**Introduction**

This report is addressed to several target groups. On the one hand naturally to future exchange students who are hopefully able to take tips from it for their own stay in Vancouver or in Canada. On the other hand to the responsible persons for the exchange program who thereby gather important feedback about the process of the program. In general the report was written for all these who think of the program not only as an experience for the exchange student but also as a chance for the participating organizations to learn about other educational systems and maybe to apply this knowledge in their own organization.

**Vancouver**

Vancouver is a marvellous city. It lies beautifully enclosed by the Pacific Ocean in the west, the coastal mountains in the north and sufficient open space in the southeast. The mentality of the east Canadian inhabitants is particularly influenced by the harmony with the nature. Stress is unfamiliar to them; instead they strive to balance profession and leisure time. Stanley Park is occupied by runners all day, people play beach volleyball at the wide beaches and in a more remote area there is Wreck Beach, probably the only unofficial naturism beach in Canada.

In my opinion one should not miss to go hiking on the north shore. To have a car can become useful and leads to more flexibility to visit some of the parks nearby or even the Rocky Mountains. In addition, the night life has its attractions; even if it is limited to some small areas downtown.

**Multicultural**

Canada is a young country and therefore depends strongly on immigrants; it’s hard to find the "genuine" Canadian. Often people even claim to be German. Asked for details most of them have to admit, that only their ancestors came from Germany. They might still have relatives there, but most probably they do not speak one word German. But some of them, especially older people, reveal their most beautiful Alpendeutsch (dialect spoken in south Germany) and tell about the old times and about their reasons for migrating to Canada.

More impressive than German immigrants is however the broad variety of other cultures one can find here. Vancouver has one of the largest Chinatowns of the western world. All Asian cultures are strongly represented. There are Koreans, Chinese, Taiwanese, the Japanese and Indians (this list is not exhaustive) with most different religions and customs. There is an unbelievably amount of different churches. It sums up to an overwhelming impression of unknowns and strangers.

To be able to enjoy the stay in Vancouver the visitor has to be interested and open minded regarding these foreign cultures. Looking at international meetings at the college it is not uncommon that from Europe derived students (thus Canadians taken into account) are in the absolute minority (under 10%); which is not unpleasantly because people respect other cultures and do not ask inappropriate questions.

**Surrey**

The Campus of the Kwantlen College relevant for IT is located in Surrey. Surrey is a rather boring suburb preferentially inhabited by Indians. If you prefer to live near to downtown it causes tedious travelling. You can reach the college by going by skytrain and two connecting busses which is not
actually comfortably. To go by bicycle is uncommon. One has to balance between the opportunity to get to downtown or North Vancouver in an instant or to live nearby the college and possible friends. Having one’s own car can be helpful to solve this conflict.

Education

Looking at the German education system one can say that the Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) tends to feel more like a school than universities do. There are small group sizes, the time table is relatively well prepared and one is able to accumulate grades over the study to sum up to the final grade. The education at Kwantlen University College reminds even more of a school. Particularly to mention are the relationship between students and instructors as well as the style of teaching.

Relationship between students and instructors

A small difference affects the relationship between instructors and students dramatically: There is no „Sie“ (the polite German addressing of other people in person). Simon Whitlow, instructor for Data Communications, introduced himself as follows: “My name is Simon Whitlow. You can call me Mr. Whitlow, or professor Whitlow, or just Simon…” Usually you call instructors by the first name (right; that takes a while to get used to it). This results in a completely uncomplicated and informal relationship, which is perhaps very productive for both sides. It is much easier to ask and make suggestions. However it does not result in lack of respect on the part of the students.

The instructors are in general highly motivated and enthusiastic about their topics. They really try to teach the students and to keep them from falling behind. They double check to be sure the students have understood a topic. The instructors gather important feedback using quizzes as a frequent method to check the progress of the students. They even repeat important topics if necessary.

Interactive lessons

The lessons are strongly developed around activities. Team work and hands on training are an important part of every course. Some of the courses take place in special computer labs. The computer places are facing the instructor making it possible to work together. The permanent availability of the PC additionally causes more silence: bored students simply surf the Internet. Communication between students is done using instant messengers. The instructors are able to supervise the student PCs; however they usually don’t use that tool during lessons. The question whether surfing or silence help the students with their learning is left to researchers.

Usually students welcome the activities. Working on a team or developing something on ones own helps to learn lessons and prevents boredom. There are no sleeping students in such lessons. In addition presenting solutions and working on teams are important key qualifications that are in this way trained regularly and early.

Learning center

The Learning centers support students. They can arrange appointments with active and former students in order to get personal assistance on a variety of subjects. The instructors are paid by the college. Additionally the center organizes seminars covering different topics and key qualifications, e.g. examination anxiety, presenting or writing of summaries.
Tuition fees

When we come to Kwantlen as exchange students we are in an enviable situation: We do not pay anything! We even get some financial support! Other students often can not understand this.

