

Intermediate Report

Liberal Arts and Sciences (Governance major)

Canada (Ottawa, Ontario)

Academic Year 2019/2020

University of Ottawa

CAN-2019-AY314-m

How were your arrival in the first week in your host country? Were you provided with any introductory information and if so, was it helpful?

Although I am taking part in the OBW exchange program, I didn't have the chance to participate in the Algonquin Park trip or the preparatory Toronto meeting that our program advisors were organizing for the program students. My pre-departure phase was unfortunately pretty busy. But right before boarding the Toronto flight in Frankfurt, I bumped into a classmate of mine and we realized that we were taking the same plane to Canada! We had to transfer to different flights in Toronto but we were together during the visa processes, I found it as a really nice way to start my exchange.

My first days in Ottawa did not really constitute an amazing experience as I realized that the hostel I was staying at was not in a safe area. I had a bit of a hard time hanging out in the city center but it helped me get to know the city and its districts. When I moved into my room in Gatineau, I spent my time walking and discovering a lot and the nice weather helped. Generally, my first times in the city were a bit lonely but university activities helped me spend my time doing different things.

The arrival orientations for exchange students were not extremely beneficial and broad, as there was only one information session for exchange students before the classes started. But welcome week events and help desks were open for every newcomer, including exchange students. I really liked the activities and met many people while taking place in events like movie screenings and cultural activities.

Were you able to deal with all formalities (course selection, accommodation, insurances, etc.)?

Yes, they were much easier to handle than they are in Germany. Everyone can get their transportation cards through the university and use them in both Gatineau and Ottawa transportation networks for two semesters. In the case of international students, it's very easy to deal with health insurance arrangements because they are also obtained through a university insurance plan called UHIP. Opening a bank account was very easy as well.

Compared to Freiburg, I found it easy to find a place to stay in Ottawa. The housing market is really understanding towards students and many of the landlords make their lease agreements

according to term dates, which very suitable for short-term residents like exchange students. I found a furnished room in a shared flat with five other students in Hull, Gatineau. My landlords were very helpful, the day after I signed the lease they picked me up from my hostel and drove me to the flat!

Moreover, I had already completed my course selection some months before coming to Canada, so school bureaucracy was not a big deal when during my arrival.

What was your highlight of the first weeks?

I really liked my routine because staying in Gatineau and crossing the Ottawa River on a daily basis to go to the city center/university made me feel like I was having the full Canadian experience. It is very nice to experience both Quebec and Ontario at the same time. There are some clear-cut differences like the language. Because Ottawa is the capital, all of the signs, writing and most of the interactions in the city center (which is in Ontario) are both in English and French. But in Gatineau, even though most people can speak English, one can realize that written things are only in French. So even taking the STO (Gatineau transportation network) buses back home from the school was a transition to Quebec as everything turns to French in the buses. I think this is very different from how people live in different places in Canada and especially in Ontario, where English is very dominant.

Classes were amazing. Experiencing the academic life in Ottawa was a highlight for me because I found the course contents and teachers significantly successful and very engaging. It was very nice to have North American – Canadian centric perspective in my courses as well, helped me learn more about Canadian people and the social and political priorities of Canadian people.

I was surprised by how diverse Ottawa was. And this diversity didn't depend entirely on socio-economic classes or city districts, same diversity could be observed in shopping malls, at the university and on the streets. It is possible to hear people speaking different languages everywhere.

Other than the points I have mentioned, a very different highlight was also how dull Ottawa was. Compared to other capital cities or similarly big/populated cities, I felt like Ottawa does not have much to offer honestly. There are amazing sites and places like the Parliament or the Rideau Canal, but for everyday life there is not variety of stuff or activities to do.



What do you perceive as unfamiliar, strange and/or different from Germany?

The classes that I was taking were different in some aspects. Especially the fact that class discussions being political in third and fourth year classes was very different but a positive experience for me because it helped us to understand social and political problems much better. This is very different from Germany as I feel like a clear distinction between politics and education is tried to be maintained although I study Political Sciences.

The university in general is very different from Germany. The campus feels like a shopping mall from time to time, which is very different from what I am used to. It is very possible to bump into chain cafes and establishments in the campus. Campuses are very big and separated from normal non-university areas and buildings. uOttawa main campus is very much in the city center but the campus is designed to create a specific area, a domain for students. Being spread around the city is not actually a thing as it is in Freiburg.

The weather is an important part of life, which makes people arrange their daily lives around. Going out and meeting people but spending time outside was not favorable most of the time because of the unbearable colds. That is why people spend time in indoors and underground facilities are very much advanced and embedded in everyday life.



Please describe the course of a typical weekday in a few sentences.

I generally shaped my days around what I had to do for courses, for example readings or assignments. I spend time grocery shopping on Tuesdays or Thursdays because supermarkets have student discounts on these days. Most of my days consisted of spending time in the library after or before classes and meeting friends to grab coffee or tea. I usually spend some hours on Wednesdays or Mondays having study sessions with my friends.

The first semester was pretty chill considering that I didn't have courses on late or early hours. I used to wake up pretty much when I wanted to (not having to wake up early is amazing!), go to the university, take my classes or spend time doing my readings/assignments. I didn't have classes on Fridays, which gave me some time to relax, travel and spend time with my friends.

I have late courses this semester and the weather is much colder, so it looks like I will be staying home more than I was last semester.



Please tell us about a great and/or formative experience (e.g. a party, university life, food, sports, etc.)

I stayed at a friend's place in Montreal for a few days and celebrated the New Year's there. I found the city very different than Ottawa and really liked it there. The atmosphere, non-stop snowfall and the general mood was very New Year-sy, I liked it so much! I had the chance to talk to very different and nice people, such as my friend's parents. I visited some other universities and reconnected with a classmate (with whom I flew to Canada with) from Freiburg. The trip made me learn more about Canada and refreshed my exchange experiences.

Please complete the following sentences: "... is what I miss the most."

Freiburg is definitely what I miss the most. Being able to go outside whenever when I like, everything being close to each other, the sun, not having to look up bus schedules and just riding my bike made me long for Freiburg. I also missed my brother, my family and my friends too but I'm used to that considering that I'm also an international student back in Freiburg. In addition, I also missed being able to see or bump into people I know on the street as it makes me feel like I'm in a comfortable environment.