

STUDENT REPORT

Name of host University: Queensland University of Technology
Department/school you studied within: Engineering

Name (student): Gísli Grímsson
Exchange semester: Fall 2015 **School at RU: Biomedical Engineering**

I GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Firstly I'd like to express that my beliefs are that the most maturing part of taking part in exchange studies is not knowing what is the next step. Report like this is useful but can also act like a certain recipe of how to do things. I will therefore outline the most useful information here but for more details people can contact me for further discussion.

The school itself has amazing facilities and the teaching is much similar as in Reykjavik University. They split units into lectures, workshops, labs, computer labs etc. QUT itself has 3 campuses: **Gardens Point** which is home of engineering, business and law. **Kelvin Grove** which houses arts, design, films, acting and design units. **Caboolture** which I never saw and has only a small portion of units which I am not sure about. **Gardens Point & Kelvin Grove** campuses are located in central Brisbane. I spent all of my time in Gardens Point as I was studying engineering and information technology.

I'm not exactly sure about how many exchange students there were since most of the time we were mixed up with new international students. But I'd say we ranged about 400-500. Mostly from Europe.

The study structure was similar to Reykjavik University although the work load was immensely reduced. I'd say the standards of the schools would have been similar but the teachers respected personal space and busy times and there was actually a possibility of having a normal life outside school times. Usually people treated the school like work and showed up early and left in the afternoon. Of course I'm not saying that sometimes you would spend afternoons and nights finishing assignments but that happened only handful of times not every day measure like the workload at Reykjavik University.

The units were different in how they evaluated the unit structure but most of the times bi-weekly assignments, labs with reports and mid-semester exams. To pass a unit a student needs to receive over 50% of all points available in the unit. Sometimes students can even skip their final exam if they have received well over 50% of all points available in the unit. The grading system in Australia ranges from 1-7 where the highest available grade is 7 which translates to having received more or equal to 85% in total for the unit.

II PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Pre – Departure: Quality of Information before you left

As I was the first student to leave from Reykjavik University to QUT the flow of information was a bit tedious. I decided to apply in late February and received confirmation letter from QUT in the end of March. Then over the Easter holiday I planned out my units and applied officially with all the documents in mid April. Although QUT officially does not accept applications after late March since I was the first student from RU they made it work out. Timings have to be well taken care of and should not be as late as I was in the application process.

I got my acceptance letter from QUT in late May which was a month before I had to depart from Iceland. This was quite stressful since I had waited to buy flights and schedule everything until I would receive my acceptance. With the acceptance letter I received information about the school, campuses, transportation and housing. Although having all these information they didn't come in handy until I came to Brisbane.

The only thing I was quite unhappy about was the service from the International Office of Reykjavik University. By the time I was leaving and had a lot of questions and uncertainty the staff had left for their summer holiday. So it was a bit difficult to be wandering into unknown surroundings and not being able to contact my own International Office. Better to keep in mind for next students that leave around this time. I left Iceland the first week in July and the school started July 20th.

The international office in QUT was very helpful and everything is very professional in helping students with housing, getting around and whatever comes in mind.

Academic Calendar – important dates

I arrived July 8th and an orientation week started July 12th. Official schoolwork started on July 20th. The examination period started in Late October and finished around November 15th. Classes finished almost a week before examination so people could catch up on work one week before examination.

In September there was a Mid-semester break of 5 working days, 10 days all together.

Reception of incoming students – describe how you were welcomed

The international office ran an hour meeting every day for the first 2 weeks of July called “Welcome to Brisbane” where the exchange/international students attended to learn about transportation, the school, the city basically DO’s and DON’Ts. Then the day before the Orientation Week started the Exchange Office invited the students to come to Gardens Point campus and meet and greet. Grilling some hot dogs and playing games. These were directed by students of QUT which belonged to an social club called QUT CONNECT.

Housing

The school helped out with finding accommodation for students. I came to Australia not living anywhere but stayed at a hostel the first week. Then I met some students and we were so lucky to find a house 25 min walking distance from the school.

