

Experience Report Wilfrid Laurier University Fall term 2019

Application phase

From the end of August 2019 to the end of December 2019 we spent the fall term in Waterloo, Canada on exchange. We studied at the Wilfrid Laurier University, named in honor of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the seventh Prime Minister of Canada. Since Canada is a country of immigrants and therefore made up of 200 different cultures, of which many are former Europeans, the cultural adaptation was not hard. Canadian universities have a very strong corporate culture and put a high premium on engagement. They have smaller classes, many recreational facilities and a closer support and bond to their students. Because of these differences in university life, the variety of different landscapes and the high amount of open spaces we chose Canada as our destination for the exchange semester.



Picture 1 Tim Hortons will always be there

Vorbereitung

If you are staying in Canada for only one term it is only necessary to have an eTa. You do not need a visa. However, it is very important to apply for eTa well in advance and to carry your confirmation mail with you when starting your travel, in case you have to confirm the permission. Additionally, it is worth searching for DAAD scholarships or something similar, since Canada is not part of the ERASMUS program and rather expensive (although not too bad).

In Canada a health care plan for students is mandatory, but if you have confirmation of a German insurance for stays abroad you can drop out from paying the fees in Canada. Sometimes they require specific confirmations, so make at least sure you bring an English translation of the insurance policy.

With regard to accommodation, it is very important to start searching for accommodation as soon as you know you are going. Short-term sublets are very limited and you should really avoid signing a 12-month lease, since it is hard to get rid of it. Many internationals lived in housing called WCRI, which is close to campus and quite affordable. You can search for it online and apply there. Other ways to find accommodation are Facebook groups (highly recommended) and Kijiji, which is kind of a Canadian eBay. The university is also offering

limited on campus housing, but you have to pay for a meal plan then and there are mainly first years on campus. Additionally, the university had about 25 private accommodation spots available where you would live in a flatshare with other internationals.

When planning your flight, the closest international airport is Toronto Pearson. From there the cheapest way to get to Waterloo by either Greyhound bus or GoBus. Both is bookable online in advance.

Arriving in Waterloo

The International Office organized 5 welcome days, where the exchange students were familiarized with the university and the system and got to know each other. Furthermore, the International Office took care about any student issues and was always there for advice and help. As part of the program organized by the International Office the exchange students went to Niagara Falls, Toronto Christmas Market, had a Halloween party and a Thanksgiving dinner to name but a few. The person in charge was Anne-Marie Joy Henry, who always had a sympathetic ear for any questions or concerns. The search for accommodation worked best via facebook ads. For incoming students who were struggling the university provided accommodations and facilitate the search.



Picture 2 Niagara Falls "Maid of the mist" cruise

Every week the incoming office organized a coffee club, where people could meet and have a chat. There were several international intramural teams, such as volleyball, soccer and dodgeball.

Studies (course selection, lecture style, exams)

The university offers a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate programs with over 15,000 full-time undergraduate students, over 1000 full-time grad students and nearly 4,000 part-time students as of Fall 2019. Laurier's varsity teams, known as the Wilfrid Laurier Golden Hawks, compete in the West Conference of the Ontario University Athletics and the university offers many intramurals, such as soccer, volleyball, dodgeball or dancing. In 2019 WLU ranked No. 1 in the country in its category for student satisfaction in the annual Maclean's Rankings of Canadian Universities for the fourth year in a row. They foster close links to their students and try to keep their courses below 65 students.

We attended five different courses, namely Interpersonal Communication, Consumer Behaviour, Service Marketing Management, Business to Business Marketing and Machine Learning, which all were electives of our program, Bachelor in Technology and Management.

BU208 Interpersonal Communication: An introductory course designed to improve the student's ability to communicate effectively within an organizational context.

BU432 Consumer Behaviour: This course focuses on the contribution of consumer behaviour to effective marketing decision-making. To this end, this course examines the role of the consumers both as purchasers/users of goods and as individuals within a social system. Various theories and models of consumer behaviour are reviewed and their implications for marketing strategy are identified. The professor was really engaged in making the class as interactive and interesting as possible, the grades consisted of a combination between exam, participation, group work and essay.

BU412 Service Marketing Management: This course examines the marketing management implications of the differences between goods and services. The course will address topics such as: creating a sustained competitive advantage, designing the service delivery system, building customer loyalty and the service delivery system, implementing service management strategies and delivering services on the Internet.

CP322 Machine Learning: The course was an introductory course to Machine Learning with R or Python, depending on your own preferences. We learned the math for different kind of algorithms but mainly focused on application and adapting parameters for practical use. One should have some knowledge about programming in advance, but basics in java are sufficient. The grade was a combination of group work, exam and a final ML project.

