

Studying Abroad – Report

Bishop's University 2015/16

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I will remember my stay at Bishop's University, where I studied and lived from September 2015 to April 2016, as one of the most exciting and joyful times I have experienced so far. Knowing that you might be applying or thinking about applying for admission at Bishop's, this study abroad guide provides you with the key information you need to make a well-informed choice. Let me tell you that, if you decide in favor of Bishop's, you will not regret it.

Why Bishop's?

Why then, you might ask yourselves, should you go to Bishop's University, instead of spending your time in the U.S. or elsewhere? After having been to Bishop's myself, I believe it comes with certain characteristics that make it a very suitable place to go especially as an exchange student. For once, the small and cozy campus, the on-campus activities and the vicinity of all housing to the campus ensure you make friends quickly and easily. If you want to, you can always find an event or a way to hang out with people, which is nice if you ever feel lonely. Additionally, Sherbrooke is very close to Montreal. Both travelling and having friends and family over is easily organized, whereas it might be difficult to visit you or to travel if you spend your time abroad in more remote places. Moreover, both students and staff at Bishop's are used to living, studying and working with exchange students. Thus, Bishop's offers plenty of activities specifically designed for you. Professors know the problems that might occur as a result of being an exchange student (you might have to leave before they can return your exams, you might need more credits than classes are designed to provide you with, you might struggle with the level and amount of assignments) and are generally very helpful and understanding. Furthermore, from what I experienced at Bishop's and while travelling, Canadians in Quebec and Ontario seem open and approachable. They are used to talking to non-native speakers as this is a situation they often encounter in every-day live talking English to French Canadians or vice versa. Finally, a stay in Quebec offers you the experience of a 'real' winter. It starts snowing at some time in November, and from that moment on the ground will be covered in snow until March. This is something you usually do not experience in Germany, and I can absolutely recommend it. What's more, Quebec offers a stunning nature in the form of forests, national parks, and a beautiful cost line.



Getting Started

Your actual stay abroad will be preceded by a semester of gathering documents and filling out forms. Among other things, you will have to apply for two separate documents that will enable you to study in Quebec. You will also have to send a detailed application including documents such as your or your parents' bank account balance to Bishop's. By the way, do not

forget to register and pay for the health insurance provided by Bishop's. I got to know some exchange students who forgot to register for health insurance, and, in the end, they had to pay extra. Additionally, if you apply for a scholarship (PROMOS), you need to select classes beforehand as part of your learning agreement, and you might have to take a language test. All these application forms require time and, in most of the cases, their deadlines approach quickly. The only advice I can give you here is the following: Do not despair! Paperwork always drives me crazy, so I hated this part of preparing to go abroad. Still, considering what you are preparing for, it is absolutely worth the agony. Besides, you are not alone. Professor Hofmann, the Akademisches Auslandsamt, and Diane Mills, Bishop's exchange program coordinator, will support and help you along the way. Diane Mills is also the right person to talk to if you have any questions once arrived at Bishop's. She is extremely experienced and knowledgeable and answers your e-mails within seconds.

Housing

As soon as you have officially registered with Bishop's, you can apply for on-campus housing. Bishop's also provides the contact details of private flat shares on their website. Most of them are located in Lennoxville (the borough of Sherbrooke Bishop's is situated) and, most of the time, the campus can be reached easily from there by bus, bike, or a ten to twenty-minute walk. Off-campus housing is cheaper than on-campus housing. It is not necessarily the prices of the rooms as such that differ, but rather the fact that for nearly all on-campus housing you are obligated to buy a meal pass as the apartments in the Paterson residence are the only ones equipped with a kitchen. However, on-campus housing makes meeting people and making friends very easy. And, while the meal pass for Dewhurst Dining Hall is expensive, you will very quickly have a group of people you can dine with and watch hockey and soccer on a big screen while doing so. Depending on which residence hall you are assigned to, you might have to share your room with someone else. If you are looking for a compromise between off-campus and on-campus housing, I would recommend the

Paterson residence hall. It offers apartments with four separate rooms, a living room, and a kitchen. At first, Paterson rooms seem expensive, but if you take into account that you do not have to pay for a meal plan, they are reasonably priced. I have had both friends who lived on campus and in private housing in Lennoxville and I think it works either way. If you choose on-campus housing, make sure to apply early and remember that you have to pay the rent for the entire semester at the beginning of the semester.



Journey to Bishop's

While you are filling out forms and applying for housing, you might also want to look for a flight. Your flight's destination should be Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau Airport in Montreal. Do not forget to complete your eTA (electronic Travel Application), which you need in order to fly to Canada. Regarding the dates of your flight, I would advise you to try and make it to the orientation week usually taking place during the first week of the semester. For the return flight, you should make sure you book it for after the winter semester's exam period (both dates will be provided on the Bishop's website, if you cannot find them, I would ask Diane Mills). It is usually much cheaper to book a go-and-return journey. However, if you only book a one-way flight, you stay more flexible and might be able to plan some travelling with others after your time at Bishop's. From the airport, there are three ways to get to Bishop's. The university usually offers a direct bus connection taking off from the airport. This is your most comfortable and most expensive option and depending on how much luggage you are bringing and how long your journey has been, I would definitely consider it. You can also take a shuttle bus to the Gare d'autocars de Montreal, Montreal's bus terminal. From there, you can get on a coach to Sherbrooke (tickets can be bought at the bus terminal or online).

