

# FORM 2: EXPERIENCE REPORTS

## PART 2

*Staatsexamen Rechtswissenschaften (Law) / Canada / Aug 2018 - Jan 2019 /  
Ryerson University, Toronto*

### PREPARATIONS

It all started in September two years ago. Just like many of my fellow students, I had intended to spend one or two semesters of my studies abroad. Whereas the first program that comes to mind regarding this kind of experiences is ERASMUS, I chose to dig a little deeper and came across the Global Exchange Program hosted by the International Office of the University of Freiburg. Aside from destinations in Asia, it also offered the possibility to spend a year in North America, either the US or in Canada.

I knew right away that I'd prefer to go the Great White North rather than the US because of obvious political and less obvious personal reasons. I fancied the kind and welcoming culture of Canada more than the US's. I was accepted in the OBW-Program, an exchange program that sends students from Baden-Württemberg to Ontario and vice versa. After a few months of patience, I was informed that I would attend Ryerson University in the heart of Toronto, the biggest City in Canada.

The preparations went well: as soon as I had the Letter of Acceptance issued by Ryerson University, I was able to apply for a **Study Permit**, which was granted after a few weeks. In May I started looking for **flights** to Toronto and found a rather cheap one operated by TAP, a Portuguese Airline. I payed around 500 EUR for a one-way ticket including luggage, but I probably could have saved some money if I booked earlier.

Regarding **health insurance** I learned a lesson just a few days before departing. I had gathered some information about additional insurances (as advised at the preparation seminar in Bad-Herrenalb) when I found out that my private insurance company would cover my stay abroad too, including all possible costs. If you're insured by a private company it is definitely worth calling them and asking, this way I saved over 600 EUR on an additional insurance. Unfortunately though my insurance (Debeka) wasn't accepted as valid UHIP equivalent, therefore I didn't get an exemption.

### ARRIVING IN CANADA

After landing in Canada, I had a wonderful time at the Welcome Days at York University with my fellow OBW participants. The trip to Algonquin Provincial Park was one of the best experiences of my stay and it's definitely worth to stay a little longer and enjoy the park on a canoeing trip in the backcountry.

The next big issue was my **housing**. I had applied to Neill-Wycik-Coop, one of the biggest and cheapest student accommodations next to the campus. I knew that many

international students would live there, and I would have enjoyed staying there. Unfortunately, my application in April was a little too late, thus I was #34 in the waitlist when I got to Toronto. I had anticipated this situation and had organized secured housing for the first two weeks at a friend's house. From there I was able to scan the housing market for an affordable and acceptable room downtown.

First, I have a few tips:

- Lower your expectations. Many houses in Toronto are poorly build and would never pass German standards, e.g. solidity of walls, doors and isolation are rarely equal to what you might be used to. Nevertheless, it is not hard to adapt to those differences and get used to heat more, keep the doors closed and ignore the casual noise from the flat above.
- Be prepared to overpay. Housing prices in downtown Toronto are insane. Aside from the extraordinary cheap Neill-Wycik (rooms for ca. 450 – 600 CAD) you'll probably have to pay a minimum of 800 CAD per month. I myself payed 880 CAD for a decently sized room in an attractive neighborhood (more on that later). Some of my friends payed a little less, but others payed 1000 CAD and more and still had to commute about an hour to uni.
- Regardless of the beforementioned prices: try to find a place downtown. I know that's kind of contradictive, but you will be spending your days and nights in an area of ca. 4 km around Dundas Square (the central square of downtown Toronto). If you can find something south of Bloor Street, west of the Don River and east of High Park you'll save hours and hours of boring metro and streetcar rides. Most of the clubs, bars and of course the University are here.
- Inside of this area I can highly recommend the neighborhood I lived in, Kensington Market. It is a 20 min. streetcar ride away from Uni (which is totally fine) and has the most awesome restaurants, cafés, bars and second-hand shops. If you have ever been to London and liked Camden Lock, you'll love Kensington.
- About where to find accommodation I can recommend to persistent and act fast. You'll be scanning Kijiji (Canada's version of EBAY), Ryerson's housing website and Facebook groups daily, if not hourly. But don't despair, everyone finds something sooner or later.

All this might sound a little worrying, but don't be afraid: you won't be alone facing those issues. At the Ryerson Welcome Days you'll meet loads of other students in the exact same situation as you.

## ABOUT RYERSON

The Uni presented itself at a big event and provided more than enough information about every topic you can imagine. And if I still had questions, the International Coordinators were more than happy to help. My coordinator, Jill Careless, was interested in our well-being, very approachable and a genuinely nice person.