I got to know students who had already spent $8000 up to the fourth semester only on study fees. I once met a Chinese girl coming from the cashier's office and she told me, that she had just paid $4000 for just one term! In general the fees are based on the number of courses (more exactly the credits) and have to be paid in advance. Up to a certain date the student is able to drop a course and thus get most of the money paid back. After this date the money is finally gone. International student pay higher fees.

But that is not everything. There are also textbooks to pay for. At the beginning of a term the student receives an automatically generated list of textbooks he needs for the courses. Usually the lessons depend on preparing the topics by reading the corresponding chapters in the book. For my own textbooks I paid more than $450. On top of that there is the normal amount for things like utilities and parking fees.

These costs have several consequences. First the students are divided into those, who are sponsored by there parents and others, who have to work to finance their studies. In the evening classes there are often highly motivated, partly older students, who work daytimes and learn in the evening. Most of the usually very young students in the other courses are only moderately motivated.

The fees make different supporting institutions possible. Above all one should mention the Learning Center and the Language Buddy Program, but also an attractive sport program and an apparently well financed student association.

Influence of companies

The influence of the economy on the universities is far more noticeable than in Germany. In my course Data Communications accompanying to the study the students worked on a Cisco certificate. One quarter of the final mark consisted of the result in the Cisco tests. Strangely enough regular lecture and Cisco training were only partly co-ordinated. The course contents matched nearly perfect with Cisco level I, but accompanying to the course students worked on Cisco level II.

The collaboration with the economy is a chance for students to receive additional qualifications and certificates. The acquired knowledge is however very special and binds the student early to certain products. Beyond that the use of the certificate is to doubt, since one should assume the student should have covered the knowledge already on a general level.

Courses I took

Normally international students are not allowed to take more than five courses. But anyhow, that is enough! Beside the courses the regular quizzes (short tests, normally announced prior to class) keep the students busy. The instructors in general estimate two hours of personal study for each two hours lesson. But I know instructors who told something about eight hours a week. In the following I am providing a list of the courses I took. Please feel free to contact me if you have specific questions regarding one of the courses. - CISY 2313: DATA Communications - Info. 4230: SW engineering (tends to project management) - CISY 2413:4 GL and CASE (primarily UML/Software engineering) - ELST 0261: English Pronunciation - ASTR 1100: Astronomy - COOP 1101: Job search Techniques
Level of the courses

The level of the courses is easier than that of our courses, at least regarding the technical contents. My subjective impression was that the students are not as well educated as students from the Munich University of Applied Sciences. But because absolute grading is strictly used the comparison with other students is not relevant. Most of the exams can be done very well with diligence and memorization. They consist to a crucial part of multiple choice questions. The remaining questions are usually solved with a short answer or a little sketch. This does not necessarily lead to easier examinations; well prepared multiple choice questions can be quite challenging. The portion of mathematics is disappearing small.

Language

Caused by the fact that at Kwantlen a lot of the students are immigrants, lack of English skills is a serious problem. Even those immigrated students who went to a Canadian high school are often not able to participate in English conversations, because at school they only hang around with friends from their home country and apparently they do not need much oral skills to be successful in school.

Therefore students in Kwantlen must present an English certificate in order to be able to study without restrictions. Such a certificate can be acquired by enrolling the English program of the college (ELST). This program is called a pre academic program but nevertheless you have to pay study fees. The study is quite challenging and easily fills out the week. In the higher level one is first allowed to take one university course and then two. The decision whether a student progresses to the next level is made individually looking at his results.

Having learned English at the “Gymnasium” one is well prepared compared to other international students. Most important is the ability to read and to understand spoken English. For the projects and other deliverables one should also be able to produce summaries. Although I had no English experience despite my time at school, the English course in our first semester and the reading of technical literature and novels in English I had no problems participating in the courses. Moreover I had sometimes to correct texts from my project team partners. Hence worries regarding language skills are unnecessary.

Nevertheless in my opinion it makes sense to enrol in an English course. First because it is an import part of a stay abroad to enhance the English skills and second because it is a good opportunity to make know other students from most different cultures.

To enrol in a course from the ELST program one has to go through a classification test, which is held one week prior the regular beginning of the term. It consists of an easy written test and a personal interview. After that the student receives a recommendation regarding the courses he should take. It is easily possible, that the results are too good, so there is no course with a suitable level.

I took part in the course "English Pronunciation" and had a lot of fun there. It is a great opportunity to train the language. As usual there are lots of activities, so it is easy to get know to the other students. And there are always details in a language to learn. Especially in my course we received plenty individual feedback from the instructor; hence the general level of the class does not play a large role.
Language Buddy Program

A great institution is the Language Buddy Program (LBP). First of all it is supposed to bring international and Canadian students together in order to exchange language and cultural experiences. But then it is also a great opportunity to participate in the events organized by the LBP. In my case Lisa, the manager of the LBP, informally introduced me to a very nice Canadian student who was also interested in learning some German. Halloween Party and different trips completed the program. The organization of the homestays is also a responsibility of the LBP.

Tips for future students

Visa

For a stay up to six month one formally does not need a visa or even a study permit. Nevertheless to have one helps when coming into the country and prevents the officers to ask annoying questions. Furthermore it can easily be updated from Vancouver to a work permit if needed. Thus one is able to append a coop term. With some problems the study permit can be applied for later in going to Seattle and thus being outside of Canada.

