



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Virginia
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 2019
Otago degree(s)	LLB, BA
Major(s)	Law and politics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
American political tradition	English	100 level POLS	
Foreign policy of the powers	English	100 level POLS	
Politics of Western Europe	English	200 level POLS	
Comparative political parties	English	300 level POLS	
Acting I	English	100 level ARTS	
			Total 72 points

Any comments about these papers?

Before coming to UVA I hadn't done any 300 level POLS papers, but I didn't find this to be an issue in taking the higher level papers at UVA. I found the American Political Tradition paper the hardest, and I think the issue was that I did not grow up learning about the foundations of America. The acting paper was really fun and not academically intensive which I liked. Papers are called courses/classes here, and when you talk about papers they mean essays. Tutorials are called "sections".

There is a lot of adding/dropping at the start of the semester, so if you really want to do a particular paper definitely take a chance on the waitlist, and try talking to the lecturer as well to try and get into the class. Lecturers are called "Professor [last name]", don't call them by their first name.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

Participation was 15-20% of all my papers. In big lectures this was done through tutorials, and in lectures under 20 people you were expected to participate in discussion during the lectures. It was very difficult to participate without doing the readings, and I found that the majority of the class would do the readings. The workload is spread out over the semester, with final exams only being around 30%, and spread out over just 1.5 weeks, and it is common to have a research paper instead of an in-class exam.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

UVA encourages the IRC, but more exchange students don't stay there than do. There was a few flatting options on University of Virginia (UVA) Housing, Sublets & Roommates facebook group, and I also made a profile on the official university housing roommate website where a couple of people contacted me. Housing is very expensive around uni at least, I was paying double what I would pay in Dunedin, and I was sharing a room here. I would definitely recommend flatting rather than the halls, as the cooking situation was a lot easier (didn't have to buy my own plates and utensils). Some houses are quite old, but in general they are heated unlike Dunedin. Quite a few exchange students were in Lambeth, which is a flatting style hall, which is also a good option. Flatting also meant that I got to meet a lot of Americans which was cool. If you want to flat I would recommend as close to the Corner as possible.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

My rent was \$580 USD per month, and utilities another \$60. My flights from Auckland to Charlottesville cost \$1400 NZD, however I only booked them two months in advance. Medical insurance cost \$410 USD, it has to fit UVA requirements. Some halls require a food plan, and these are quite expensive. Alcohol is really cheap, and get the store cards at the supermarkets as they will save you money. As I was doing a second exchange I wanted to save my money as I had previously travelled in the US. The cost of spring break really depends on what you decide to do, and some people also do "beach week" after exams.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Because I was flatting I opened a US bank account, which was really easy at Bank of America. I took over \$700 USD in cash with me, and also had a debit card and an Air NZ Onesmart card. Once I opened the bank account I transferred my money into it, and did a second transfer halfway through the semester. Having a US account is the best way to go, as it means you can also get Venmo, which is like internet banking, and very popular with the Americans.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

You need a J1 visa, which the process for is a hassle. Linda, the exchange co-ordinator at UVA was super helpful with any questions I had. If you want to leave the country mid exchange (eg Spring Break) you need to get this signed off by the exchange office as well.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

The university has specific requirements for health insurance, and I couldn't find any NZ insurance that fit the requirements. I emailed Linda about this as well, and she gave a few options that were significantly cheaper than the default UVA insurance.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

If you come for the US semester one (NZ semester two), you will be able to sign up for many different activities, but US semester two has less options as it is halfway through the year. I joined the Outdoors Club which was a good way to get out and explore the surrounding areas of Charlottesville. They offer heaps of trips that you can sign up for through the semester, including

different activities like hiking, mountain biking and rock climbing, and also have heaps of gear that you can borrow.

There is a buddy program, which runs a couple of events, so I would recommend signing up but other than that exchange students are left to themselves.

What was the university/ city like?

The city is quite small, only 50,000 people including 20,000 students. To get around, the Uni has a free bus system, and the city also has a bus system which you can use for free with student ID. I did most of my shopping at Barracks mall as it was easy to get to on the bus. They also have Uber, Lyft, Lime, and Bird to get around.

The University has many old buildings which look very similar, and I would be careful when selecting classes that you have time to get from one to another. There are multiple gyms, including an aquatic centre, and you are never far from a Starbucks.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

The Corner, which is where the bars/restaurants are, on the corner of 14th St and University Ave. Survivor hour at The Biltmore is really popular, and try meet frat guys so that you can go to frat parties. Shenandoah and Monticello are interesting places to visit. Being in Charlottesville, DC and New York are not far too far away.

Any tips for future students?

If you want to be friends with Americans, I would recommend flattery, and joining clubs. It is very easy to become friends with exchange students because exchange students are trying to make friends, whereas Americans already have friends.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

Undoubtedly the highlight of my exchange was when UVA won the National Basketball Championship, and everyone went insane. Fall semester is football season, and spring is basketball season. These two sports are the most popular at UVA, and it is a great atmosphere to go and watch a game in the student section. UVA is known as a party school, and it is common to go to both bars and frat parties. Being under 21 isn't really an issue, but it is definitely more convenient to be 21+, and this also means you can rent cars.

I would definitely encourage anyone to give everything a go, and really put yourself out there to make the most of your exchange. Everyone is intrigued by the New Zealand accent (although most people thought it was British). I went Texas which was very different to Charlottesville, and I also went to a rodeo which was an interesting look into US culture. Charlottesville is very liberal and not very religious which makes it more similar to Dunedin than other parts of the US would be. Everyone I met was so welcoming and willing to help with anything, Charlottesville is such a lovely place to live. If you are thinking about going on exchange to UVA or somewhere else, you absolutely won't regret it. (There's a reason people who go on exchange can't stop talking about it.)

Rotunda



Basketball game



Rodeo



The Corner after UVA won the basketball final