There are a few ways to find housing. Either going through an agency called Brisbane Students which I did. They were quite hard to deal with and sometimes quite irritating. But what they offer is very good for a group like I was involved in. There is also a web community called Gumtree.com. Gumtree is similar to Bland.is but there one can look for a room in a shared house. Many options are for finding accommodation in Brisbane and should not be considered a difficult task.

If you go with Brisbane Students rental agency just make sure that you read everything very closely and not let them trick you, they will try !

It is a little more expensive then if you try other alternatives but can be easier and a lot quicker process. They supply housing close to the campuses which is a big plus but as I said they are a pain to deal with.

Costs

Rent was 220 AUD a week and in the beginning we paid a bond of 880 AUD which we all received back at the end of the rental agreement. Most rental agencies either have minimum rental lease of 5-6 months which is the most annoying part of going through an agency. If people go through gumtree.com usually they don’t need to sign rental lease but can drop out of the room with a weeks notice. Therefore you are not still paying for a room after you leave home.

Everything is calculated on weekly bases in Australia.

Books were around 100-150 AUD but I did not buy any books. I was rather lucky of choosing courses not as demanding about the books and the library has amazing facilities which I rented books when needed.

I had a plan of spending not exceeding 50 AUD every day. Some days you don't spend anything and others a lot so I'd say 50 AUD a day was quite reasonable. Food was similar to Iceland although you can be smart about everything. I found food markets around Brisbane weekly which were usually a lot cheaper with fresh produce than supermarkets. I almost never used public transport as I walked almost everywhere. Most people bought bicycles so not a lot of money was used for public transport. Like in everything it always depends on the person how smart you are with expenditures. I'd really recommend to just stay at a hostel the first week and meet other students and try together to find an accommodation.

The International Office

- Who is responsible for incoming exchange students?
 - Not quite sure about the name sorry but usually they have a lot of staff in the office and they all take good care of everyone.
- Did you receive good service from the office?
 - Amazing, I mostly spoke to a man called Benjamin Cox and he was very helpful with enquiries.
- Do you receive all relevant information?
 - Yes from QUT everything was really clean cut. As I received the acceptance letter a lot of information about the school and Brisbane followed.

Exchange promotion

- What kind of activity did you take part in to promote exchange studies at your host university?
 - As I did not bring any material from RU it was hard to do anything except being myself and telling people about the school and country.

Social Activities

Most of my friends were exchange students and I made really good friends. Australia is very laid back and stress free country and most people there are very helpful and friendly. The students guild of QUT has a huge range of organizations and social clubs ranging everything from QUT Running Club to acting, climbing, surfing or Exchange Buddies.

The exchange office started by having few gatherings and one big party boat trip in the beginning of the semester. Then just at the end they had a goodbye party. I participated sometimes in the actions of the social clubs although I did not partake a big part in their work itself. I made good friends and we travelled or did things our own way. Just depends on what everyone is up for. I had many friends that were really active in the sports community or the climbing club.

Culture and Language

- Did you have any language problems with the faculty or other students?
 - Never, English is everywhere.
- How are the possibilities to experience the country and the culture?
 - Quite big. Just depends on yourself what you do. On campus is an art gallery and a lot of museums around Brisbane.
- Any recommendations for students?

Cultural and Social Effects from the Exchange Experience

- How do you think the exchange experience will affect you from a cultural and social point of view?
 - Meeting people from different backgrounds and with different beliefs from yourself is really maturing. I shared the company of people much unlike my friends and family in Iceland which I believe is one of the most developing phase for a person. Open mind can get you really far in whatever one decides to

partake. Meeting different people from all over the world really opens ones mind and perspectives.

- How do you think the exchange experience influences your future career possibilities?
 - This question is not easily answered but my best bet would be of my knowledge of Australian system, international connections, social skills and open mind gained from the whole experience.

