

Experience Report

(TUMexchange, Departmental Program, Free Mover and non-European Double Degree)

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Preparation

At first, I was not accepted at my University of choice in Toronto but thought that I will visit the Université Laval in Quebec City. It was very spontaneous and surprising when I heard about a new open spot in Toronto which fairly enough relieved me a lot as I felt way more comfortable in English than in French. TUM made the change to Toronto very easy and I had the information about the new university within a day. Toronto Metropolitan University only required a small Portfolio and no additional proof of language, so the application there was quickly completed and accepted. They provided information about the course selection in advance and I was able to choose my courses from home before the semester started. Don't worry if something turns out differently or you end up not liking it, you will be able to change your courses within the first couple of weeks. The exchange coordinators in Toronto are very helpful and forthcoming in providing a nice stay for you. Most of the courses you will have with either third or fourth-year students as the university wants to give us more choices. The studios will be with the fourth year as they can select different studios with optional focuses on project management or building science. But don't stress, you can change everything after trying it for the first time.

Studies at Host University

The courses are all held in English, but the other exchange students and I were able to follow all lectures pretty quickly. Only the assignment descriptions were a bit difficult to read in the beginning as we were not used to what is expected from us and what the professors there typically want to see. But as the courses are mainly way smaller than at home, it is always comfortable to ask questions and confirm with the professor. Language-wise it was generally very nice, as Canada is so international. Everyone seemed to have an interesting background and it didn't feel awkward at all to speak English with our German accent after a very short time. So many people there have so many different accents and everyone did their best to understand us.

The start of the semester was really nice because we arrived in time for the freshers week, which is their orientation week for the first semesters. Like that, we were able to do all the fun activities on campus and meet other exchange students before the semester started. The campus is really nicely located right in the city center at Dundas Square. If you google TMU you will most likely find a picture of the Student Learning Center, a big white cube with a blue triangle at the entrance. The inside is very nice and holds a

lot of study places, also for groups. It is a great place especially if you have some group presentations to prepare, but you might have to book a room during exam periods as it gets busy.

The courses at TMU are smaller and more intimate than at home. We all said it feels a bit more like in high school again. We had to raise our hands to answer questions in some classes and we had ongoing assignments in all courses. But it was always manageable and for me personally way less work than at home. I chose the Building Science-focused studio and was very happy with my choice. For the first semester we didn't have to design a project but did a lot of research papers (there is generally a lot of essay and paper writing going on over there). It was a lot about indoor environment, such as air quality, temperature, and so on and we even did hands-on blower-door tests. It was a super nice studio and I would really recommend it to anyone who wants to find the sciency part in Architecture. In the second semester, we did have to design a project, but it was also much more research-based. We had to write a big research paper about our material of choice before starting the design. It helped me a lot and I felt like my design developed much easier and more focused after doing really deep research before. It can get a bit nerdy, but I loved it. Work for studio is more individual and even if we had group assignments I felt like the Canadians liked to split up the work and everyone did their share alone, and then we'd just put it together in the end. I liked that as it gave me more space to plan my day.

Just ask the other fourth-year students in your studio about other courses, they most likely already know the professors and can tell you which courses they recommend and which ones they hated in third year or what professor means a lot of work. But don't worry too much, I was always able to handle all the deadlines quite well and if something is too close, the professors are very likely to give you extensions if you ask for them.

I never used the small cafeteria they have on campus as almost no one from my courses went there, but you can find microwaves in the architecture building or get something from close-by supermarkets if you have long studio days.

Accommodations abroad

I lived in Tartu College Student Residency. It was about a 35min walk to University and I quite enjoyed the walk. You can get a bike to get around the city faster, but be careful you will need a good lock as bikes get stolen a lot in Toronto. Tartu is right next to a subway station which is very convenient if you need to get somewhere further away and you can also take the subway to university. When I lived there it was I think the cheapest student residency in town with \$990 / month. But they raised their prices a little I think as they had some renovations going on. As Tartu is located directly at the other University in Toronto, the U of T, 90% of the students in Tartu go there. And even more are exchange students. I lived in a single room and had 5 roommates. I really liked it there, as the rooms provided enough privacy and it was super easy to find new friends as all the exchange students are very welcoming and motivated to do things together. I also liked that there were so many people from U of T as you meet other students like that and not only architecture people from TMU. I would say staying there is really worth it! Some others were able to find cheaper private rentals, but that always seemed to be a struggle to find a place in the

beginning and they all had to live in a hotel for the first couple of weeks until they found something. And the student residencies near campus are just very expensive and not necessarily nicer.

