

EXCHANGE REPORT

GEORGE BROWN COLLEGE

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Introduction

I decided to take this semester abroad to enhance my education, since George Brown College (GBC) is a well known school in digital design and ahead when it comes to BIM and Revit.

If you google "George Brown College BIM" you can find that they are a bit ahead, they for example have the first Canadian BIM lab installed on campus and the head teacher of the education belongs to the board of directors of the Canadian BIM association CANBIM.

If you feel that you want to develop your Revit skills and see how deep the Revit hole is take the red pill, GBC the right place.

Well Canada is not the nearest country from Denmark but from what I saw from later reports and conversations with colleagues I could understand that maybe that would be the best (not moneywise) country to invest my semester on.

Toronto is a quite vibrant city, Greater Toronto Area has nearly 6.5 million habitants, and you can really see the movement, even in freezing temperatures the city never stops, it's quite extraordinary.

George Brown College is a professional degree school, with lots of campus across the city, the one that I was on is located in Casa Loma 20min from the city center 5 min from the metro station walking.

Experiences at the host university

GBC is a great university, multicultural with lots of fun stuff to do. But first thing first, you go there to study :)

I went there as a 5th semester but since they don't have this semester during the winter time I attended the 4th semester, this happens because they only have one intake a year, this may seem odd but it's fine to attend this semester, if you are in the same situation don't feel under valorized you still going to learn a lot.

GBC has a multicultural background of students, and normally during lunch time they represent themselves with their associations promoting diversity and explaining to the other student communities their values and beliefs, here you can also find student clubs with many different interests, sports, hobbies, and internal communities similar to the buddy scheme at Kea and so on.

At GBC you can join the gym, and attend sport classes as soon you become a member of the school sport team, you don't have to pay nothing to subscribe or pay a month fee, and at the same time you are supporting the GBC team.

Classes

Architectural Technology & Sustainable Design

This is the main discipline, we had this lecture Monday at 08:30, I guess that is the way they use to provide everybody a nice week start, basically this is the class that you can't really miss, here they give you an overview of your week goals and define everything for the semester.

Is not as bad as it sounds, the teacher, Pietro Ferrari, is the one that I mention before "CANBim director" is quite helpful and if you show interest we answers back with double the interest that you put on it.

The semester starts with a wood bridge, made with sticks and pins, there are some rules that you have to follow, some wood that you need to buy in an art shop downtown, you just go there and say "Im from George Brown blablabla and they already know, they have a bunch of sticks ready for you to pay, my advice don't go for that (some have 1mm section) buy the 12mmx12mm sections ones and don't spend too much money on it, they work better and they are easier to pin. I didn't perform great, but what matters here is to show up and you can have great laughs on some monstrosities that show up as well.

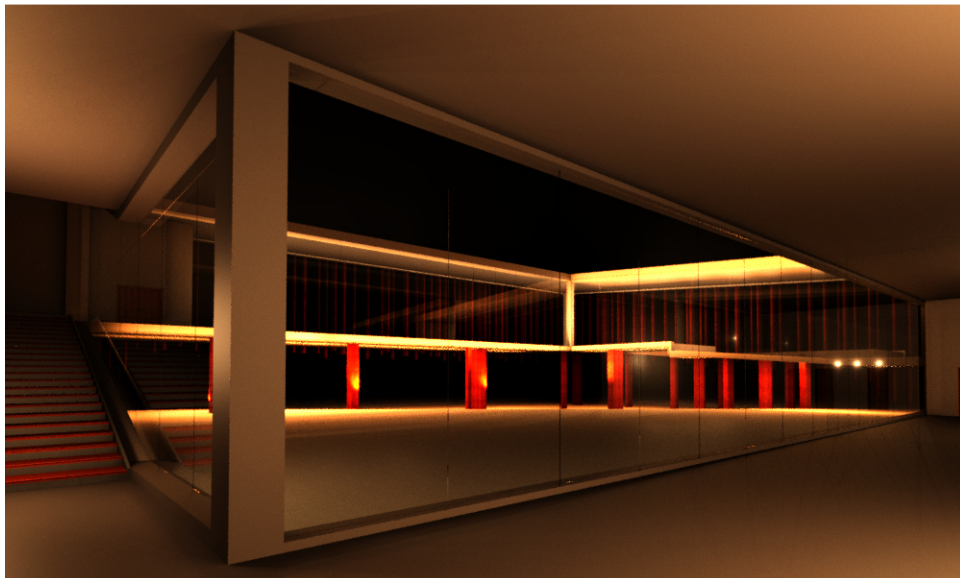
After that it comes the first project, in my case was a warehouse project for a factitious client. The main shape is fixed so don't spend time playing architect and focus more on the zoning regulations to design the site and start from early on using Revit that was pretty helpful later on when I had to revise some issues before due date.

