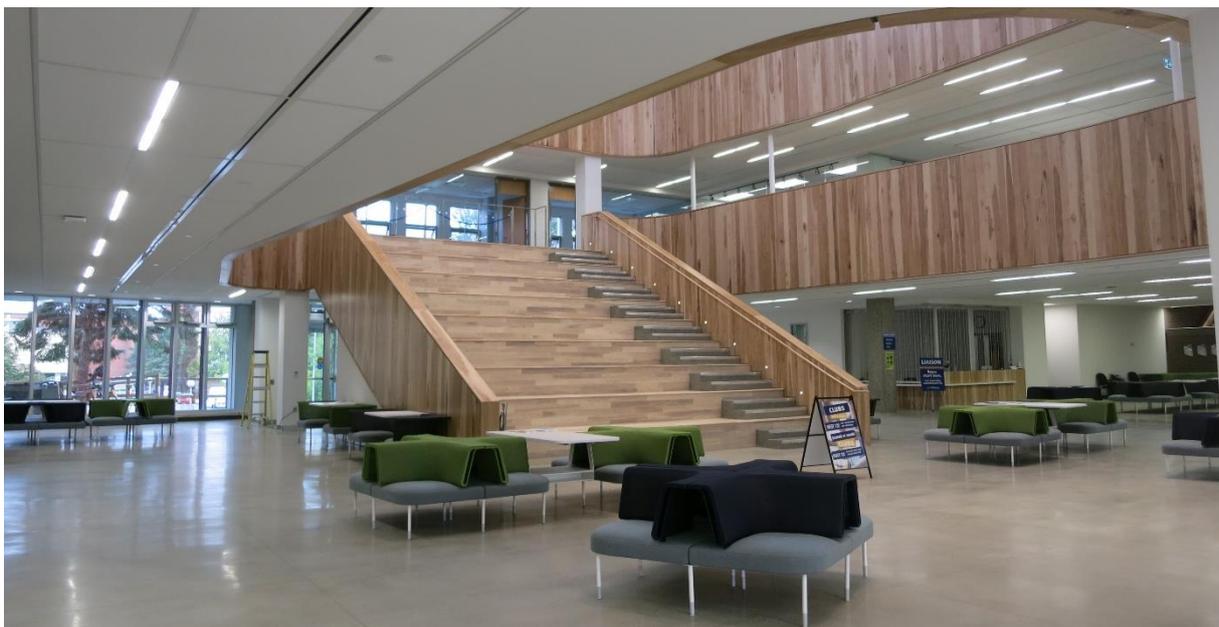
The second option is to live off-campus in a shared apartment in the city. I did that and I was very happy with it but I was one of very few international students that didn't live on campus. Hence, I sometimes felt cut off from the international group but it wasn't my goal to become friends with only international students in the first place but to also meet Canadians. And for that goal, it helped to not get too involved with the other on-campus international students and to have a Canadian roommate. For looking for off-campus accommodation, I have the following advice: compare rents (e.g. on Kijiji.ca for Sudbury) and do not pay much more than the average rent. Don't get tricked into paying for full 12 months if you're only staying for two semesters. Check the distance and bus connection from the potential apartment to the school, city centre, grocery stores and so on (e.g. on google maps). This is an important one! Speaking for Sudbury, make sure that your apartment is close to the bus line 500 (direct bus to Laurentian), maybe also 501 but try to avoid having to take more than one bus to get to school. Best live in the southern part of Sudbury or close to the Transit Terminal, but not in New Sudbury. Another consideration is whether the bus station close to your apartment has a shelter or not because the buses rarely run perfectly on schedule and being protected from an icy wind when it's  $-20^{\circ}$  outside while you have to wait for your bus for 15 minutes can make all the difference.



Picture 2: Downtown Sudbury viewed from a hill.

While I loved living off-campus and having some separation from school work and free time, living off-campus can sometimes be lonely and it is rather difficult to spontaneously hang out with friends on campus at night when there are almost no buses going to and from campus. But if you don't mind the commute and sometimes waiting for a bus for some time, I would recommend living off-campus because you have more freedom and it is much cheaper.

**Some thoughts on studying at Laurentian:** For Canadian standards, Laurentian is a medium-sized and medium-prestigious university. It has a friendly and rural touch to it and takes great care of its students. While you might not find cutting edge research and world-renowned professors across all fields, it is fairly famous for its environmental, medical and mining programs. It is also one of the few bilingual universities in Ontario. The size of the classes I attended was generally small (usually around 20 to 30 students) but this also depends on the field and the level of the class. Expect smaller classes in upper-year courses. As most of the descriptions available online on Webadvisor are extremely short, I recommend you contact the instructor when you are in doubt about the content and compatibility of a class while planning your schedule. From my experience, the level of difficulty increases sharply between the different years, e.g. a fourth year class will be much more detailed and time consuming than a second or third year class. Usually, classes in Canada also involve much more assignments and exams during the term than in Germany. This means that you will have to spend a lot of time on small weekly assignments that not necessarily enhance your understanding nor are very difficult but usually are extremely time-consuming. The expected workload for a Canadian student is five courses per semester. Having taken five courses in my second semester, I can tell you that this workload is extremely high and you will have only very little free time if you take five classes and want to take each class seriously. Therefore, I recommend a maximum of four classes per semester. In my experience, it is not the easiest to make friends with Canadian students in your classes because they sit each at their own desk and are occupied with their phones before class. Thus, it is not easy to involve them in a conversation. And by their third or fourth year, most of them have already established a close-knit group of friends and are not necessarily interested in new friends. But don't give up, keep trying! Try in your lab groups, which are usually smaller and it's easier to strike up a conversation with classmates if you work on a project together.