Everyday life and leisure

I joined the TMU sprinting team and that was the best I could do there! I met all my best friends from Toronto there and the training was really challenging. They take their varsity clubs very seriously and the training has high quality, but don't let that scare you away to apply. I have never sprinted before I joined in Toronto and they still took me in and let me train with them. The coaches and the other athletes are very very nice and supportive and it was never so easy to find new friends. I even competed in the end but most importantly it saved me after a long day at uni and I just learned how important it is to find a balance between work for Uni and taking time for hobbies. TMU also offers more spontaneous sports classes on campus that don't cost extra. I had to pay a little bit of a fee for the tracksuit and the facilities we used for sprinting.

In terms of everyday costs, I think it is a little more expensive than in Munich, especially groceries. But the conversion mostly shocks you more than it is in the end. It sums up to some money, but hey, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Additional costs / Funding possibilities (optional)

One really annoying extra expense was the mandatory insurance you have to take at TMU. You can't get rid of it and it was I think an extra \$500. Read it carefully before taking an additional private travel insurance from home, because I think the one from TMU could be enough, and then you just pay two insurances.

There is the possibility to work on campus and they post a lot of job offers online, so if you want to earn some extra money you can definitely do that.

Competencies and learning experiences

I feel like my English got a lot more fluent and especially writing is a lot easier now as well, after all those essays. I learned to be more open and more confident in talking to strangers and meeting new friends. Academic wise I also had the most fun at TMU and it really showed me what direction I want to work in later in life. It is great for everyone who wants to be more science focused but also offers more typical architecture courses. The architecture studios had very interesting topics like hospitals or churches.

Intercultural experiences

Canadians are known to be one of the friendliest people in the world and it is really true. They will always help and just chat with you about the most random things. I loved how open and multicultural it was in Toronto. Only the nightlife is a bit disappointing in Toronto. Even on New Year's Eve everything closed at 2 a.m. And I was a bit surprised by the amount of Crackheads on the streets. But they are very harmless and I still always felt safe walking through the city, even at night.

Intercultural Seminars at TUM before mobility

I didn't join an intercultural seminar before the exchange year, so I don't know if it would be helpful. But I can definitely say that integration in Toronto and at TMU was super easy even without the seminar.

Thinking green

Obviously, the only way you can get to Canada isn't the greenest way. The flight to Toronto takes about 8 hours. But then you can definitely find some more green transportation. Bike sharing is very convenient in Toronto and even getting your own bike for the year is relatively easy. The subway system of the city is quite large and subways go every 3 minutes so that is also super comfortable to take. If you want to travel, there is also Flixbus available and multiple other bus companies that are most of the time also the cheapest option to get to places. Trains are more rare and very expensive but I have heard that the Trans-Canada train is really worth it, or the Rocky Mountain Express is an incredible experience.

Other

If you get the chance, I would really recommend traveling to the Westcoast. I did a camping trip with my brother for the last month there and it was the most beautiful experience. The Vancouver Islands are very exotic and way more diverse than I ever imagined. Then we headed on to the Rocky Mountains and camped in Jasper and Banff. If you love the mountains and hiking, this will be perfect for you too. And look out for backcountry camping, as those are most of the time the most unique and hidden places in the national parks. You don't have to be scared of bears, I was freaked out about them at first but it turned out not to be a problem at all!

Conclusion

At first, I was really skeptical about why we needed to go abroad for Architecture and what it will give us professionally in the end. But now I really get it. Just the experience of studying architecture at another university with other focuses and styles of teaching broadened my view on architecture so much. I can now imagine where and in what field I want to work in later and feel like the time in Toronto really helped me to develop my own philosophy as an architect. And that's only professionally. Toronto helped me a lot to approach new people more confidently and talk more easily with strangers. And there are so many more life lessons I took with me. Feel free to contact me if you have any more questions. Enjoy your stay and greet Helen Stopps from me if you decide to take the Building Science Studio as well ;).