This discipline is complemented with a studio lesson where you have an assistant teacher helping you directly with your own project doubts and questions, in my case I had an actual architect professional that could help us pretty good because that is what she does every day at her main job.

The final project was a bit more fun, they give you a program with some directives, some area requirements and give you total freedom to create, in my case was to design an architectural museum by the Toronto bay area - one advice is that don't spend crazy time on the design part (try to get it right at first time), they are quite open to opinions but you must follow the directives and areas by the book.

Everything seems too much work I know, but one thing that they have really well thought is the due dates and the amount of work that you have to do, every week you have a work to do and if you follow the requirements you will be fine in the end of the semester.

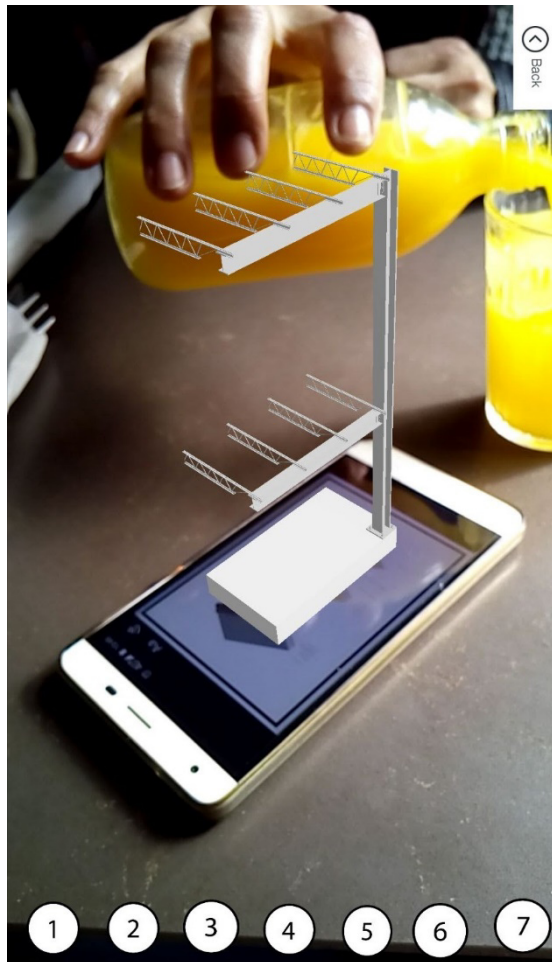
One more thing at this discipline, in this one you don't have standardized tests, but instead they evaluate you every week with the work that you delivered.



Sustainable Materials & Methods

This class is more theoretical, is a bunch of lectures about material properties and the how's and why's of materials, nothing very specific but very handy to know.

The semester starts with a site visit that you have to do with a colleague, basically we went to a supermarket and took a bunch of pictures of the metal structure (this is going to be very helpful when you do the first project in Architectural Technology) and make a report of



what you saw naming all the elements and make brief descriptions.

At this class you have tests and as you probably have seen in movies, they give you a scantron (just google scantron) and you have to mark what you find its right. Personally, I don't like these kinds of exams because sometimes is just a misplacement of a word and your answer is not the correct one, everything is by the book and sometimes you know the things, but because you don't know it word by word your answer is considered wrong.

Is not so bad as it seems, just get used to (with so many students I can understand that this is the way to correct so many tests).

Overall has a good class and sometimes you learn something that you never thought about a certain material or technique.

One more thing, last evaluation on this discipline is a 1 to 5 mock-up of a key junction of a metal structure, so be ready to spend some dollars on materials, (try to talk with friends and make a group so everybody can model at the same time and share materials and tools)

#In my case, I could convince the

teacher to make an augmented reality model of the model and saved some dollars for a nice lunch at CN tower .

BIM for Arch. Tech

This should be the main thing for what you go for Canada after the Toronto Maple Leafs and Maple syrup.

I had a really nice teacher, in his fifties, you can tell that he is a Autodesk Geek from early days. Once I asked him in witch AutoCAD he started and he said the Release 9.0 from 1987.

