



**Ontario/Baden-Württemberg Program
Exchange Student Report**

Academic Year 2016-2017

Host University: Universität Mannheim

Home University: University of Ottawa

Length of exchange (*fall, winter, full-year*): Fall

Subject(s) and level of study (*undergrad., grad.*): Juris Doctor (Undergrad)

Please comment on your personal experiences. Keep in mind that this document will be published online and is intended primarily to serve as a resource for students who are considering an exchange in Baden-Württemberg. The following topics are intended only as suggestions. Please feel free to omit or add any topics you wish. You are also encouraged to insert images if you wish. There is no limit with regard to length.

Please indicate whether you wish to be identified on the webpage linking to students' reports by:

- First name, home university, subject of study, and host university, or***
- Subject of study and host university only.***

See the OBW website for examples.

"Start-Kurs" (*your experience during the first (pre-semester) month of your exchange stay at your host university*):

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the pre-semester course due to a contract I had signed with an employer prior to being accepted for the exchange. For those who did complete the program I heard fantastic feedback. It seemed like a great opportunity to get a lot of the administrative requirements out of the way before regular coursework started. It is also a good time to make friends, learn German, and get settled into a new environment.

Academic experience (*Courses, teaching style, number of hours of courses per week, taking notes in German, approachability of staff and professors, workload, grading system, speaking German, etc.*):

The courses I took were fantastic. The teachers in Mannheim are extremely professional and passionate about the course material. They are more than simple instructors. They are pedagogues who want to ensure that you understand the material and learn it in a sustainable way. I took a full course load, each lecture being between 2-3 hours per week. The courses were less strenuous than my law classes in Canada; however, it is important to study hard for exams when they come around. Professors were relatively accessible and the grading was fair. All of my professors were fluent in English.

Accommodation (*Residence or not? finding a place to live, price, what is included in the price, e.g., electricity, heat, water, internet etc.*):

I lived in the student residence "Ulmenweg". It is a series of 6 student houses in a row filled with dorms. It was fairly far from the University and did require the purchase of a train pass. The processes of arrival, rent payment and

acquiring internet access were relatively smooth. I would encourage talking to other students in the dorm to see how they got internet etc. I would also check to see if the dorm has a Facebook page because it is a great way to get second hand furniture or household items if needed. The internet was included in the price, but the resident was required to purchase a router to connect. The price was cheaper than what I was paying in Canada and included heat, electricity and water. Each room had a sink, but the bathrooms were shared between all the room mates. It was an adjustment from the living arrangement I had in Canada, but was overall satisfactory.

University Life (*student life, making friends, activities, going out, etc.*):

Making friends with other international students was easy. There were hundreds of students from abroad and building relationships with these individuals was the highlight of my experience. The student association puts on a number of events for international students and each international student is also paired with a mentor which can make the transition easier. The school also has a number of organized nights out that are fun to attend as well, and a great way to meet people.

Expenses/Budget (*How much did the whole experience cost you? Regular monthly expenses, initial expenses, unexpected expenses, travelling budget, etc.*):

My expenses while in Mannheim consisted of groceries, rent, my train pass and my prepaid cellphone plan. The cafeteria on campus offers cheap lunches, which I would recommend if your budget allows. Other than the cafeteria, eating at home is significantly less expensive than eating out.

My rent was approximately 300 euros per month, I paid 25 euros per month for my cellphone and 280 euros for the 4-month train pass. Groceries were relatively cheap compared to Canadian prices, especially if you stick to the basics.

Travel can be done on the cheap as long as you plan in advance. Bus prices remain fairly stable last minute, but prices for the train and for flights surge as you get closer to the date. That said, your travel budget can be anything from a few hundred euros to thousands depending on how well you plan and where you go. I did a mix of lower budget travel and higher end hotel travel and spent a few thousand euros, but again- it can be as much or as little as you like.

Daily Life (*Living in German, what did you miss from home, Canada etc..? what did you like most? practicalities, food, making friends, etc.*):

The thing I missed the most from Canada was customer service. Many German shops and restaurants have a different idea of the relationship between customers/clients and employees. This was one element of the culture shock that I didn't anticipate and found initially fairly difficult to handle. Another thing that I missed was the efficient processes that exist in Canada- especially with respect to administration. Everything from banking, university registration, and applying for visas required a lot more steps (and time) in Germany than in Canada. Eventually, I adapted but this was frustrating at first.

One thing that I liked about Germany was the cultural experience. Learning more about a country and its people was fascinating. An exchange also allows you to meet so many people from all over the world and opens your eyes to the rich diversity the world has to offer.

Travels (*where, how long, budget*):

Over the course of my exchange I travelled to the following destinations: Italy (2 weeks); Luxembourg (2 days); Berlin (4 days); Nuremburg (1 day); Amsterdam (3 days); Spain (10 days); Portugal (4 days); Austria (2 days) Neuschwanstein/Fussen (2 days). I didn't keep track of the exact amounts I spent, but generally the duration of the trip, the accommodation type, and the activities undertaken in each place largely influenced the price. In Italy I stayed in a hotel and did a lot of the touristy activities along the Amalfi Coast and in Rome. In Luxembourg I travelled by bus and stayed with a friend so that trip was relatively cheap. In Berlin I stayed in a hostel and both there and in

Nuremberg my meals were covered by family members I have that live there so those trips were also on the lower spectrum of my budget. In Spain and Portugal I probably spent around a thousand euros on travel, food, and accommodations. Travel within Germany is relatively cheap especially if you plan a day trip.

Advice (*what is the most important advice you can offer to students applying to and/or participating in the OBW exchange?*):

Take every opportunity that is presented to you. Try not to have one foot in Germany and one foot in Canada – this could taint your experience. Have an open mind and accept that you are on exchange to learn and grow and develop as an individual.

I would also recommend maintaining some of the things that you did at home, so for example if you are a runner, keep running while abroad. If you are a member of a gym or of a church, try to keep that up abroad. Exploring, travelling and making new friends are all important, but I would also encourage taking time for yourself. Keep your individual well-being in mind as well.

Summary (*what, in retrospect, does your exchange experience mean to you? academically? personally?*)

On an academic level, my exchange vastly broadened my perspectives and opened my mind to European law. I loved all of my courses and will remember what I learned for the rest of my life. The exchange also broadened my professional network and I can't wait to see where all of the people I built relationships with during my time there end up in their respective careers. Personally, I also made some of my best friends on exchange- some of whom were able to attend my wedding this year! Overall it was an incredible experience, and one I would recommend.