

## St. Mary's Exchange Students Intrigued with Sights and Sounds of Calgary



*Ivanna Tsiunyk (left) and Olena Maksymiv are studying at St. Mary's University for four months as part of an academic exchange with Ukrainian Catholic University.*

Two Ukrainian exchange students currently studying at St. Mary's University are experiencing Calgary as many locals do, commuting to and from school on public transit.

It is something of a contrast from what they are used to – a 15-minute stroll to classes in picturesque Lviv, Ukraine, where the 18-year-old students are studying social pedagogy at Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU).

But rather than finding their C-Train trips tedious, Ivanna Tsiunyk and Olena Maksymiv are intrigued with the multicultural sights and sounds of Calgary and the many people they are meeting on the way.

Once they arrive at their destination, they are warmly welcomed by members of St. Mary's close-knit academic community.

"We are very thankful for all the people who are welcoming us," says Ivanna. "It is such a surprise that everyone is so open and they are treating us very well."

The students are studying political science, psychology and theology as part of a formal academic, research and cultural exchange between the two Catholic universities. They are the second set of students to venture from Lviv to Calgary as part of the exchange program, which was established in 2010.

In keeping with St. Mary's and UCU's emphasis on community service, the students will be volunteering at a senior's residence and a school during their four months in Calgary. They are also looking forward to participating in campus life and making friends among their fellow students.

"We like our professors very much and they are offering their help to us," said Ivanna. "At our university, the professors also offer their help."

Students participating in the exchange must display proficiency in English and a strong desire to explore other cultures. "UCU wants every student to go abroad and to have an international experience," Olena said. "It opens doors to the world."

The students are quick to encourage Canadian students to consider studying at their alma mater. "We would like to tell St. Mary's students that UCU has a (summer) program where they can study our culture, make Ukrainian food, wear Ukrainian costumes and learn Ukrainian songs."

"We are delighted that Olena and Ivanna have quickly embraced so many opportunities to engage with St. Mary's University's program and activities," said Dr. Linda Dudar, Dean of Education and a leader in the StMU-UCU exchange program.

"In addition to their classes and service learning projects, they have also had opportunities to interview faculty, meet special guests and be involved with liturgical activities with both Ukrainian Catholic parishes in Calgary," she said.

"They truly want to learn as much as they can – something we seek to provide for all of our students."

Ivanna and Olena say they appreciate the support they have received, because this is the first time that they have been so far away from home.

After celebrating Holy Supper with their families on Ukrainian Christmas Eve (January 6), they set off on a 16-hour journey to Canada, the first time either of them had been on an airplane. Skype visits with their families every morning and the kindness of their host family have helped stave off homesickness.

Their Canadian hosts have already taken them to Banff and Edmonton. Other highlights include eating at a Chinese restaurant and having coffee at Tim Hortons and Starbucks. Which of the two coffee mega-chains were they most impressed with? The students agree that Tim Hortons is the best. True Canadians, at heart!

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