

Experience Report – University of Northern British Columbia

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First of all, congratulations on your decision to take on the adventure of a stay abroad! For my stay abroad, I chose to apply for two trimesters (eight months) at the University of Northern British Columbia, which is located on top of a hill in Prince George, BC, and I can without a doubt say that I did not regret my decision once. The people that I interacted with during my stay abroad were all incredibly kind and welcoming, and even though Prince George is not a very big city, UNBC definitely does offer a lot of opportunities if you like outdoor adventure and learning in a friendly environment.

Once you are granted a university place at UNBC for the duration of your stay abroad, you will have to apply for a study permit if you wish to stay for the full academic year. Keep in mind that you will have to hand in a number of different documents in order to apply, so you should start gathering everything you need as soon as possible. The application process itself is explained on the government website, and while it is not very complicated, it does require quite a bit of paperwork. I would also recommend uploading your application online on the website of the Canadian government. That way, it is usually processed more quickly than mail applications. I got my study permit within two weeks after submitting all the required documents. Also, if you should want to travel to the US during winter break or reading break, you can very easily apply for an ESTA from Canada which will make it possible for you to travel into the States as a tourist. If you do not want to go by plane, you also have the option to take the Amtrak train from Vancouver to Seattle.

If you study at UNBC, your student fees usually include a fee for the U-Pass which is an addition to your student ID card that makes it possible for you to use the bus system within Prince George.

Even though Prince George seems a little remote at first, there are definitely a number of things you can do downtown and around campus, for example bowling, indoor climbing, ice skating, or watching hockey games at the CN Centre. The student fees you have to pay also include a membership for the Northern Sports Center that is a 5-minute walk away from campus, as well as free access to the two local indoor pools.

The university campus is right by the woods and a lot of students often walk to Shane Lake or to a little fire hut to have camp fires. If you are lucky enough, you might even be able to see the Northern Lights from there. Get-togethers like that are frequently organized by the

UNBC Outdoors Club that also organizes a number of fun trips to places that are a little bit farther away from the university. The Thirsty Moose Pub on campus also regularly hosts fun events, and there are karaoke and trivia nights every week. (Keep in mind that in BC you have to be at least 19 to get in though!)

If you are looking for a nice weekend trip, I recommend going to the national parks in Jasper and Banff. They are about a four-to-seven-hour drive away from the university, so the easiest way to get there is to either rent a car or see if the Outdoors Club organizes a trip there. Either way, going there is a wonderful opportunity to see some of British Columbia's beautiful landscape!

Prince George also offers some opportunities if you enjoy skiing or snowboarding, or if you would like to try out one of those winter sports while you are in Canada. There is one ski hill in Hart that offers rentals for ski and snowboard gear, and that is quite easy to reach by bus during winter. UNBC usually also offers a skiing trip for students in January or February. During the winter months, you should also be prepared for lots and lots of snow so if you like being outdoors you might have to get some proper snow boots while you are in Canada. The temperatures can go down to -30°C on some days, but do not worry too much about that, it is a dry cold so it does not feel quite as cold as it sounds!

For shopping, there are places like the Pine Center Mall, Walmart, Save-On-Foods etc., and although Prince George is not the biggest city, there are a lot of nice little places to discover, like little cafés such as Books and Company, or restaurants like Wasabi Sushi, that are all quite easy to reach by bus.

If you live on campus it might take somewhere between 20 and 45 minutes to get there by bus, depending on the time and the day of the week you want to go. If you should decide to live on Residence, you will usually have to pay for the meal plan too. The Meal Plan includes unlimited food from the Dining Hall 7 days a week, as well as a 150 Dollar balance on your student card that you can use at some of the food places and cafés on campus, so you probably will not have to go out to get groceries all that often.

Living on Residence is a great way to meet people, and even though it might be slightly more expensive than living off campus, I would definitely recommend it. The Residence Assistants frequently organize events in either one of the residence buildings, and you will have quite an easy time getting in touch with other students. The apartments are usually shared with three other students, and you share a living room area, a bathroom, and a kitchen, but everyone has their own bedroom. Each of the buildings also has a Common Room with sofas, tables, and a TV that students can use any time.

Overall, UNBC does a great job when it comes to making new students feel welcome and organizes a variety of different events during Orientation and throughout the semester that will give you an opportunity to get in touch with other students. At the beginning of the year, during the club days, you will also get the chance to have a look at the different student clubs at UNBC. The university also hosts a farmer's market inside the university building every Tuesday (you should definitely try the Frozen Paddle ice cream while you're there!).

When it comes to studying, UNBC offers a number of really interesting classes. As a full-time student, you will probably have to complete at least 12 credit hours which does not sound like a lot but classes usually are three hours long instead of 1.5, and the course load throughout the semester is doable but definitely heavier than at German universities. You will have to take midterms and finals and probably have to complete a number of smaller assignments and papers, or give presentations throughout the semester. Most of the professors are really nice and helpful, and the university offers a number of services to support students mentally as well as academically if needed.

Overall I can only say that if you are looking to spend your semester abroad in a place with a beautiful landscape, lovely people, and interesting classes, and you prefer a bit of outdoor adventure over the feeling of a big city, UNBC just might be the right place for you. If you do have any more questions, feel free to ask the International Office for my contact information, I am happy to help! Other than that, good luck with your application, and I hope you will have a wonderful time during your time abroad!



Cougars Hockey Game at the
CN Centre

Shane Lake



Residence Building – Neyoh



Residence Apartment – Common Area

Jasper National Park

