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Exchange Report

Introduction

I have decided to apply to George Brown College in Toronto for my 5th semester as I thought it would be a great experience to live on the other side of the world for a couple of months. I wanted to experience a different way of teaching and see how it feels to live in Canada! I was hoping for a big city life where you can meet people from all corners of the earth and explore one of the largest cities in North America. From an educational perspective, I aimed for courses that would develop my creativity as well as extend my ability to use Autodesk software. After this semester I can tell I ticked off all the things I hoped for and experienced so much more from what GBC and Canada have to offer!

Where did you study abroad?

I studied at George Brown College (GBC) in Toronto in my 5th semester.

What KEA program did you attend at the time?

Architectural Technology and Construction Management.

What classes did you take during your semester abroad?

I was enrolled in 4 mandatory courses and 2 Concentrations (Electives).

Mandatory classes:

- Studio:

This class is a combination of KEA's Facilitator Class and all the other classes but with a strong focus on developing the "main project". In this course, we always started a week with a class where one lecturer was introducing us to all the problems within the project. Later in the day, we had a hands-on class where in groups we had time to develop the assignment and clarify any doubts with another Studio teacher. This semester, we were doing high-rise timber construction. Something very different from KEA was that we were split into roles (Environmental Specialist, Building Law Specialist, etc.) that were coming with a list of drawings assigned to each of the group mates which made the collaboration way smoother. In this course, the biggest struggle for me was the OBC (Ontario Building Code) and the fact that in Canada they want you to be way more creative than at KEA. We had to come up with the whole design. However, at GBC they don't want you to know Structural Engineering. As a Structural Specialist in my group, I was surprised at how little we were taught about the topic.

- Materials:

This was a typical lecture-structured class. The teacher was very passionate about his subject and made it interesting to listen to him.

This class and Studio were the only ones that demanded any key junctions. Comparing to KEA where in the end we are supposed to deliver around 5 details. We had to develop just 1 detail and we did it in groups. That was very different for me as we weren't asked to do any final presentation with the key junctions. Instead, we had written exams and group assignments.

- Revit:

This was one of the most time-consuming classes. In the beginning, I was a bit disappointed in the level and tempo that we had. However, it turned out to be one of the most useful ones. Our teacher showed us a lot of Revit-related tricks and tons of plug-ins. Also, he was giving us weekly assignments to do in pairs based on which we received our final grades. Simultaneously doing his deliverables and Studio felt tight sometimes as his projects were really complex.

- BIM:

This class was conducted online and it was a lecture-structured class. We had 3 tests throughout the semester and a final group project. I've learned a lot about working on bigger-scale projects and the job of the Project Manager.

Concentrations:

- In Computational Design:

I enrolled in this class last minute but it was the best class I could have chosen. Firstly, the teacher was explaining the complex issues so well that it didn't seem hard at all. Also, she was always eager to help with any questions popping up. We were working on Dynamo and Revit. It was my first time using Dynamo and thanks to this Concentration I was able to design a new building or copy-paste an existing one by the end of the semester. This course was something that we don't have at KEA at all. If you would be going to GBC I would highly recommend attending any class conducted by Hoda Ganji. She has a YT channel where she records quite often to answer students' questions so you can get help at any time.

- In Architecture:

This class is made by the Dean of the Architecture Department. It was very creative, focused on the way not as much as on the goal. There wasn't any specific syllabus for this course as we were meant to develop the project in phases. We started the semester by writing words of inspiration based on the video we watched. After that, we had to write Project Proposition and Project Concept Statements. This course was all about playing with words in a way that you can convey the idea without any drawings. Later on, we had to start with the design but it was supposed to be something unique, abstract, and strongly connected to our Statements. This course became a bit repetitive over time but it was something extremely creative that you won't find at KEA.

Academic Experience

How helpful was the receiving school in the process of choosing classes and settling you in?

The process was a bit messy. Another exchange student from KEA from my program and I couldn't access the GBC registration website. We had to manually text administration which classes we wanted to be enrolled in. It was a bit confusing procedure as no one told us how many ECTS points each of the subjects had. We were texting with KEA's coordinator, GBC's coordinator, and administration. Also, we weren't told how many Concentrations we needed and what are the time slots for them so we eventually figured it out with a help of one of the GBC's students who had their profile running.