The coach will drop you off in the city center, from where you have to take a taxi or wait for a bus to get you to Bishop's. As you can imagine, this second option is more strenuous than the first one, yet, if you are well-organized and do not mind a longer journey to Bishop's, you will be fine (the second option is the one I chose). If you do not feel up to travelling from Montreal to Sherbrooke on the same day that you arrive in Montreal, there are plenty of nice hostels to spend the night. Some of the exchange students I met contacted each other via Facebook beforehand and spent a few days exploring Montreal before going to Bishop's together. Thirdly, you could also look for a carpool. In order to find one, I recommend Amigo Express or joining the group "Bishop's Carpools" on Facebook. The good thing about the Facebook group is that a lot of students will go back to Bishop's from Montreal at the beginning of the semester, and that they will drop you on campus while the Amigo Express drivers most probably will drop you in the city center.

As a final note on travelling to Bishops, do not take too much stuff with you. It makes sense to buy your winter clothes in Canada, as they are designed to keep you warm even when temperatures are extreme. Also, do not forget to take a few summer clothes. You will arrive at Bishop's in late August, which means the weather might still be very hot and humid.



Getting Started at Bishop's

Once you have arrived safely at Bishop's, there are two things I would take care of rather sooner than later. I would suggest you get a mobile phone contract or a prepaid sim card. There is free Wi-Fi nearly everywhere on campus as well as in a lot of places in the cities (Sherbrooke, Montreal, Ottawa, etc.). However, it might come in handy to have a Canadian phone number in order to communicate with friends or to use while travelling. I bought a prepaid card provided by Koodo Mobile. I would also create a bank account that provides you with a credit card. You absolutely need a credit card in order to purchase something online, book a car, and for pretty much everything else. If you are bringing your German credit card, make sure you do not have to pay a fee whenever you are taking money from your account. I opened a free account with CIBC, RBC also works. Both banks have branches in Lennoxville and ATMs on campus.

Studying at Bishop's

I immensely enjoyed not only living but also studying at Bishop's. Shortly before the semester starts, you will be asked to choose four to five classes. Classes take place twice a week, and are usually more work than in Germany. For each class, you will have to sit a midterm and a final exam, and submit various other assignments (essays, presentations, projects, etc.). Therefore, I recommend you choose classes you are truly interested in, as you will have to put effort into them and deal with their topics extensively. You will also have to take time to study during the semester, and not, as in Germany, at the end of the semester only. As a student of English you should take advantage of subjects offered at Bishop's, but not in Wuppertal, such as Canadian drama, literature, and politics. The professors at Bishop's are very approachable, friendly, and reliable. They are used to having exchange students in their classes, which means you can always talk to them in case you are having trouble following the class. Classes are made up of English Canadians, French Canadians, and exchange students. Consequently, many students study English as their second language, which will make you feel more comfortable to speak up in class. Grading of course depends on the individual professor. However, generally speaking, the midterm and final exams are less difficult and extensive than the German exams you are used to.



Leisure Time

There is so much to do in your free time that you will hardly manage to fit everything in. During the week, events such as talks and concerts are offered by the different departments. Most of them are free and it is definitely worth it to go to some of them. You will get e-mail invitations about the specific events so make sure you check your e-mail account on a regular basis (not only because of the events). The Gait, Bishop's on-campus bar, is open on Thursday, and it hosts a Trivia night once a week. You can spend your free time joining one

of Bishop's numerous clubs such as the Environment Club or the Board Game Club. Regarding keeping in shape, you can work out at the gym or use the pool for free. Bishop's also offers intramural sports teams and clubs. On the weekends, I suggest you support your sports teams, the Gaiters, at the gym or on the field. The soccer and football season passes by quickly, so you will mostly be watching basketball. For the games, the gym is usually packed with fellow students dressed up in purple cheering and chanting. Even if you are not a sports addict, it is really worth checking it out. Otherwise, the Gait turns into a club on Saturday night, and you will see many familiar faces there. The weekends you should stay at Bishop's are the Homecoming weekend as well as Halloweekend. You also should not miss the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

Otherwise, weekends provide you with the time to travel. The easiest way to get somewhere further away is taking a carpool to Montreal and then a coach such as Megabus or Greyhound to the destination of your choice. Sometimes, when students are going home, they might even offer a carpool to a place like Toronto. Some exchange students I knew even got together and bought an old car they used for travelling. You can buy used cars for



cheap on online platforms such as Kijiji, however, you might need the help of someone who knows his way around cars. All the cities in Ontario and Quebec are worth a visit (Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Ottawa, etc.). If you rent a car, I recommend visiting some of the National Parks around, or drive up North (and do whale watching or go dog sledding, if you are interested). New York is a 9-hour bus ride away from Montreal. In the wintertime, places to ski are about a one-hour drive away. Note that you have a Reading Week (one-week break) in February or March, which gives you the opportunity to travel for a longer period of time.

Be what? BU!

I hope that this short study guide on Bishop's helped you with your decision of where to go for your stay abroad. As I have said at the beginning, I cannot imagine anything better than spending your semester abroad at Bishop's. As a final help, I have listed the ten things that seem most important to me when thinking of my time at Bishop's and how to make the most of it.

- #1 Do not let the paperwork drive you crazy
- #2 Make sure you know how you get from Montreal Airport to Bishop's
- #3 Get a sim card and a credit card
- #4 Find the right work-life balance
- #5 Let the purple spirit take over
- #6 Travel with friends
- #7 Take classes you could not take at BUW
- #8 Share food
- #9 Learn Quebecois (at least a few words)
- #10 Stay in touch with your friends and family at home



Good luck and best,

Lara