

Report: University of British Columbia – Vancouver (Canada)

Fall Term 2019/2020

Decision Making – Restrictions versus Opportunities

Before diving into my experience at the University of British Columbia, I want to give a quick overview of one crucial fact that should be taken into consideration before deciding on where to go on exchange. It is important to note that graduate exchange (master level) students are not eligible to take courses in **Economics, Business, Psychology, Health Sciences, Community and Regional Planning, and Anthropology**. In these specific programs, only undergraduate courses can be attended. When you are in effect enrolled in one of these programs at FU, there are still plenty of opportunities to study at UBC. In the following, I will explain how the course system of UBC works and how you can find the perfect program for you.

The course system at UBC reflects the different years of each program. 100 to 400 level courses are undergraduate courses, i.e. year one until year four. 500+ courses are graduate (master) and PhD level courses. Note that, undergraduate programs at UBC usually take four years, therefore some 400 courses might fit a master's program at FU. It is possible to choose master courses at UBC from other programs than the one you are enrolled in. For example, if you are an economics master student at FU (like me) and therefore not eligible to take part in 500+ courses in economics at UBC, you still have options. Although I must admit that I was pretty frustrated at first, I quickly realized that this could be a chance to broaden my knowledge. Luckily, UBC offers many interesting programs in a vast area of disciplines. It was not an option for me to pick undergraduate courses because I wanted to challenge myself. Therefore, I ended up looking into 500+ courses from programs related to economics and my personal interest. I would advise everyone that ends up in a similar situation, to scroll through the course register <https://courses.students.ubc.ca/cs/courseschedule?pname=subjarea&tname=subj-alldepartments> and find five to seven courses that you like, before making a decision. In the end, I enrolled in one geography course and two courses of the master program Global Public Policy.

To register for a master level course, every student needs approval from the teacher. This approval can only be received by writing emails to the respective professor. Moreover, the syllabus of each course is normally not provided in the UBC course register and must be requested from the instructor. Note that during the summer break (May-end August) some teachers might be on vacation and difficult to reach. In general, the professors are very relatable and do everything they can to help you out. Do not hesitate to write them and ask questions.

Overall the master programs in Canada are comparably small. Most classes only comprise eight to twelve students. It is advisable to start writing to the respective professors as soon as

possible to ensure that the course is not full yet. Moreover, have a plan B, in case your preferred courses are already booked.

Studying at UBC

As a master student, a full course load per term is two to three courses. I took three, and they kept me quite busy. The workload is definitely higher compared to my studies at FU. It is very common to have weekly assignments, such as presentations, reflection papers, and questionnaires. Furthermore, the final grade also comprises attendance and participation. My weekly assignments were normally based on papers that needed to be read before class. It normally came to around 250-300 pages per week for all three courses combined.

To make sure that you feel comfortable with your workload, it is advisable to visit all courses that interest you in the first week. In that week, you still have the opportunity to add and drop courses and personally speak to the professors. As mentioned above, the professors are friendly and have a sympathetic ear for the concerns of their students.

Master courses are normally three hours long, but only once a week. So, I had two days off, which was needed to read and prepare for the classes. To study I can recommend the Arts and Music Library in the Irving K Barber Learning Centre; one of the few silent study areas on campus.

Housing

In my first exchange to the Netherlands, I could not find housing immediately and ended up moving seven times in the first month. To avoid this from happening again, I signed up for accommodation on campus. Most exchange students stay at Walter Gage or Fairview Crescent. Walter Gage is closer to the university buildings, Fairview a little further away (20 min walk). I chose Fairview as my first preference because it seemed a little cozier. Fairview looks like a small village with cute little houses. Here, students share a flat as a four to six persons group. My housemates were very nice and relaxed, and I really enjoyed my stay in Fairview. In the first week, a lot of social gatherings were organized, which made it very easy to make friends. Note that, no kitchen utensils nor bed sheets or covers will be provided. The cheapest way to get the basic equipment such as pans, and duvets is IKEA or thrift shops. The UBC bookstore also offers all these things but for a higher price. I am still not sure yet if I liked staying on campus or not. UBC is far away from downtown and other districts in Vancouver. Therefore, the commute to UBC is quite long, which made me feel quite alienated from Vancouver itself. In addition to that, it was not necessary to leave campus because you can find everything you need such as supermarkets, and restaurants. Nevertheless, I personally tried to leave campus as much as possible. For example, I went studying in cafes in Kitsilano (closest district to UBC), East Vancouver (hipster district) and Commercial Drive or participated in

dance classes on Broadway. Overall, I did not regret living on campus. It is absolutely convenient and cheaper than most accommodations in Vancouver.

Free Time

If you have some spare time, use it! As the license plates in Vancouver indicate, British Columbia is a beautiful province. On the north shore, there are many hikes and mountain biking routes easily accessible from Vancouver. The first months I explored the nature when the days were still long enough and it did not rain. The hikes I can recommend are the West Lion, Saint Mark's Summit, Lynn Canyon and Garibaldi Lake. Some hikes can be reached by public transport, the others are only accessible by car. Before going to Vancouver, I would not have considered myself an outdoorsy person, but after the four months, I have to say that the beautiful big red cedar trees and the look from the mountain top on the ocean are the most memorable things for me. On Thanksgiving weekend in October, I went with a few friends to Banff in the Rocky Mountains. I would strongly recommend to go there. The nature in the Rockies is just incredible.

When the days get shorter and colder, skiing is the alternative to hiking. Students from UBC get a cheap season pass to Whistler, one of the best ski areas in the world. My last week in Canada I spent skiing there; it is absolutely beautiful. If you plan on going skiing as well, check for accommodations early enough, because it gets quite crowded there, especially in the days leading up to Christmas.

After a beautiful day in nature, to still your hunger, visit one of the city's great restaurants. Especially Asian food is amazing in Vancouver. Compared to the product prices in the supermarkets, dining out is not that expensive. Check out the Dosa Factory (Monday offers), Meet (Vegan junk food) and The Naam (close to UBC, huge portions). Moreover, the coffee shop culture is great. You can find nice cafes that fit your mood everywhere. Check out the Great Dane (on campus), the Only Café (Kitsilano), the Federal Store Luncheonette (East Vancouver) and Hayan Mug Coffee Roaster (Cheap and delicious dark roast).

Vancouver's goal is to become the most sustainable city in the world. In that spirit, instead of buying new clothing, check out one of the numerous thrift shops around the city. The Salvation Army has many shops all over the city. The biggest one is located near main street in East Vancouver. My favorite thrift shop is Cheapskates, which is close to UBC and offers sports clothing and gear only from known brands to an incredibly cheap price. Highly recommended!

There are hundreds of student clubs at UBC. They range from dance to religion, or psychedelics. Student clubs are a great opportunity to meet Canadians and learn new things. I attended the Yoga and the Salsa club, both were fantastic. All the clubs introduce themselves on Imagine Day, the welcome day for international students and first years.

Behind the Glamour

Vancouver is a magnificent city, but, as everywhere on the west coast, homelessness is a big issue. Some areas, especially in downtown on east Hastings streets, are hubs for homeless people. I personally think that it is important to not close your eyes and look away here – maybe consider donating.

Conclusion

I love Vancouver and British Columbia. For everyone that loves nature and is willing to study hard, UBC is the perfect place. I miss the mountains and the ocean already. Moreover, it is so impressive to see how even in a big city people can be nice to each other and are not stressed. I hope I can bring some of the relaxedness back to Germany.