When we came to the first class no one, not even the teachers knew that we were exchange students. We had to introduce ourselves to all the lecturers and explain our situation. Eventually, we were warmly welcomed by them.

What classes/study experiences did you find the most rewarding?

Definitely, it was the Revit class where I got to know so many useful things being explained in a completely different way than at KEA. Also, the Concentration in Computational Design. I felt like I have learned so much within a few months in Canada on that course. It helped me a lot with extending my CV and portfolio.

What classes/study experiences did you find least relevant or least valuable to you?

The least valuable class was probably Report Writing which more or less was the same as writing the mini-dissertation in the 4th semester. Eventually, I managed to drop out of this class as I had enough ECTS points.

What classes would you advise other KEA students going to the receiving school to choose or not to choose?

Between the two Concentrations I was enrolled in I'd definitely suggest attending the Computational Design. This class is more relevant to what we are studying at KEA. Also, the projects that I performed during this class helped me to get an internship and expand my skills and understanding of real-life workflow.

Cultural/Personal Experience

What challenges did you experience culturally while being abroad?

There were a lot of challenges during my semester abroad. I have faced so many cultural differences compared to Europe. Copenhagen is a small and safe place to stay whereas getting around Toronto city can take you up to 2-3 hours by car. There are people from all around the world. Also, the fact that a lot of nations have their own districts like Little Portugal, Little Korea, etc. makes it such a better experience. You can easily grab an authentic meal just around the corner. I was living close to the Greek district and I soaked in their pastries.

On the other hand, people in North America are having different mindsets. You feel like the strangers do care more about you but it's hard to find a friend. For example on my first day of school when another exchange student and I entered the classroom and introduced ourselves no one really tried talking to us and we were the ones who had to make the first

move. After that, we had a good connection but they're just not trying to push harder on being your friend unless you are the stubborn one in the beginning. Also, if they are international students it's so much easier to get in contact with them.

How helpful was the receiving school in this process?

Not really helpful. In the beginning when I had questions regarding organizational information the lady at the GBC help desk didn't even know that they accept exchange students. I found myself around. After this situation, I didn't rely on the school that much. If I had any questions I asked a specific teacher or other full-time students.

What was the best cultural/ personal experience during your studies abroad?

Just living on the other continent in the big city! When I was deciding on the city I wanted to go to for an exchange I knew I wanted to try living somewhere else than Europe. Canada was my priority and I'm so happy I had a chance to spend there a few months exploring the city and making friends whom I can always come back to.

What advice would you give other KEA students going to study abroad at the receiving school?

Don't expect to get more educated in the technical aspects but use all the tools the school gives you (like the Adobe Package) and try to sign up for the classes that you wouldn't have a chance to attend at KEA. Also, remember it's just a few months so try to explore the city from day one as Toronto has a lot to offer.

Practical Experience

How was the application process?

That was really smooth. It took the school around 2 weeks to give preliminary approval and around a month to send the acceptance letter. For the visa- they advised me to apply for a tourist one as I was staying there for less than 6 months. Visa came within an hour after applying.

What did KEA help you with?

There was a pre-departure meeting where they discussed all the things worth thinking about in advance. They advised us on getting extra insurance, checking KEA's Outlook, or being aware of scam rentals. Also, my coordinator helped me with changing classes and my schedule at the beginning of the school year.

What help did you receive from your school abroad?

Together with the acceptance letter they sent me all the information I needed to know about insurance and such. There were a few leaflets too. They sent me the obligatory insurance to pay for while in Canada. Eventually, I ended up with two of them - my private one and the one from school.

Did you have any practical difficulties settling down at your destination?

It was a bit chaotic in the beginning. I was living in the house with 4 other KEA students. Our house was approx. an hour from downtown by public transport. Getting around in such a big city took us a moment. We had to figure out how the monthly pass for the subway works (it's

best to ask someone at Shoppers Drug Mart), the way to school (which was an hour away), and even find the closest grocery store (that was 25 minute's walk one way).

How helpful was the receiving school in this process?

GBC has never helped us in finding any accommodation. They didn't even offer a dorm. It was a bit stressful process.

Where did you live?

