Travel Report

University of Calgary
Haskayne School of Business
Winter semester 2017

Student number: 367730
Preparing for the exchange

The first contact I had with the University of Calgary was in August when the student exchange coordinator emailed the documents we needed to fill in to accept the exchange place. The application process required students to select four MBA courses from a limited list of courses taught at the Haskayne School of Business. Prior to sending this over, we needed to get approval for our selection from Aalto. We also had to send our CV and transcript over to the University of Calgary. The courses we chose before coming to Calgary were not final, so it was still possible to swap courses during the first two weeks of the semester.

In the first few emails, I also received instructions on how to apply for student housing on campus. The application itself costs $50CAD regardless of whether you receive or accept the housing offer. I applied online via the residence portal. You can apply to live in a studio, in a 2-persons apartment, or 4-persons apartment. Make sure you do a thorough research to find out how much it would cost to live in what kind of apartment, as the prices are higher than student housing in Finland, as well as in comparison to prices offered by the private market. While the costs are higher to live in student apartments on campus, it is a lot more convenient to go to classes, attend events, and meet other exchange students. However, if you’d like to look for apartments from the private market, remember to check out Airbnb early on, as well as post on the University Facebook groups that you’ll be invited to join, about available rooms and people looking for roommates.

Migration preparations for my exchange to Canada was very difficult. The Visa process is very tedious, especially since there isn’t a Visa Application Centre (VAC) in the Nordic countries. The closest VAC is in the UK, however, if you’re from a country that requires visa to go to the UK, I would recommend checking out other centres in Europe and decide where to go apply based on the processing time. You can find out the information here: http://www.vfsglobal.ca/canada/. Here’s the link to find out what documents you need to prepare and bring with you to the VAC http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/study-how-documents.asp. It’s mainly your acceptance letter, student status, financial proof, and proof of identity. Since the exchange semester is less than 6 months, you only need to apply for a visa and not a study permit. Fee for the visa is approximately $100CAD and depending on what country you’re from, you’ll have to also pay the biometric fee of $85CAD.

I personally went to Poland to the VAC as it had the shortest processing time of 6 days. I intended to stay in Poland until the process was complete but the actual time it took was a
lot longer. Therefore, I recommend only going to get the biometric done and then flying back to Finland. Once you receive an email asking for your passport, send the passport via a courier service to the UK VAC.

As I travelled to Calgary from Hanoi, Vietnam, there are no direct flights. I recommend using Skyscanner or Momondo to search for the flights to get the best prices. The flight tickets are rather expensive from Vietnam. If you leave from Finland, tickets were as cheap as 400€ one way. Icelandair offers good deals from Helsinki to Calgary via Reykjavik.

When arriving to Calgary airport, Uber would be the best way to get to the University. The MBA semester started on the 2nd of January with an intensive block week courses. However, as I did not choose any courses during this week, my courses only began on the 9th and thus, only arrived in Calgary a few days prior.
Exchange studies

The winter semester lasts four months from January to the end of exam weeks in April. The international student orientation was held on the 5th of January. I was unfortunately unable to attend since I had not arrived in Calgary but I heard that this was only an informational session. The first week of the semester was block week where classes start at 8 AM to 5 PM every day. This was not recommended for exchange students due to the possible jet lag. However, a few of my exchange friends took a course during the block week and they said that it helped with their workload during the semester as well as gave them more flexibility to travel.

As an MBA exchange student, the list of courses offered were rather limited. They were mainly in the areas of finance, or very specific courses geared towards developing skills for the oil and real-estate industry. Courses ranged from introductory to advanced levels. The language of teaching at the University is English. While I was interested in learning topics outside the MBA program such as a language, little guidance was given on how I can apply. Therefore, I suggest doing some research on the University of Calgary’s website on the available courses as well as contacting different departments directly for more information. I also recommend asking for permission to take courses outside the MBA degree by both Aalto and the University of Calgary’s student office beforehand.

The final exams for the Winter semester was held from mid-April to the end of April. Some MBA courses have an exam while others did not. Information on the course, the workload, and possible exams are given during the first class. This was convenient as it left enough time for people if they wanted to make changes to their course selection. The courses I took did not have final exams so the workload during the semester was rather heavy. These courses consisted of numerous research papers, presentations, and group works. Although, this meant that my travels could begin sooner.

SGMA 601 - Strategic Management I

Level: Graduate, 6ECTS
Instructor: Ayesha Malhotra
Assessments: Group assignments (research papers and presentations), individual quizzes, individual papers

The Strategic Management I course is about how to formulate and implement strategies. A few of the areas covered include global and corporate strategy, diversification, strategic change, and strategic implications of new technologies. The large group research project
was for the University of Calgary’s Health Research and Innovation centre W21C. We had to analyse the company’s current strategy to recommend a long-term plan for W21C. The course was relatively useful as we could apply our learnings to a real company and see the impact of our work. Additionally, the quizzes enabled us to enhance our critical thinking skills. However, it does not provide a huge varying angle from other strategy courses taught at Aalto.