Picture 3: the newly renovated atrium of Laurentian University.

## **How to make the best out of your time in Sudbury:**

I am aware that every exchange student has different interests and preferences but looking back on my year, I can point out some suggestions that made my stay and the stay of other international students such a blast and a wonderful time, while international students that didn't implement those ideas were more lonely and disappointed by the end of the year. For me, Sudbury was a great choice and I really enjoyed my year up there. But I also like smaller cities (and long winters) and would have been hopelessly lost in Ottawa or Toronto.

1. Join clubs! While it may not be easy to make friends in your classes, you will for sure meet great Canadians to hang out with if you join one of the many clubs. So, don't miss the clubs' fair at the beginning of each semester.
2. Get in touch with the local community: while Sudbury may seem like a boring mining community at the first glance, there are so many vibrant clubs or initiatives that try to make a difference in the community. There are many opportunities for volunteering for you to get involved, e.g. healthy food initiatives, the local German language school, the local science museum... There are more opportunities out there that you have free time for. So, if you think Sudbury is boring it's only because you haven't looked closely enough.
3. Explore the surroundings of the campus: Laurentian University is unique in its natural beauty as it is nestled right beside a large nature protection area with trails (hiking in summer, cross-country in winter) starting right beside the university buildings and residences. The conservation area behind the campus is a great place to explore a typical Canadian Shield ecosystem: perfectly clear lakes, colourful forests and rocky shores and outcrops in a hilly landscape. And you can still see traces of the impactful mining operations on the rocks and plants.
4. Use the warm season: definitely try to explore as much of the surrounding area during September, October and November before the snow comes because the snow and ice are most likely not fully gone when you leave in April. Late summer and early autumn is the perfect time to explore northern Ontario because there are no bugs anymore, it's still fairly warm during the day and you get to see some amazing fall colours. My list of recommended destinations for weekend trips in northern Ontario include Algonquin Provincial Park, Killarney Provincial Park, Manitoulin Island, Onaping falls or just the conservation area behind the campus, which is incredibly scenic.
5. Use the cold season: yes, it does get very cold up in Sudbury and the snow and ice does stay for a very long time. But if you bundle up and have a hot tea ready when you get back home, there is no reason not to enjoy those crispy clear, icy cold winter days outside. There are winter hiking and cross-country ski trails starting right on campus as well as a natural ice skating rink on the frozen lake not far from the campus. There are concerts organized by the students' committee, art events downtown, different museums to explore and of course lots of nights hanging out with friends that will make you forget how cold it is outside. And to be honest, if you dress in many layers with a very warm outer layer and good, sturdy boots, it isn't as bad as people say.



Picture 4: Lake Ramsay's ice skating rink and art installations during a cold winter day.



Picture 5: BBQ at the sugar bush of friends (maple stand tapped for maple syrup)

### **Some reflections on my growth during my year abroad:**

During my studies for two semesters at Laurentian University in Sudbury I've grown both professionally and personally. Concerning my studies, I was able to take some advanced ecology and GIS classes that would not have been offered in Freiburg. This really supplemented my previous post-secondary education and helped me to draw a clearer picture of the direction of my career aspirations. I also gained different perspectives by taking a class on indigenous environmental issues, which introduced me to different knowledge systems other than the Western knowledge system and opened my eyes to an extremely sad and horrible portion of the Canadian history. While some of the classes I took were rather boring and did not help me to grow professionally, I still learned something even if it only was how to control my impatience better. Personally, I got much better at approaching strangers and striking up a conversation, eventually becoming friends with people I might not have talked to in Germany. I also increased my self-confidence and self-reliance by living in a different part of the world for such a long time. On the other hand, I also started to appreciate my network of family and friends back in Germany - more than I ever have during previous stays abroad. This sense of appreciation sometimes developed into homesickness, but I learned to cope with it the best I could.

While my academic stay in Sudbury is over, I still have the privilege to live in Canada, having an internship position as a German Language Visitor Service Specialist at Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario. This internship is advertised each year in the group of German exchange students from Baden-Württemberg in Ontario (OBW). It gives me the unique opportunity to learn about tourism, recreation and natural history education in the most popular park in Ontario while living in the park and enjoying its unique landscapes on my days off. So, if you are planning to participate in the OBW program and like nature keep that internship position In Algonquin Provincial Park in mind!



Picture 6: Sunset at a lake in Algonquin Provincial Park

At the end of my report, I would like to encourage everybody who is thinking about a stay abroad to follow this dream and make it reality. There are so many opportunities to grow, adventures to take on and lovely people to meet that it will be absolutely worth it! So, take a leap and apply!