

Experience Report by Melina Hösl

Abroad for the fall term 2023 at Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba (UM),
Winnipeg, Canada

Application phase:

For the TUM SOMex application one has to submit a CV and a motivational letter as well as a language proficiency test where needed until January of the respective year one wishes to go abroad. For me, I could still use my IELTS test certificate as it was not yet two years old. Once nominated by TUMSOMex, one has to accept the nomination and wait until Amber Pohl, the student exchange coordinator of UM gets in contact with further information. She will contact the nominees to apply online at the UM's online portal until April 1 for the fall term. I do suggest choosing the fall term as the brutal winter weather of Winnipeg, also called Winterpeg, will hit in January and February with -20° to -55°C . The application at UM is rather a formality as one can be certain to get accepted once suggested by the TUMSOMex team. The course selection is independent of that matter and follows later on around July. Amber Pohl always replied fast and very kindly to my requests, so do not hesitate to ask for help or advice.

Preparation:

As I did not have to take any language courses or a language test for the application, I was not worrying about that in advance. Yet, if such a language test and the necessary preparation is required, it is to be kept in mind to have everything settled before applying in January for TUMSOMex. The more important thing for me personally was to ensure that the financials are set to support the time abroad. We luckily do not have tuition fees as we are still enrolled at TUM simultaneously and pay our semester fees there, however, the living costs in Canada are above the ones in Germany, especially for groceries and necessities. Living on campus for the four months of the term cost me around \$7,000 CAD which have to be paid soon after the beginning of the term in full. Further, one has to keep in mind that travelling within Canada almost always entails flying by plane as the distances are simply too large (and Winnipeg is located fairly in the middle with long distances to everywhere) which definitely raises travel costs. As I am receiving funds according to the German Federal Law on Support in Education (BaföG), I was automatically eligible for their funding abroad called Auslandsbafög. Even if one

is normally not entitled to receive Bafög, it is possible that one is able to receive Auslandsbafög from which one might benefit.

German citizens can use an eTA to travel to Canada. It is not a visa but allows one to stay in Canada for up to six months at a time and remains valid for up to five years. The approval takes several days at max and the fee is lower. One is not allowed to work in Canada with an eTA, thus a study visa or similar is needed for that.

Arrival:

I arrived on September 1 in Canada, which meant that I had to stay one night at a hotel as the official move-in date in residence was September 2. Luckily, my buddy from the AIMS Manitoba Buddy programme, where TUMSOMex students get entered to automatically, was able to pick me up at the hotel and helped me move into residence. He also was willing to take me and another exchange student from TUM for grocery shopping to get the necessary essentials for the start. Further, he was very kind to lend me bedding for my stay, as it is required to bring one's own bedding when staying in residence at UM. A lot of the other exchange students bought their bedding at a website suggested by the residence office or bought it themselves at IKEA or Walmart after arrival. Those first trips are either made with helping hands by local roommates or buddies or with Uber, as it is very, very hard to get around the city without a car. There are indeed busses, but the connections are not very good and might require one to stay and wait for 40 minutes for the next bus at a four-lane intersection in the middle of nowhere. Further, the busses only take coins for individual tickets. After the university started one can also buy a prepaid bus pass at the university centre or the UPass for around \$250 CAD for the whole term. Latter is included in the tuition of local students, but not in ours as exchange students usually do not pay tuition. The first two weeks there are a lot of orientation events from the UM Student Council but also from the International Office which offer a great opportunity to get to know other people, exchange students, student clubs, and also the university premises themselves. Especially the UM sport events were a valuable experience for me, as this university team spirit is not existing in Germany as we do not have such a strong university club culture. Watching basketball, hockey, American football, and such shows the university spirit and Canada's very American culture.

Studies:

After the enrollment at UM officially went through one has the possibility to browse the course catalogue on UM's student registration and records website Aurora. For the Asper School of Business the subjects usually cover Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Supply Chain, Leadership, Human Resources, and General Management. Economics is not part of Asper and those courses can be hard to get into but that does not mean to not try. The courses are labelled in thousand levels, meaning a 1000 course is a 1st year course, 2000 2nd and so on. Exchange students are not eligible for 5000+ courses. Amber Pohl will get back to the exchange students mid-June for further information and it is advised to consult with the International Office at TUM if one wants to have credits transferred afterwards. The course choice then must be entered in a Google survey tool for Amber to register the exchange students in mid-July.