**BSEN/ENCI 691 - Fundamentals Project Management**

Level: Graduate, 6ECTS  
Instructor: Blake Kanewischer  
Assessments: Group projects (papers, fundraiser, and presentation), midterm exam, individual peer evaluation papers, and reflection paper

The fundamentals of project management course provide a comprehensive look on the different steps in managing a project. This includes planning, control, scope, time and cost processes, project organization, and human resources. The lectures focused on going through theory in the textbook, while the group project allowed us to apply those learnings to plan and manage a charity project ourselves. The midterm exam was a take home assignment where we had to review a project and answer a few questions. While there were regular assignments, this was a fun and interesting course as we were given a lot of freedom to decide the project and its’ outcome. Furthermore, I learned a lot about the processes of managing a project and would recommend others to take this course if they’re interested in project management or have never take similar courses before.

**ENTI 793 - Tech & Innovation Management**

Level: Graduate, 6ECTS  
Instructor: Mohammed Keyhani  
Assessments: Group projects (final report and presentation), individual discussion leadership

The Tech & Innovation Management course covers concepts on regulations and social pressure in innovations dynamics, incremental versus radical innovations, market-pull versus technology-push theories, and key factors for successful innovation. The main group project was a business opportunity analysis for a start-up working on mixed reality. This was a challenging project due to the scope and expectation of the stakeholder. However, due to the extensiveness of the research, we learned a lot about new innovations in VR, AR and MR. Our individual assignment was to facilitate a class
discussion on a topic of our choice based on the list given by the professor. This was a fun presentation as we could draw on our own opinions and experiences to foster this discussion. Listening to presentations from other classmates was also a great part of the course.

**MKTG 785 - New Venture Marketing**

Level: Graduate, 6ECTS  
Instructor: Deborah Andrus  
Assessments: Group project (presentations and papers) and individual papers

The New Venture Marketing course focuses on understanding how to identify market opportunities and create value for customers by addressing problems through product and design service. We looked at marketing strategies when founding a start-up. Our group project was to come up with a business idea to found a start-up. This included analysing the potential market and customer segment, identifying the procurement process of the product or service, developing stakeholder, marketing, and brand strategy, as well as creating a market-entry plan. While it was an interesting project, I was disappointed by the lack of openness to new ideas from professors. We also had two written assignments on patent and trademark law, and a new venture marketing theory.

Whereas the group project gave us insights into some of the processes involved in founding a new company, the individual assignments were very dull. Many students found the individual papers very useless. Overall, some parts of the course were useful as I would like to start my own company one day. This was a demanding course due to the heavy workload.
Free time and other information

Calgary is a large city in the Alberta province. While the images on Wikipedia of Calgary look very promising in the summer, Calgary unfortunately looks rather bleak in the winter time. Due to temperatures in the winter reaching -35 degrees Celsius, not many people are outside and the city centre resembles a ghost town. Though, Calgary is referred to as the sunniest city in Canada, averaging around 332 sunny days a year. So, even though it'll be cold during the winter semester, it is still nice and sunny. Remember to bring a lot of warm clothing and winter boots, especially if you are planning on doing outdoor sports like skiing, hiking, and ice-skating.

I remember telling my friends that have been to Canada that I’m going to Calgary for my exchange, and everyone said that it is a city in the middle of nowhere. I can now confirm that. Even though the city had 1,239,220 inhabitants in 2016, it is always very empty. Due to the huge land area, residential areas are very spaced out and people mainly live in the suburbs. When going downtown, you will mostly see office buildings and restaurants scattered here and there. Nice areas I recommend checking out are Kensington, Stephen Avenue, The Beltline, and 17th Avenue. These are some of Calgary’s unique neighbourhoods that are home to great restaurants, nightlife, and design. Popular bars and nightclubs amongst university students in Calgary include Cowboys and Knoxville for country music, and Music and Bespoke for hip hop and top hits. If you are a foodie, I recommend checking out some Calgaryeats Instagram accounts or finding restaurants via hashtags #yyceats and #yycliving.

The cost of living in Calgary is higher in comparison to Helsinki. Accommodation on campus ranges from 500 Euros a month for a room in a four-person dormitory to 1000 Euros per month for a studio. Each dormitory has a kitchen and the rooms are furnished with basic furniture. Students are required to purchase their own sheets, cooking, and cleaning equipment. The rooms are adequately clean, however, there have been cases of bed bugs. The residence buildings also come with study rooms on each floor and a coin-operated laundry room.

