

Utah Valley University - Study Abroad Field Report

from Victoria Entenfellner

I spend one trimester studying “Digital Cinema” at Utah Valley University, which was a great experience for me. The university provided me with many practical opportunities I would not have had in Austria. Especially the focus on getting real experience stood out, as professors would always forward open jobs on projects, whether it be in the professional area or on a student project. In comparison to my “Media Technology” course in Austria it was obviously very focused on film. However there is little Audio education, but UVU does offer different courses for Audio, Animation, Interactive Media many other subjects and it is possible for exchange students to take a class from another course.

There was some initial confusion about the enrollment and courses I would take, due to a change in staff last year, but once that got sorted out everything went very smooth. In addition to the required four classes, a student may pick two additional classes. I did all 18 credits, but depending on the classes it can get quite stressful.

Classes are usually very practical and it is easy to meet and make friends. I worked on 10 different short films during the time period of three months, which is more than I have done during the previous two years studying in Austria. In addition to these film projects there were many short practical tasks that were done either alone or with others for class. All the classes had a very strong focus on applying the subjects taught. Even the more lecture based class was less about memorising the material rather than applying it correctly in the exams.

UVU also offers many clubs and social activities one can participate in. I visited a few clubs and it was always a nice community, so if the schedule allows it the clubs are definitely a great place to socialize and get to know new things. I recommend the Outdoor Adventure center for exchange students to get to know the amazing nature in Utah.

Robert Trim teaches two of the required classes and he is a good person to get in touch with. Not only did he organise field trips to see local film sets or meet fellow filmmakers for all the students, he is also very involved in making the exchange students feel at home. He and his family invited us to their house multiple times and he would always help us out if we needed help or advice for something.

Me and the two other austrian exchange students were offered to join the department’s Hollywood trip. It was organised by a professor, Duane Andersen, with the intention to give the students insight into the industry in Los Angeles. During the trip we visited different production studios. Meeting with employees gave us the opportunity to see and learn about aspects the

regular visitor would not see. In addition we met with working professionals to get to know their companies and work. It was a great opportunity to ask questions and tie connections into the industry. Duane was very involved to provide the students with chances to meet and learn from successful people in the industry. He also organised a monthly film screening with an additional Q&A with the filmmaker. He also maintains the collaboration with the annual Sundance Film Festival in Park City. In order to participate and volunteer at the festival UVU extended my time in the program to the end of January.

I recommend incoming students to get in touch with the housing administrators as early as possible. It is hard to find affordable housing close to UVU that leases for only one term. Even though Mike Harper is in contact with Wolverine Crossing, the dorms the exchange students stay at, they were uninformed and it was a struggle to get the lodging figured out. They were hard to communicate with over mail and they would not even reserve spots for 24 hours after signing the contract, but give them out on a first pay basis. The dorm itself was poorly maintained and there were various repairs needed during the stay of three months. I would recommend asking for a new building when staying at Wolverine Crossing or looking for housing alternatives in advance.

One big factor in getting integrated is definitely transportation. The public transport is very scarce in Utah, there is no service at night or on Sunday and it takes very long. In order to get to projects and activities outside of Campus I would recommend to just ask for rides. Everyone is very approachable and willing to help out. Carpooling with fellow students is usually easier and faster than public transport.

UVU is definitely a good university to go if one seeks a lot of practical experience. I have been told multiple times that productions prefer to hire UVU students over other Utah universities, because they have the most hands-on experience and connections to the industry. I met many lovely people during my stay and I learned a lot, which I believe will help me in my profession.