

First Name: Marshal Wiebe  
Institution: University of Lethbridge  
Academic Discipline: Management  
Where did you work abroad (city, country): Banda Kyandazza, Uganda  
When did you go abroad: March 28  
Which work term (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.): 3<sup>rd</sup>



1. What motivated you to seek out an international work term?

I was actually scheduled to complete a volunteer experience with Buiga Sunrise in Uganda before I knew I would be doing a Co-op with them. I had been interested in doing international development work for some time, and wanted to gain experience on the ground to see if it was something I would be interested in doing for a living.

2. How did you fund the travel and other costs associated with this opportunity?

I originally paid for all the costs out of pocket, but eventually recouped these costs when I was granted the Louis Sherman Turcotte Award and ConocoPhillips Cooperative Education Award.

3. Can you tell me what steps you took to secure your co-op position? Did you feel it was hard to secure your co-op position and how would you advise other students to make the same effort?

As mentioned above, I was actually scheduled to complete a volunteer experience with Buiga Sunrise in Uganda before I knew I would be doing a Co-op with them. When I realized I might be able to complete the volunteer experience as a Co-op, I spoke to the Co-op office and they helped me to make it happen. I just needed to bring in a list of the activities I would be doing, go through a risk assessment analysis, and then get the ok from the Co-op office.

4. When conducting your job search did you find that many of the jobs available were in specific sectors? (ie: corporate, non-profit, government, etc.) Where, or how, would you suggest other students focus their search?

I did not conduct a job search, as I already had my position at Buiga Sunrise before I decided to use the position for a Co-op term.

5. Tell me about the cost of living in (city or country). How did your expenses compare to your income based on the salary you were earning? Were you able to save any money and where did you find savings or discounts which reduced your expenses?

I did not receive a salary from Buiga Sunrise – I was there as a volunteer. My cost of living in Uganda was pretty minimal compared to what it would be at home though. My accommodation was free. Food was generally less expensive there than it is at home, and my only other expenses were my mobile phone and public transportation – both of which were less than they would be at home.

6. How did you find accommodations and what rent can you expect to pay in (city or country)?

Accommodation was provided by Buiga Sunrise.

7. What, if any, cultural barriers did you have to overcome and what were some of these challenges?

Although English is the primary language in Uganda, the way people use English does not always translate between cultures. At times I would need to attempt several different ways at communicating one idea just to get thoughts across. I did learn a bit of the local language, but mostly just enough to greet people in passing.

Also, because I was in a foreign culture, I needed to be open to learning about and at times embracing different customs and social mores. One custom I was challenged by on occasion was the custom of always accepting gifts when they are given. Gifts are often given in the form of food, which meant that I would often eat when I wasn't hungry or didn't like the food. It may not sound like a big challenge, but repeating it over and over for four months made it harder each time I did it!

8. Did you find it difficult to meet new people? What steps did you take to integrate yourself into your new surroundings and make yourself more comfortable in a new setting?

The Director of Buiga Sunrise is a friend of mine from my home town, and I have known her for almost twenty years. Because I trust her, to become comfortable and integrate myself into the new surroundings, I started by trusting the people she trusts. From there I expanded my own social network typically by having

conversations openly with people I met, going to church services and travelling occasionally to tourist destinations with people I had already come to know and trust.

I also responded to the requests of others to spend time with me. It was easy to meet people because so many people wanted to meet me. Being the only white person in the community, I fostered curiosity in many locals, and they often approached me to spend time together.

9. Overall, what advice would you give co-op students who are seeking international opportunities?

I would recommend that for some students it might be helpful to find Co-ops where there are other people from a similar cultural context. One of the biggest challenges I had was feeling isolated in my experience. Although I had the internet and my phone, and lots of people around me, I didn't have anyone around who could relate to exactly *how* I was experiencing what I was experiencing in Uganda. Some people might be fine on their own, but at times I felt like I would have been really happy to have had someone to thoroughly share and debrief with.

10. Is there anything else you want us to know about your experience?