

Dominik Schmidinger

## **One year at Brock University**

St. Catharine, Ontario, Canada

I had the wonderful opportunity to spend a full year at Brock University. Before writing about my experiences, about the pros and cons of studying in Canada, I'll provide some general information about the study program.

### Preparation:

If attending a full study year in Canada, a study permit is required, which has to be acquired before moving to Canada. Generally, it is rather easy to apply for a permit as it can easily be done online. Nonetheless, keep in mind that several documents are requested throughout the process. Therefore, applicants are advised to apply early in order to have enough time to react should problems occur. Getting in contact with your supervisor is also necessary while planning your stay. In general, Brock supervisors are extremely helpful and patient. If any questions come up, do not hesitate to ask them.

### Brock University:

Brock represents a typical North American University. One gigantic campus, several sport facilities, a swimming pool, a newly renovated gym, thousands of more or less motivated students who live either on or off-campus and numerous indoor and outdoor study areas which invite to hang out with students from various backgrounds. To put it briefly, Brock is completely different from the University of Innsbruck. You will always bump into some familiar faces when strolling through the corridors since everyone spends almost every day on campus. In terms of workload, it also differs a lot from what we are used to in Innsbruck. Generally, the fourth-year classes are much smaller with around 15- 24 students and much more time-consuming. Students should attend every session and it is expected from course participants to actively contribute. Furthermore, besides an active participation throughout the entire semester, the workload also includes multiple assignments and often several midterms and/or presentations. It might be overwhelming at first, but after a few weeks in, I realized that the content is much more practice-oriented and therefore easier to understand. Additionally, due to the continuous workload, it is easier to follow the class and thus easier to master the courses.

In terms of course offerings, I might simply say that it is unreal. Brock offers almost everything!

Keep in mind that the costs for class materials like books or notes can be shockingly high. However, asking local students for advice can help enormously to reduce said costs.

### Living:

International students can decide whether to live on or off-campus. Living on-campus offers a convenient and safe way of living while staying at Brock. The accommodations are right "on-campus" and Brock makes sure that the rooms are furnished and clean when moving in. It might be by far the easier option. However, it is tied to additional costs and limitations. When living on-campus, the purchase of a meal plan is mandatory and not all flats are equipped with a kitchen. Furthermore, on-campus accommodations are reserved for first

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year local Brock students and internationals. Therefore, most of the students who live on-campus are between 17 and 19 years old and it felt more like high school than university. I decided to go for the off-campus option. In terms of living off-campus, opinions are divided. Many people suggest to not start looking for accommodations until you arrive in Canada. I met a couple of people who did it that way and they ended up couch surfing for 2 weeks. In the end, they found an accommodation but it was absolutely not worth it. If you get the chance to inspect the house/flat/room beforehand, do it. However, there are other things to worry about when getting to Canada and in my opinion wasting the first weeks looking for an accommodation should not be one of it. I made the experience that no matter how well the condition of an accommodation seemed, it was almost always below Austrian standards. It is also worth mentioning that some landlords do not accept international transactions. This could lead to complications when trying to pay the first rent. Upon arrival in Canada, it is advised to open a Canadian bank account. When going abroad alone, it only remains to say, that openness and a bit of luck are your best friends when looking for a place to stay.

### Community:

Brock's community is simply stunning. In the first week, Brock organizes several introduction events in order to help newcomers and international students to settle in. I recommend everyone to attend these events as it is the best opportunity to meet people. Canadians are extremely friendly and Brock is a place where friendships for life are made. At the beginning of the semester, there are also opportunities to sign up for intramurals which are also a great way to get into contact with Canadians.

### Surrounding:

When arriving in the Niagara Region, it might be disturbing at first glance. Remember, you are in Canada which means that the country is gigantic and a "city" like St. Catharine with a population of 130.000 feels more like a village than a city. However, St. Catharine offers several cosy cafes, restaurants and pubs. It also has a large shopping mall which can easily be reached by bus. In terms of transportation, the entire St. Catharine region is pretty well connected. Nevertheless, it might be somehow annoying to commute in the Niagara Region since the area is very spread out.

The geographic location of St. Catharine is excellent. It is close to Toronto and the U.S. border. Everything on the east coast of Canada and parts of the United States can be reached by coach (Greyhound, Megabus). Prepare yourself for long coach journeys of up to 11 hours...I'll promise you, the effort is definitely worth it.

### Conclusion:

For me the year abroad at Brock University in Canada was an absolute success. Needless to say, the experience was not always easy, it was also sometimes challenging. But quite frankly, that's exactly what it is all about. It is about surpassing oneself and being able to handle difficulties alone in an unusual environment. I do not regret a single choice and I would not trade the experience for anything. If you have the opportunity to study at Brock I would absolutely recommend to take the opportunity and step out into the world. In the end, it was the best decision I could have ever made.