Since I am a master's student at TUM, it was required by TUM that I shall only take 4th year bachelor's courses to obtain credits. I do not really know why we were not allowed to take courses from the graduate studies as well, which is a bit unfortunate. The Asper School of Business offers a lot of 4th year courses in Finance and Accounting, but as this is not my field of interest, I struggled a lot to find interesting courses on a 4th year level that I could get credits for. At the end, I selected and got approved my course choice by the International Office at TUM, though it turned out to be redundant anyway, because apparently exchange students also cannot get into GMGT 4000 courses, and some courses were cancelled before semester start. It was more left to taking what I could get and was allowed to rather than what I actually wanted to do. Luckily, one of my professors agreed to have his 3rd year course individually elevated to a 4th year course for me, which implied that I had to deliver an additional paper to the normal course's scope. Therefore, this is also an option for anyone encountering the same problems as me.

The level of courses is definitely lower than what I experienced in my bachelor's; however, the workload is higher as most courses require regular assignments, mid-terms, group reports and presentations, and finals. I would say one has to work more, even if the content is easier per se, because writing reports and such still takes time, even if it just counts for about 2 % of the final grade at the end. In return, a benefit is that the final exam does not account for the whole 100 % of the grade as they do at TUM. For some reason, the UM officially suggests students to take 3-4 courses as a normal workload. I guess, this is partly as the studies are usually not the priority of an exchange semester and one wishes to have enough time to experience the

country and the culture. In my experience though, most local students take 3-4 courses as most of them are also working in the meantime, which does not apply to most exchange students. Additionally, there is not that much to travel to and experience in Winnipeg in the winter, and when the snow started, it is hard and cumbersome to get around at all. In hindsight, I would not have minded if I had more courses or some would have not been cancelled.

The class sizes in the higher levels are about 30-40 students per class with one or more professors. The teaching style is more similar to high school or German Fachhochschulen, as the small class sizes allow for active exchange and participation is mandatory. For some classes participation in class accounts for 10-25 % of the final grade. Further, group works and presentations during class time or in projects are very frequent, too. I personally, enjoyed this teaching environment. It might be less fitting for people who wish to stay silent and undetected in class. Even though the small class sizes and mandatory name tags may suggest a more intimate class feeling, I was very surprised to experience that there is rarely small talk between class members before, in-between, or after classes. Most students are very punctual and arrive 10-15 minutes prior to class but they will wait silently on their seats, in front of their computers. Most professors start their lectures right on-time, although it is not a biggie if one is a little late. It is accepted to eat during classes and leave the classroom during the lecture if needed. As for starting on time, it is usually custom to not overrun the scheduled class time. However, after the professor ended the class, most students leave the classroom immediately within the next two minutes, without any communication.

Regarding exams, a lot of them are conducted in class on the personal computer, within the UM's Learning Management System UMLearn, which tracks the activity on the computer during the exam. In Asper, a lot of the exams are in MCQ format, but written exams or small remarks are not rare.

[Student life and cultural experiences:](#)

As indicated above, I chose to live on campus in residence during my stay abroad. I did so to experience the difference to Germany and also to avoid the difficulty with transportation in Winnipeg without a car. It took me five minutes to walk to my classes. Overall, one can definitely live cheaper if one chooses to participate in the programme of UM that connects exchange students to home owners with a spare bedroom. However, most exchange students

live on campus. Other than exchange students, people in residence are international students (non-Canadian students who undertake their full studies in Manitoba) and a few Canadians who live too far away from university to commute. I was very lucky to have a lovely Canadian roommate with which I got along very well and was able to do activities. In general though, it is rather hard to connect to Canadians and their typical Canadian culture while living on campus, as the UM is located further away from most of the residential areas of local Canadians and, as mentioned before, most Canadians leave the classroom and the campus immediately after their classes are finished. Further, since most locals have a car and drive to university on their own, there are not many points of contact for exchange students or commuters. Another point impacting this is that most Canadians due to their high tuition fees (which are tripled for international students, by the way) only do their bachelor's and stay near their home town for studies in order to be able to still live with their parents and save money. As a result, most of their social networks stay intact and they still have their childhood friends around, so they do not have a strong need to form new friendships at university. Most exchange students therefore stayed in their bubble of exchange students. Due to my Canadian roommate, I was fortunately able to experience some of the Canadian culture more closely, but also my social circle was rather constituted by exchange students and internationals studying on campus. Canada is known as a country of immigrants and highly supports immigration in need of citizens, but specifically Winnipeg has a lot of international students hoping to become permanent residents as Manitoba is the easiest province to emigrate to. The rural, agricultural history needs a big labour force.