One issue with Ryerson University is caused by its location right downtown: it is hard to get in touch with the “real students”. Most of the regular students can not afford the pricey downtown accommodations on top of the awful high tuition fees and prefer to live one or two hours away from the University. Hence their life doesn't take place in this area: they avoid coming downtown daily, pack their course schedule in two or three days a week and spend their time in the suburbs. Therefore, I spend most of my time with the other exchange student from all over the world. This is not a complaint at all, I had an amazing time with my friends. But if you really want to bond with Canadians it is probably easier in a smaller town with a Campus Uni.

Regarding my courses I was definitely to fearful in my choice. I was insecure about the level and aimed a little to low: enrolling in an intro class was a mistake, I would recommend choosing courses which are at least of your level (e.g. the 200ers for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year). Don't be afraid, the content is not too hard to understand.

An activity I would highly recommend was the participation in an intramurals league. I played soccer in a team with a few other exchange students and a few Canadian students. We played in a league of ten teams against other teams from Ryerson every Thursday, and it was a great opportunity to get some exercise and socialize. Many other sports are offered through this program as volleyball, flag-football, hockey or boxing.

## TAKE-AWAYS

I enjoyed the stay in Toronto, especially because I had never lived in such a big city with its North-American vibe. I was impressed by the omnipresent diversity of the people, both in the university and on the streets. I was able to improve my English, both in the academic context and everyday conversation. It was interesting to get to know how knowledge is taught at Canadian Universities, it reminded me more of my high-school than my home university. Overall, I thought it would be more of a shocking and adventurous experience, but in fact I developed a weekly routine pretty fast. Of course, it was very different from home, but it feels good to know that I'm able to build a life in an unknown country out of nowhere. Now I know that a can arrive at the airport with nothing more than two suitcases, and a couple of weeks later I find myself settled down.

I would recommend my trip to everybody who isn't afraid of the big distance to home (which you nevertheless don't really feel) and wants to know if the continent across from the Atlantic really looks like in the movies and Netflix shows. After seeing that it really does, you'll find yourself in a University that offers more possibilities and support to students as you're probably used to. You'll meet lots of people from all over the world, develop the wish to see all their countries and maybe start to appreciate a few things you never noticed about your home country. It is a great experience, and if you can: do it!

## SPECIAL ADVICE

Because I'm studying law, I had some major issues with my course selection, which ultimately resulted in my decision to cut my stay from two semesters down to one. I will shortly give some advice about the situation. Since it is only important for Law students from Germany, I will continue in German for the sake of clarity.

Die Anrechnung des Auslandsaufenthaltes in Kanada hat sich als äußerst schwierig herausgestellt. Vorangestellt lässt sich sagen, dass ihr auf jeden Fall mit dem Prüfungsamt eurer Uni sprechen solltet, am besten **bevor** ihr viel Zeit in die Bewerbung steckt. Geht auch hier auf Nummer sicher und lest selbst alles gründlich nach was euch gesagt wird, jeder Mitarbeiter des Prüfungsamtes oder der Studierendenberatung kann einen Fehler machen oder ein kleines Detail mal nicht kennen (wie in meinem Fall).

Die JAPrO Baden-Württemberg sieht für die Zulassung zum Freiversuch und dem Notenverbesserungsversuch eine bestimmte Semesteranzahl (acht bzw. zehn) vor. Diese wird bei Beantragung der Zulassung zur Staatsprüfung oder auf Anfrage auch vorher (in jedem Fall aber erst nach dem Auslandsaufenthalt) berechnet. Ein Auslandsstudium wird hier unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen (§ 22 JAPrO) in der Zählung nicht beachtet, da dem Prüfungsamt bewusst ist, dass man während eines Auslandsstudiums selten Examensrelevanten Stoff lernt, diese Aufenthalte aber nicht „bestraft“ werden sollen.

Eine der Voraussetzungen ist, dass man „rechtswissenschaftliche Veranstaltungen“ in einem bestimmten Umfang besuchen muss. Wer also (wie in vielen Bachelor-Studiengängen möglich) im Ausland Fächer aus anderen Studiengängen belegen möchte, muss sich bewusst sein, dass er möglicherweise somit ein oder mehr Semester an Zeit „verliert“ und somit keinen Anspruch mehr auf Zulassung zum Freiversuch oder sogar zum Notenverbesserungsversuch hat.

In meinem Fall habe ich zwar „Business Law“ Kurse besucht, diese wurden jedoch von der School of Management (nicht Law School) der Ryerson University angeboten. Eine Law School existiert an dieser Universität nämlich noch nicht. Da mir nicht mit Sicherheit gesagt werden konnte, ob meine Semester nun angerechnet werden oder nicht, bin ich nach einem Semester wieder zurückgekehrt, um hier in Freiburg weiter zu studieren. Um solche Ungewissheiten zu vermeiden kann ich nur wiederholen: spricht mit dem Prüfungsamt und informiert euch **genau** was für Kurse angeboten werden und zu welchem Programm sie gehören. Das beugt bösen Überraschungen vor.