

## **GEAR webpage**

### **Interested in a one-month English language and cultural program at Canada's most innovative university?**

General English at Renison (GEAR) is a Canadian immersion experience program which runs at Renison through the University of Waterloo. The program offers a 4-week English language and immersion program each year that runs 8 monthly sessions throughout the year (excluding June, July, August, and December.) General English at Renison (GEAR) is an intensive English immersion program that provides students with general English skills that helps them adjust easier to the Canadian lifestyle and learn more about the local culture here. This program runs eight sessions throughout the year for each month excluding the summer months and December. Throughout the duration of the GEAR program, students will be in class for 20 hours per week learning, listening, reading, writing, practicing grammar and speaking skills in a multicultural environment. Students will also get an opportunity to engage with local Canadian students and experience what life is like in Canada throughout their time here.

Through partnerships with other universities in the world, GEAR offers customized programming for certain universities, and university partnerships.

### **Interested in experiencing entrepreneurship and innovation first-hand in the heart of Canada's Silicon Valley?**

If you are passionate about entrepreneurship and innovation, and intend on improving your English communication skills for everyday conversation, and perhaps even in a business setting, GEAR is the perfect program for you! Located in the center of Canada's very own Silicon Valley, Waterloo's GEAR program offers you an immersive experience of the resources and facilities available for students and the community at Canada's most innovative university. The programming functions just like an actual gear in the way that gears function mechanically, the GEAR program teaches you the mechanics of the English language, and gears are usually used to represent the STEM field. As a student in GEAR, you will also be able to explore the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) faculties at Waterloo, and experience life on campus as a student here. You will get to see how we implement our innovative and entrepreneurial features into our faculties through the different tours you will go on to different faculties. The activities that students participate in all have an innovative aspect to them, and teaches them both entrepreneurial and leadership skills that they can use in their academic life, as well as for bringing future potential ideas to life.

### **Interested in learning more about Canadian culture?**

One special feature of GEAR is its exclusive Canadian Culture course, in which you will learn about the Canadian culture, values, and traditions, and gives you an immersive experience to what life is like in Canada. The Canadian culture course is reflective, comparative, and student-led. This course gives you the opportunity to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between your culture and Canadian culture, and you will get to analyze those differences in class. The course is student-led in the sense that your teachers will customize the course content to suit your interests, so that you can explore the topics that you want to learn more in-depth. The nature of the classroom context makes the learning environment a unique place, because you will be learning English in an English language environment, with other international students. Through taking this course, you can deepen your

knowledge and experiences on Canadian culture as you get to participate in activities related to class materials.

### **What's so special about GEAR?**

The GEAR program provides more integration between classes and activities, so that activities are connected to and reflect the material being taught in class. As a student of GEAR, you will learn from qualified and experienced teachers who customize the academic programming to suit your interests, so that you can make the best out of the program. There are no more than 20 people per class, which means that you will receive lectures, classes and instruction in a highly personalized environment. You will also have an opportunity to participate in related local, community-based cultural activities. The purpose of these events and activities is to engage you in the language learning process beyond the traditional classroom, while simultaneously increasing your knowledge of Canadian culture.

Students often get to do activities that relate to the concepts they have learned in class. For example, if you learn about ice hockey, you will have the chance to go skating in an ice rink, to get a true Canadian experience. If you are interested in learning about the history of the Indigenous peoples, you will have the chance to visit the Waterloo Aboriginal Education Centre to learn about the Indigenous peoples and the role they played in Canadian history. Then you can reflect on your experience of doing the activity and write about what you have learned. Your GEAR classes will help you strengthen your English communication skills through reading, writing, and oral communication classes, to provide you with a foundational base for further learning.

### **What about entrepreneurship and innovation?**

The program has a special focus on entrepreneurship and innovation in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. During your time in GEAR, you will have plenty of opportunities to go on trips and excursions to organizations and companies in the local area to get a taste of what innovation and entrepreneurship means here. Some trips that students have gone on in the past include the Toyota plant, where students learned about the car manufacturing process, Shopify headquarters, to understand Canadian e-commerce culture, and Velocity, where they explored the University of Waterloo's very own start-up incubator. We have also had innovation tours where you can visit Communitech and the Velocity garage to learn more about entrepreneurial resources and facilities available in the community. Both the Entrepreneurship Society and the Conrad Centre have held events for students in the past to promote entrepreneurship and innovation in Waterloo.

Previous students have gone on a tour to explore Waterloo's Stratford campus, so they get to see our Global Business & Digital Arts building and facilities, and what the program offers. At Stratford, you may even get the chance to put your problem-solving skills to the test and determine a solution for a problem. They have also participated in the Great Amazing Math Challenge, which was a problem-solving workshop that we held in collaboration with the Centre for Math and Computing. Generally, you will be able to see the different facilities and resources of what the Waterloo region offers and what happens at the University of Waterloo. They have also gone to our Design Centre so they get to meet the student design teams that are doing things like building concrete canoes and other social events for them to meet other students.

Our program is very diverse in the way that GEAR tries to involve students with native speakers as much as possible, so you can get plenty of practice using your conversational skills. We offer conversation lunches and other social activities, so you will have plenty of opportunities to interact with Canadian students. Being in GEAR is unlike learning in a regular ESL environment, because during your time here, you are exposed to a stronger focus on language, and you are learning in an English language environment with other international students. We are also able to pair you up with our BSW and MSW students through our program facilities, which is beneficial for both of you. By pairing you with our BSW and MSW students, you are able to benefit from being able to practice your conversational English, and our domestic students can add the interactions to their extra-curricular activities as part of their degree requirements. We have systems in place to facilitate these conversations with native speakers, and the programming is more STEM focused.

### **How is STEM at Waterloo?**

Since Waterloo is very focused on the STEM field, many activities in the program will be related to STEM, such as a tour of our faculty of engineering. Previous students have participated in an Engineering Society Q&A discussion before, to meet current engineering students and talk about what student life is like in Waterloo. You will have the opportunity to explore our other faculties as well. To be in such an innovative learning environment, and learning to embrace different cultures is a great learning opportunity that would be really hard to find elsewhere.

Since Waterloo has established partnerships with universities around the world, some universities send groups of students for the GEAR program. Thus, each month's activities and program duration vary, because we develop different programming for each university group that comes in, to suit their individual needs. Each university that comes for GEAR works with Renison to determine the timeline that they are coming, to help dictate what kind of events and activities the students get to go on. For example, we had a group from Chile come in, who wanted to tour the STEM facilities of Waterloo, and we have students come from China and Japan.

### **Where will I get to go on trips?**

We have had trips to Niagara Falls, visited a board game café, and shopped at Fairview Mall. On Valentine's Day, students made Valentine's cookies in the cafeteria, so that they can experience more Canadian traditions. GEAR is packed with trips and activities, so there is something that will suit your interest. The schedule of activities and events are to help you discover what your favourite part of Canadian culture is, and ensuring you get the best out of that experience.

### **The benefit of being in GEAR...**

Being able to study in a classroom that is multicultural and very diverse, so you know you'll be practicing your English with people from different cultures. The benefit of the diversity is that since English is the common language between cultures, we encourage you to speak to your classmates in English to communicate. You will have a blast learning at Canada's most innovative university.