Homestay

In general to live with a Canadian family is a good idea. Unfortunately it sometimes comes to a kind of playing roulette: some of the host families are extremely kind; they see the exchange student as an opportunity to learn from other cultures and they do everything to make the stay for the student as comfortable as possible. Others think of the exchange students in term of an additional income source. Some of them have up to five students at a time and do not really care for them. Another family uses the student for making the dishes or to watch after home and children.

To avoid this gamble it is in general easy to find another accommodation in Vancouver. But thus one also lacks the inestimable experience of living in a real Canadian family and to learn the language it is definitely better. Therefore my last recommendation is to complain instantly at the homestay office if problems with the family occur. Most times it is possible to move to another family.

Co-op

A very interesting aspect is to append a co-op to the educational term. Prerequisite for that is to enrol in the course COOP1101. This course prepares for the process of application. In fact the personal application is optimized together with the instructor. Meanwhile the instructor tries to find out as much as possible about the student. Then he organizes contacts and offers from suitable companies.

Normally students have to pay tuition fees while they are enrolled in a co-op term. As an exchange student again we do not have to pay those fees. In general the co-ops are well paid by the companies; hence one should be able to cover the costs of the stay.

Unfortunately most of the offers refer to support and administration, like e.g. working on a helpdesk. Munich students should not expect much, but with some personal initiative one should be able to find another kind of job on ones own.
Taxes (GST)

Keep all your invoices! With some restrictions you can send them in after you have left the country and thus get the paid GST back. This only refers to goods taken out of the country and to some other expenses like short time accommodations. Further information can easily be found on the Internet using the key words “tax refund” and “GST”. The necessary forms can be found at the airport.

Car

It is not difficult to buy and register a car in Canada. Cars are a little bit more expensive in Vancouver because of the air control; nevertheless a running car starts at about $700. There is nothing comparable to our TÜV. The insurance company also registers the car. In order to register a car some insurance companies require for a birth certificate. The insurance is quite cheap. Gas is about only half the price as in Germany. With a running car chances are high to sell the car in the end for a price close to the one paid in the beginning. If the car is not running any more the best thing to do is to donate it to the charity car program. Especially if one intends to go on trips in the surrounding parks or to go on holiday prior or after the study purchasing a car is worth it.

Journey date

One should plan to arrive one week prior to the start of the term. On Thursday and Friday before Labour Day there were unexpected orientation days for the international students. Although most of the provided information is not important for exchange students one should use these days to get in contact with some people. Also the English tests are taking place in this week. Remaining days can easily be used to discover Vancouver.

Office supplies

It does not make sense to bring a lot of office supplies. They use totally different formats in Canada. Sheet are punched differently and thus do not fit in our folders. I did well buying everything there. And do not lose hope: There are checkered notebooks; you just have to look for them really hard.

Textbooks

A huge amount of money goes into textbooks needed for the courses. Comparison is worthwhile in Canada: used to the fixed book prices in Germany I bought books in the rather expensive bookstore on the college campus; even Amazon would have been cheaper. To care for the books early is also a good idea. The bookstore sells used books collected the term before for cheaper prices. In this way students are able to get rid of their old books and get some of the money back.

There is also a library, but they do not textbooks. Best is to ask people from the courses as fast as possible for their used books.

Vacation

At this point I would like to mention some highlights one should connect to the stay. In summer and winter the sea-to-sky-highway and the Rocky Mountains are worth a beautiful trip, cheap and beautiful with a tent on the wide-ranging campgrounds. In winter one should not miss to go skiing in one of the huge ski areas. Snow and empty slopes are unique. A husky tour of several days
through the quite winter is an experience one does not forget. With appropriate planning one is able to make a stop over at the east coast on the way home. Highlights could be Toronto, Washington or New York.

**Contacts**

**Lisa <homestay@kwantlen.ca>**

Lisa is in charge of the Language Buddy Program (LBP) and thus also for the organization of the homestay and other activities of the LBP.

**Susan <Susan.Allan@kwantlen.ca>**

Susan is working in the international office and our contact person. Ask her everything regarding organization as well as visa. She also has the right connections to help with all type of problems.

**Shawn <Shawn.Erickson@kwantlen.ca>**

Shawn organizes the co-ops for the IT students. He is also the instructor of the COOP1101, revises the resumes and has the contacts to the companies.

**Internet resources**

**www.ratemyprofessors.ca**

This page is a very good help when selecting the courses. There is a huge amount of comments from students about their instructors. Of course some of them are quite subjective, so be careful!

**www.map24.ca**

Since last year the brilliant map originated in Germany is also available for other countries. There are both a static and a dynamic version. The address search helps to locate accommodations.

**Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank all those, who made this inestimable experience possible for me: Mr. Köhler for the organization, the committee at the Munich University of applied sciences for the nomination, Susan in Kwantlen for her invaluable help, the European Union for the financial support, my uncle Jörg, without whom I would never have come to Canada, my friend Irene for her continuing support.