Exchange report GBC winter 2021

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Introduction

I have always wanted to study abroad and after spending most of my vacations abroad in Europe I wanted to go some place new and unique. I chose Toronto because I really enjoy living in and visiting big cities. Unfortunately I did not get to truly experience the city as my exchange semester was in the height of the corona epidemic, so I settled with following their classes online from Copenhagen. Yes it was not ideal but it was nonetheless a worthwhile experience.

Experiences at the host university

It is important for students who choose this university to understand some fundamental differences in how things are done. First lecture of the semester the grade breakdown is presented and you will see how grades are distributed. Unlike the danish system where it more or less is all about your final exam you will earn points toward you final grade doing work throughout the semester. For example 30% of your grade would come from assignments, 10% from weekly quizzes, 10% from labwork, 20% from your midterm exam and the final 30% from the final exam. This takes some getting used to and required a very different strategy compared to back home. You cannot slack throughout the semester and study really hard toward the end if you want a good grade. Another thing to note is that their semester started at the 11th of January, which meant that I had classes for the next semester while still having 3 more exams of the fall semester left. This meant that the first couple of weeks were extra stressful but it evens out as you will be done by late April and get to enjoy an extra long summer vacation

Introduction to machine learning

This course was by far my favorite. The professor that taught the classes was great and created a great dialogue despite the limitations of it being streamed online. He made sure to keep everyone up to date and designed assignments in such a way that you were able to follow and learn complex and foreign topics. I do however have some issues recommending this course to everyone as it requires a far higher level math than is required for the datamatiker degree in Denmark. I happened to have gone to DTU and finished some math courses there which just barely got me through it. But if you are up for some mathematics you should definitely go for it.

Introduction to cyber security

This course was overall great. The professor had a great way of using analogies to help understand topics such as DOS attacks and various precautions you would take to mitigate such. The labwork for this course consisted of learning and using tools discussed in the lectures and worked as a great way to "get your nails dirty", compared to the much more theory-heavy lectures. Overall I would recommend this course especially if you have an interest in cyber security.

Web development

I had a lot of issues with this course. It felt like nothing was handled well at all. Despite the description of the course it felt like an introductory course to Javascript akin to the one we go through in our first semester in Java. We did not build sites as much as we did tiny logic based exercises. The professor I had in my lab class was probably the worst teacher I have ever had. He was condescending to students whenever a question was raised, our assignments were copied from the 2017 course without even fixing the dates on the documents. I would recommend everyone to steer clear of this course.

Agile development

This is the one class that had group work which allowed me to socialize with my fellow students. I felt that the course material was not deep enough for what I would have wanted. We spent 2/3 of the semester doing a super basic and (from what we learned in KEA on our third semester) not very well executed SCRUM project and the last third was spent touching on a couple software patterns. The project was really poorly constructed as we did not have to actually execute any part of the construction of the product, we simply had to make up a couple scenarios and make artifacts based on these. The professor did a good job teaching but it was not the right course for me. If you have made a project using SCRUM before I don't see you gaining much from this course, however it should serve as a good starting ground if you have no prior experience.

Social and cultural experiences

As I did not get to travel to the city itself I sadly cannot write much about my experiences. My only real contact with my fellow students were in the group project for Agile Development. There were some stark differences in the way we worked and it felt like my group members were incredibly passive to the point of me having to take 100% of the decisions. This took some getting use to as I felt as if there was not much sparing. They would do as we agreed but it was up to me to delegate and organize everything. I think it was an interesting experience but I much prefer having discussion and sparing with my group compared to "ordering" hand-in so I can put it all together.

Practical experiences

Due to the epidemic I had to apply for a different visa than you would otherwise have to. I applied to and received the visa that would normally suffice within 2 days of my application. The extended visa I needed required me to submit biometics at an official Canadian facility. It turns out that there isn't a facility in Denmark so I would have to travel to Berlin, Stockholm, or London to submit these, and international travel for such an appointment was not an option at the time.

Conclusion

Overall I would still recommend taking an online semester abroad as it provides new challenges and helped me grow by adapting to a new system.