BU462 Business to Business Marketing: The course focused on B2B marketing relations. Especially topics like adjusting your sales force to your companies needs and differences between industries and sectors in B2B were covered. There was no exam but a grade for participation and two group projects as well as an individual work. The course was quite interactive and the projects supported the learning process.

In conclusion we can say that all 5 courses were well organized and taught.

The Canadian style of studying is very different to German universities. Due to the students paying high tuition fees, they expect a better lecturer to student ratio and a closer support. Therefore, the courses are much smaller than those in Germany, in general consisting of less

than 65 students. In this way the lecturer is able to take his/her time to have talks with each student individually. Due to the courses being smaller students are expected to actively participate and in some courses participation is part of the total grade. Canadian universities believe that by participating and keeping a school like lecture style students are more focused and process the information better. In addition, there are two exam periods per semester, the midterms and the finals. By this system the course grade is not only dependent on one final exam. Furthermore, Canadian students often need to conduct presentations and write essay which are counted as part of the overall grade.

With regard to the style of writing essays, the parts Canadian professors attached importance to differed from the German way. Canadian professors put a high premium on personal insights, feeling and own experiences.

Moreover, there are three semesters per year instead of the two in Germany. However, most Canadian students do not study during the summer semester, instead they work or do internships to earn the money necessary for paying their tuition for the following 2 semesters. Due to the high tuition fees many Canadian students leave university with quite a high amount of debt or try to receive scholarships through sports or outstanding academic results. As a result, Canadian students are more competitive and are eager to get the most out of anything they do.

University life and city life (university facilities, food, costs, culture,..)

Waterloo is a rather small city while having two big universities. Therefore, there are a lot of students in the area. In the university area there are mainly students living in small houses for about 5 people.

Canadians are in general really open minded and friendly and it can be really interesting to work together with them on group projects at university. They also ask how you are wherever you meet someone and saying thank you when leaving the bus is a very common thing to do.

The university, especially the business building is very modern and well equipped. There is basically everything you need on campus, including a big food area, a free gym that you can use nearly 24/7, a soccer field and all kind of studying and group work areas.



Picture 3 Lazaridis Hall, Business Building

The only thing missing is a grocery store, so depending on where you live, a grocery trip to for example Walmart or Bobs ValuMart can take you about an hour. The prices in Canada seem a bit higher than in Germany, especially because the pack sizes are lot bigger. However, the only significant price difference is for alcoholic beverages, which are also only available in specially dedicated stores. This is also visible in bars and clubs.

Waterloo downtown has several bars and restaurants to offer and nearly every of them has some kind of special night like “Taco Tuesday”, Karaoke on Wednesdays or free entry on Thursdays. Due to the many students in the area there are always many people and the opportunity for having an amazing evening with friends. A special event during the term is called “Homecoming”. This happens in September and is basically the first game of the season for the Golden Hawks football team. On that day also many Alumnis come back to the university and there is an all-day event around the university.

In October they also try to do Oktoberfest in Waterloo/Kitchener, where they actually import “Hacker Pschorr” beer from Munich and play german songs. This was quite fun but not comparable to the Munich Oktoberfest. Nevertheless, it was a fun time due to the fact that in the Waterloo area a lot of Canadians have german heritage and are still able to talk german, so we met a lot of them there and it was also great sharing this experience with the other internationals.

In general, there are quite a lot of events happening in Waterloo as well as at the university. There are many days where the university is offering free pancake breakfast or free soup because there is some kind of thing they want to celebrate.



Picture 4 Farmers market and kids playing hockey

The German roots are also visible in the Amish culture in Waterloo. There are a lot of people living the Amish way of life and there is also a very big farmers market where you can buy the vegetables and foods in general that they produce. A lot of them also still speak German.

Waterloo is also a good spot for traveling around many places. Especially the reading week before the mid-term exams can be used for exploring Canada. Possible destinations in Canada are for example Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Algonquin National Park, Bruce Peninsula National Park and Ottawa. Due to its closeness to the US border also Chicago, Boston and New York are reachable with either a rental car or by Greyhound bus.



Picture 5 Bruce Peninsula National Park



Picture 6 Chicago Skyline.

Picture 7 Quebec City

Early in the term the university also offers a weekend trip to a Canadian campsite at the Kawartha Lakes, where you can learn how to use bow and arrow, canoe and also just enjoy free-time by the lake for two days. This was definitely a great and also very Canadian experience.

It is also important to keep in mind that Canada is getting quite cold from mid-November on. On the coldest days it can be down to -20°C and because of the cold wind it feels worse. In our case we only had very few very cold days in mid-December, during the rest of the time it was a normal cold winter.



Picture 7 New York Skyline

Overall, it was a great experience staying in Waterloo and being part of the Wilfrid Laurier University. There were a lot of possibilities to learn new things, meet new people, visit interesting places and also see how a culture can be the very similar and different at the same time. Therefore, we can absolutely recommend a stay in Waterloo for a semester abroad.