You can quite easily get around the city with public transportation by purchasing a public transport sticker that costs approximately $150CAD. This is a discounted price students receive which entitles you to unlimited use of public transport for one semester. Calgary’s international student exchange coordinator will inform you on how to purchase this in the introductory emails. The University is located next to a train station and several bus lines.
The closest malls to the University campus are Market Mall and Westbrook Mall. I recommend going to Market Mall if you want to do a full day of shopping since it has several clothing stores, an Apple store, a food court, and Safeway supermarket. Westbrook Mall on the other hand is mainly for grocery shopping as it features a Walmart. For a wider selection of fresh produce, you should go to Safeway, and for cheaper products go to Walmart. If you don’t want to cook, there are two large food courts on campus where you’ll find a wide selection of food to choose from. However, the food is more on the greasy side.

Besides accommodation, public transportation, and food expenses, exchange students also had to pay $11CAD for a group insurance. I did not know what this fee covered. Some courses required students to buy business cases and books. I suggest first checking online and on Aalto databases to see if these materials are available. The University of Calgary has a great fitness centre which is free of charge. There is also an ice skating rink you can pay to use.

Meeting all the other exchange students was harder compared to my previous Bachelor’s exchange since there were no orientation activities. However, if you participate in events organised by the International Student Association CISSA, you can easily get to know other international exchange students. They organised a few trips to nearby mountain areas like Banff and Lake Louise which are must-see attractions in Alberta. On the other hand, getting to know local MBA students can be a little more challenging. Beside working on group projects together, MBA students don’t have as much time since they are usually working during the day as well. That said, the students are very friendly and would be more than happy to go for a coffee and give you tips on things to do and see in Calgary and Canada.

The University offers a mentor program where they pair you up with a local student. The mentors are volunteers so the engagement level varies drastically between different mentors. I unfortunately did not get a chance to meet my mentor but was still able to participate in group activities organized for mentors and mentees.

Another way to meet local students is by joining University clubs. You can get to know the clubs and activities offered at the club fair event organised during the first few weeks of the semester. I personally joined quite a few clubs including the Outdoor Club, Business Club, Food and Games Club, and the Ski Club; which in hind sight was not a great idea since I did not have time to attend most of the activities organised. However, some clubs also offer discounts to stores and restaurants on campus and downtown.
Coming to Canada for exchange, I wanted to learn how to ski. The Ski Club organises two ski trips per semester. These trips are usually from Friday afternoon to Sunday and include bus transportation, accommodation, and ski passes. You'll need to rent the skiing equipment yourself, but the Outdoor Centre on campus offers rentals at affordable prices. The spots to these ski trips fill up quickly so I suggest queueing early in the morning to secure a place.

![Skiing down the hills in Revelstoke](image)

Travelling to neighbouring national parks and lakes in Alberta should be on your list of attractions to visit. You can easily explore them on day trips during the weekend by renting a car with a group of friends. While there's not much to see in Calgary, it's conveniently located near the Canadian Rockies. The national parks Banff and Jasper are great places to go skiing, hiking, and canoeing during the summer time. From mountains to canyons, these national parks are natural wonders you must explore. Additionally, there are also various hot springs nearby you can visit for a relaxing getaway.

For longer trips around Canada, you can go during the reading week holiday that is in the middle of the semester. This is a great time to plan a trip with your friends and get to know them better. During my reading week break, myself and a couple of friends rented a car and went on a road trip to Vancouver. There are a lot of things to do and see in Vancouver so make sure you have at least four days. I recommend checking out Granville Street, biking around Stanley Park, and hiking up Stawamus. And if you'd like to discover more of Canada and visit the United States, you should go after your exchange. Purchase flight tickets early on because prices go up very quickly.
Final Comments

Overall, my exchange experience at the University of Calgary was enjoyable. I would recommend choosing Calgary for your exchange if you’re a big ice hockey, cowboy, and country music fan, interested in learning about the oil and gas industry, and if you love winter sports.

If I could re-do my exchange in Calgary, I would try to take a more active role in the student clubs. It would be a great way to meet local students and learn more about the North American culture. I would also organize more trips around Canada with exchange friends, since after our studies, it will be more difficult to find the time as well as be able to plan trips with friends you make from around the world in a country that’s on the other side of the globe. Make the most of your time with people you care about!

During my exchange, I met wonderful people and learned valuable skills I can apply to my academic and professional career. It really opened my eyes to the North American style MBA programs. Another wonderful skill I learned was how to ski; and it made it evermore special that my first-time skiing was at the most vertical slope in Canada. Furthermore, it was interesting to see the differences in the University culture between Aalto and Calgary. After being exposed to the start-up scene in Aalto and Helsinki, it was stimulating to hear fellow students talking about their experiences in large corporations and their determination to get into the corporate world. In my opinion, one of the best aspects of going on exchange is the ability to meet people with completely different mind-sets and life goals. I believe that great innovations happen when you expose yourself to different people and ways of thinking. Thus, if you are considering whether to go on an exchange, I high recommend taking a step outside your comfort zone and go for it! You won't regret it!