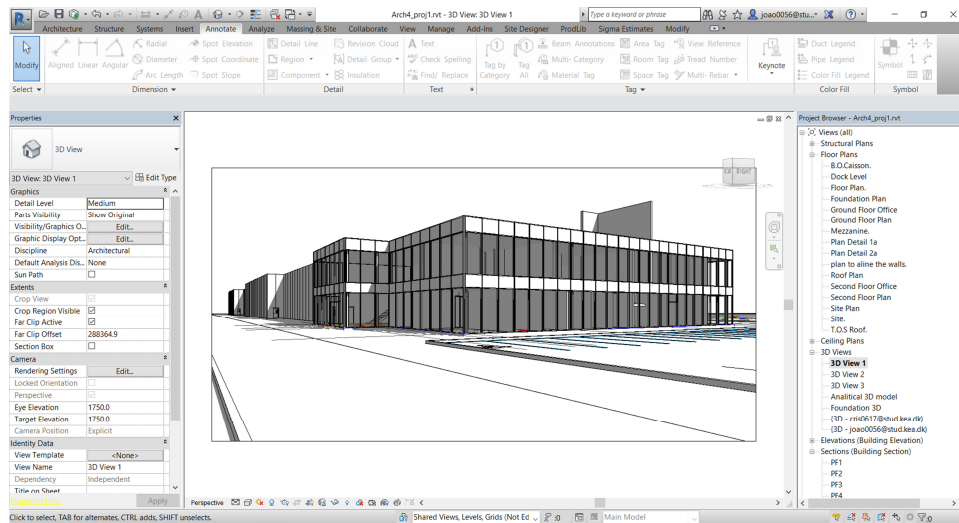
The thing about Gorka (teachers name) is that he loves Autodesk and he follows the trends all the time, he may not know all the commands by hard but he knows if it is possible or if Revit is able to do it or not, the guy is an Autodesk reviewer advisor from the early days of Revit, so you can imagine what you can learn from him.

Don't be afraid to ask him all you want to know as he says "there are no stupid questions just stupid people", believe me the questions that you might have he got answers from somebody in 2004.

Basically, the guy is a Revit monster and he loves to teach and share it with young people who feel the same about the program.

There are tests in this class, you just have to repeat what you have done in class but this time in a bit faster way.

One advise that I can give you is to sit next to the teacher from day 1 to improve communication and ask as many as you want him without interrupting the class.



Portfolio Development

At first glance this might look a strange class but then you think, (next semester I have to send my portfolio to 200 companies in Denmark, why not do it in this class and learn how to do it here), yeahh that's what I did, after some hard work joining all the projects that I did in previous semesters and sometimes give them a better touch, my final submission was the same one that I send to all the architectural firms in Copenhagen, guess what I had to refuse offers and got a fantastic place.

The teacher is a very nice guy, young and trendy, and what we does for living is see portfolios all day long, the guy is an architect that is responsible for hiring people in his company, so he knows all the tricks and tips on how to do an interview, actually the final exam is a interview alone with him in class where he revises your portfolio and asks you one question (mine was: what makes you passionate about architecture)

Advise: spend some time on it, it's one of those things that can really help you find a better position when you are looking for an internship.

Structural Systems

This class is a bit boring especially because it was Friday morning at 8:00 and half of the class is almost falling asleep on those very very comfortable red chairs...

Although not the most interesting topic, you are going to use what you learn here and integrate it on your decisions on your projects and sometimes learn interesting things on how the engineer calculates the structures.

Don't worry is not rocket science and if you try to get along it can be helpful sometime during the semester.

Tests are with scantrons and a basic calculator can be helpful, I used my phone but, by the looks of everybody that is not what you should use, if you ask the teacher in advance it shouldn't be a problem.

Professional Communication

Guess what, the fun is over, from now on the classes below are quite boring and what you should do is pass.

This class is on how to write professionally and make product descriptions, technical descriptions, etcetera.

The teacher is a librarian and follows all the right methods on how to write documents and how to show your search results blablabla.

Important but boring, the thing that she uses to maintain students at her classes is that she counts all the presents and I guess that if you miss a certain amount of classes you can fail this subject.

Law & Construction contracts

I can assure you nothing is worse than law and contracts, but the teacher is quite enthusiastic about it and sometimes gives you nice examples on "how to cover your ass".

Basically is a discipline where he shows some examples of misunderstandings and court cases, decisions and because of the law 123.4 blablabla that's why was decided in favor of that person or company.

Tests are in scantrons and there is no way you can be prepared to it. Just bring the class book in the computer and use f3 search on pdf the main words on the test it is always there something you can use to answer.

Zoning & Building Regulations

Best for last right??? Not at all....

Even worse than law, but in this case the teacher fixes your face and if you don't go with him you are flagged, just sit far back in the auditorium and keep a low profile about yourself. In this case we manage to talk with Goldie (head of teaching department) and manage to skip evaluation on this class and just had to attend classes.

Is not so bad as it sounds but, is nice to try and compare the two countries on construction law but with no interest at all for the Danish students.

#Advice: try to talk with Sophia at kea and try to select some electives that the other students from GBC have. Some of them look very interesting by the name but I can't really help you on that.



Social and cultural experiences

Toronto is a mega city and with that comes the multiculturalism typical of a city like this. Every weekend you have something for your taste, sports, music, cafes bars you name it.