I lived in the AVM residence, which is the only residence that does not require the selection of a compulsory meal plan. AVM has a kitchen area within the apartments, which consists of a sink, storage space, and a fridge with freezer. Cooking is not allowed within one's own apartment, there is a community kitchen in the basement for that. I chose a meal plan that enabled me to eat in the dining hall, as well as at the food court in the university centre. In hindsight, I am a bit torn about this decision. I have a couple of food allergies and the dining services especially in the dining hall are not very eager to consider those, even though I declared them when choosing the plan. At the same time, the dining hall is a social hub though, creating opportunities to meet other students in residence and from other residence halls. I would say most of my social contacts later on, were formed in the beginning of the term in the dining hall. Further, one does not have to go grocery shopping by bus, which is a burden,

especially once it gets colder. On the other side, the food is not very healthy, very repetitive after some time and one has to accept their menus and opening hours. There is a “grocery run” organised by students in residence where once a month a bus is rented to bring the participants to a specific grocery store announced before. As my roommate was Canadian and stayed for the full-time of her studies, she brought an air fryer and rice cooker along, which are allowed according to the residence contract and allowed us to cook our own simple meals. Maybe keep that in mind when deciding on the roommate in the residence portal (it has a bit of a vibe of online-dating).

The university and the international office are active to inform about and organise cultural events and gatherings. There is also a specific walk about the roots of the indigenous Canadians if one is interested to learn about that side of culture as well. One very interesting trip, which was also organised specifically for exchange students, was the visit of Winnipeg’s flagship Canadian Museum of Human Rights (which building you will see on all pictures about Winnipeg as it is the most modern building of the city), which covers global human rights movements and developments but also allows to learn and understand a lot about the Canadian culture. Moreover, I suggest visiting the sports games as an American/Canadian experience. As a UM student one gets free tickets to the university team’s games, the Bison games, but it may also be worthwhile to invest into a professional sports game. I watched one game of American Football, where the Winnipeg Blue Bombers are supposed to be fairly good, and three NHL hockey games of the Winnipeg Jets. I personally enjoyed hockey a lot and with the Jet’s student rush tickets one can get last minute tickets by text for cheap.

American and Canadian cities are obviously not as old as European ones and therefore lack the typical architecture and structure of European cities with central historic districts. The downtown area in Winnipeg is not the central hub as it is in Munich, but rather the social meeting points are distributed throughout the city in malls, some streets with cafés, and parks. A nice hotspot are the Forks, at the intersection of the three rivers which mark the beginnings of the settlement of humans there, with some shoplets, food places and craft beer stores, but as opposed to Munich, there is no pedestrian area with other shops and bars close by. Clubbing in Winnipeg follows a weekly schedule, with specific clientele on specific days of the week. I asked around in class and got the following suggestions: Obsidian has a student night with discounted prizes on Thursday, Cowboy’s is recommendable on a Friday, the bar King’s Head on Saturday, as well as the Latin bar La Roca. Besides that, us exchange students usually

enjoyed the karaoke night every Tuesday on campus at the bar VW's (formerly the Hub). The overall music genre in Winnipeg is influenced by its rural location to pop and country. Canada has provincial regulations for every club to close at 2 am, so at 2 am the music stops, the lights are turned on and everyone is escorted to leave. The only province where clubs are allowed to open for longer is Québec.

Regarding travelling, I visited Vancouver which is a three-hour flight from Winnipeg to visit a friend and I travelled to Banff National Park with other exchange students during our lecture-free Reading Week in November. The other exchange students managed to organise a trip to Vancouver together with 15 people in total. It is likely to find other exchange students to travel with during the term or within short breaks, however, some also set out to travel and discover Northern America on their own after finishing the term. The fall term in Canada ends the last weekday before Christmas and as the following semester in Munich only starts in April, one has about three months' time left. I had been to Canada before and therefore did not visit the east coast with Toronto, Montréal, Québec City, etc. again, but I highly encourage to do so if one has not visited Canada before. Two thirds of the Canadian population actually live in the provinces of Québec and Ontario, resulting in a more civilised infrastructure and the different cities are not that far away from each other.

Final remarks:

I really wanted to return to Canada as I have been there before. My time abroad fortified my image of Canada as a very friendly, tolerant and exciting country, but the city Winnipeg itself is not very interesting and rather dull. Being accustomed to the European lifestyle and the life in Munich, Winnipeg does not have much to offer, and it is unfortunate to be without a car (as an exchange student) in such an environment which requires it so much. I am certain that my overall experience would have been much more positive if I had a car, and it were easier to go to and experience places. It also offers much more freedom, as the public transport in Winnipeg is solely reliant on busses and very bad (also who wants to walk around for 20 minutes from the bus stop to the destination at -30°C). Nevertheless, the people I met and the places I visited in Canada besides Winnipeg were very nice and the semester abroad itself was a very enriching experience that also fostered my self-confidence.

Maybe, if one finds a group of people, it is affordable to rent a car together for a certain period of time and cover some sights around Winnipeg. Preferably before the cold actually kicks in.

Appendix:



Walking classes



Animal roommates on campus



Downtown at the Forks



The Fork's market



Downtown Winnipeg



The Red River which flows through Winnipeg and runs next to the university



View from my room on campus



The administrative building of UM



UM Campus



Calgary, Alberta during Banff Trip during Reading

Week



Banff National Park, Alberta