III ACADEMIC INFORMATION

The Teaching situation

- In which language are the courses taught?
 - English.
- How would you evaluate the level of study in relationship to the level at RU?
 - I would say that the standards are quite similar. I used the same textbooks for two of my units that were the same in RU. Although the workload was a lot less in QUT which I felt was much better to have more oversight of your studies. In QUT there were difficult assignments both practical and theoretical but rather than having assignments every week they were every other week. Be aware that this is my perspective, someone else could feel differently about their units.
- Is the teaching primarily practical or theoretical?
 - The teaching was a mix of practical and theoretical. They also had workshops which were either oriented like RU has assignment classes or some extra material to help gaining understanding.
- Are the professors using cases, group work or lectures (or a mix)?
 - Different between units but mostly mixed. Lectures always in larger groups but in units that had a smaller group some case studies and group works were integrated.
- How is the workload compared to that at RU?
 - The workload was a lot less. I'd say the workload in RU is really inhumane without sounding dramatic. In QUT the teachers respect personal life and schoolwork can be looked at as a typical 9-5 workday. Of course sometimes the workload increased but never in that kind of way that you ever felt that you could possibly not finished everything which is a feeling that far too often is quite familiar in RU.
- How is the relationship between faculty and students?
 - Depending a lot on the lecturer just like in RU. Some were very interested in integrating students in all kinds of activities connected to the faculty, others not.
- What is the relationship between the students in the classroom?
 - Depending on the lecturer, some integrated students a lot in participating in either calculating or some discussions others did not.

Required reading

- Was all required reading in English?
 - Yes.
- Is the reading material used for detailed knowledge or a broad overview?
 - I'd say both. Depending on units but reading material usually echoed the lecture material. As always more knowledge is just an advantage but attending lectures and workshops could be considered enough work on your behalf in gaining basic knowledge. As said above depending on the units.
- Were examinations based on the reading or on the lectures?
 - Both as in RU.

Exams

- Please describe what types of exams were you given?
 - Two exams had multiple choice and written/calculated examples. One was mostly calculated examples and TRUE/FALSE questions. One was an essay exam in which we got 6 different topics and had to write about 3 of them. One page written in computer for each question. This exam was open for 3 days and was a take home exam from a legal unit.

Other

- Do students have easy access to the library and its resources?
 - Yes, the library has really good facilities with computers and endless material of reading.
- How is the access to the computers?
 - Easy, almost computers/computer rooms in every building on campus.
- How is IT used in the teaching or as a distributor of information?
 - **Every lecture is recorded as it is mandatory for all lecturers/professors.** On the QUT virtual similar to RU Intranet all lecture material is stored along with lecture recordings. I had one IT unit where most people brought their own computers although some computers were available in the rooms.

Description of Courses

- Comments: Relevance, Difficult/easy, Practical/theoretical, Enrolment problems
- All the units were 7,5 ECTS. Automatic control and Physics of the very small are basically the same units as Reglunarfræði and Eðlisfræði III in RU. Health legislation was a legal unit which was 50% legal concerns of a medical personnel in the Common-law system as in Australia, Canada and UK. But 50% were regulations and regulatory bodies around the world ranging from CE mark, FDA, ISO, and of course the Australian regulatory system for medical devices.

Example:

<u>Course name:</u>	<u>Prereq.</u>	<u>Exam</u>	<u>Major at RU</u>	<u>Approved as</u> (Common/elective/extra)
<i>Automatic Control</i>	<i>Calculus</i>	<i>Written/Calc</i>	<i>Engineering</i>	<i>Common/Mandatory</i>
<i>Physics of the very small ---</i>		<i>Written/multip.Choice</i>	<i>Engineering</i>	<i>Common/Mandatory</i>
<i>Health Legislation in Medical environment –</i>		<i>Written exam</i>		<i>Biomedical Eng. Elective</i>
<i>Databases</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Multip.choice</i>	<i>Engineering/IT</i>	<i>Elective</i>

Any other experiences you would like to talk about?

Australia is an amazing country and people that go for exchange semester are amazing people. Really eye opening experience and widens one perspective of the world. Brisbane is a great place to be located in Australia as it is located on the central east coast and close to many amazing places to visit and explore.

Names and e-mails:

If any student has any more enquiries please contact me and I will be happy to give some more detailed explanation.

Gísli Grímsson

Email: gisligrim@gmail.com

Phone: +354-6930077

Facebook.com/grimsson