Just try and never say no, experience everything, in Toronto city center near to Kensington market you can find night life district and there you have everything for every taste, by the way you can't drink alcohol in the street but if you have a medical prescription or a friend with back pain you can go to weed dispensaries and get medicine :)

Don't skip lunch at CN Tower its around 60\$ a person but the view is priceless, every 70 minutes the restaurant completes a full rotation and it's nice to try to identify the places that you've been and the ones that you have to go next. My advice is that you should go after you spend some time in Toronto, so then you can relate with the spaces.

We rented a car at the Pearson Airport for a day and went to the Niagara Falls, don't skip the boat trip. Not so expensive as I thought. Went to Buffalo for lunch nothing very interesting to see and then came back to Niagara via USA along the Niagara river via road 190 (it's always nice to make a "road trip in America").

Distillery district in Toronto is like our kod byen here in CPH nice places to have diner and nice bars to enjoy some beers.

Other than that just google what you like and Toronto definitely has some weirdo places that you will like.

New York.... mandatory, and try to sleep near to Times Square you will enjoy much more the city and this way you don't spend your life in public transports, we could find a room on 39th street with Lexington Ave quite cheap 400\$ 4 nights for 2 persons, you will definitely be grateful to spend some more bucks on the hotel and enjoy the city more up close (bring nice and comfortable shoes, you will walk kilometers a day).

We went also to Montreal to see the European Canada, and boy... what a difference not just the language but the lifestyle, looks another country, more dedicated to arts and culture, looks like Paris crashed in there, don't miss it. All the new shows from cirque du solei start there so try have a sneak peek at them.

Practical experiences

We travel by wow from CPH to Toronto with a 1 hour stop in Iceland, if you book with some advance and some luck you can get some pretty good prices (I paid 2400dkk with 1½ months in advance).

To find a place to stay in Toronto is quite hard maybe the same as CPH, we used a system called homestay where supposedly you go to a family house just like an exchange student from an upper secondary school, supposedly because the house I went was nothing like it, was a 7 bedroom house full of students with no family, more like a shared long time hostel.

#My advice: book a Airbnb or something similar for a week or two and then ask in the school for help they will provide you all the information and believe me they are very helpful and sometimes they know someone that is leaving or a vacant place. (Stay close to campus so you don't spend your sleep time on the bus, and forget bicycles, Toronto is a hilly city and if you go on winter time just forget it's like 2 or 3 times colder than Copenhagen cycling in -12 degrees with no bicycle lanes, No thank you).

As you can guess by now I went there with my girlfriend and oh boy, that makes thing much cheaper, that's why we could visit so many places.

On food we try to save some money, have dinner at home and bring something to school to eat (in school there is no canteen you only have restaurants like subway, pizza hut and fast food) its healthier and saves your wallet for nicer things.

Basically, all the supermarkets belong to the same company (similar to here with "coop" there they have "president's choice" and it's on all main supermarkets from the Loblaw's group, the cheapest chain is called "Joe's no Frills" and you can get allot for your bucks compared with CPH.

We are coffee persons, so every morning we went to the Starbucks Canadian version called "Tim Hortens" 3.5\$ for two large coffees doesn't seem allot to me.

#Tim Hortens is like a national thing, it's everywhere and its always full, is one of those companies that I wish to have the money that they make just on coffee lid covers, it's insane how 1 company can work so much, they have from coffee, to sandwiches and lunch menus.

##Sometimes they have this game called roll and win. Don't throw away your cup like I did for a month, if you roll the lip of the paper cup you can win coffees and thing (I can't believe how many free coffees I throw away before I asked what was that all about).

Other than that, just google and YouTube Toronto allot, all the information are helpful and the more you search before, easier you will find yourself there, see from transportations prices to the supermarket promotions so you can estimate how much you will spend, I thought that I would spend much more, maybe the housing is at the same price that CPH but the rest is normally cheaper when you compare to Denmark.

Conclusion

In conclusion, going to Toronto was not an easy decision to make, I've been in your place (do I have the money?, what about the people?, the food?, the cold?), but I can assure you the best decision that I took in many years, helped me in my profession and I feel more confident, with a professional portfolio that I had to refuse many interviews companies here in Copenhagen.

If Revit and BIM mean something to you and you really want to learn it the proper way, with the proper teachers, don't look back, take the red pill and book your flight.

Think it as a Revit course (how much are those?) with the benefits that you have 8 hours of Revit a week with Autodesk advisors as teachers.

As you should know by now just google it and YouTube it as much as you can, make your decisions according to time and money, and never forget, your time is also money, spend some money on it and make the right decisions to save your time from commuting and spend more time learning in Canada.