I was living in East York. I knew 3 other students from KEA going to Toronto and we managed to find 5th person for the house we rented out by ourselves.

Was it expensive?

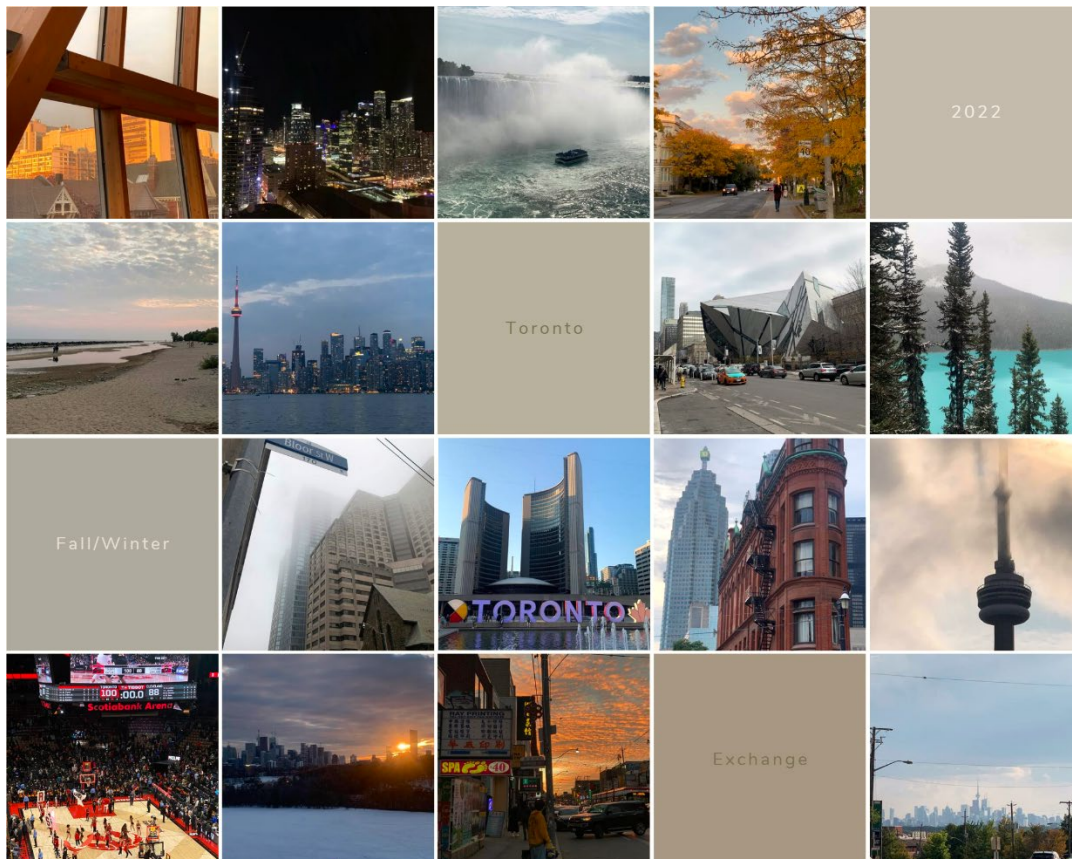
It was pretty much the same as Copenhagen's rent prices. Compared to Toronto prices it was cheaper than what I've heard people were paying but the location was not the best. It was far away from the city and adding the public transport expenses it would make more sense to rent out something closer to the subway station.

What kind of expenses did you have in general?

The biggest expense was the rent. The prices at supermarkets are a bit higher than in Copenhagen but eating out is way cheaper. Also, a big monthly expense was a SIM card and a public transport ticket. Also, my flatmates and I had to spend a lot of money on Lyft back home as the metro stops working at 2 am and the buses tend not to come. Overall public transport in Toronto is not reliable at all, no matter the time of the day.

Did you spend more or less money than you budgeted with?

I spent approximately the amount I aimed for.



Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity to have been chosen to be one of the George Brown College exchange students. I developed so much during this semester abroad. I found out what is really interesting for me, and in which direction I want to further educate myself. Thanks to the diversity of the classes I faced challenges that helped me in finding my strengths. Also, going to such a huge city as Toronto comes with no time for boredom. If I could go there once again I definitely would.