



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Texas Austin
Semester & Year of Exchange	S2 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts (Hons)
Major(s)	History

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
The Revolution will be Dramatized	English	THEA 100 level	13.5pts each
Women of Colour in Feminism	English	GEND 300 level	
An Introduction to Old Testament Studies	English	BIBS112	
Latin America in the 19 th Century	English/Spanish	Span 300 level	
			54pts total = 3 x 18pt Otago papers.

Any comments about these papers?

There wasn't a lot of difference between the work load for the higher level papers and lower level papers. I would recommend taking higher level papers because in my experience the content was more interesting and the expectations are pretty similar. I took these papers because they did not have similar equivalents in the Otago departments, this was a big bonus to my exchange as it fed my academic curiosity and broadened my degree.

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

Class discussion is a major part of the UT arts papers. This was certainly a positive. I found the classes themselves very engaging and the teaching excellent. However the US Arts syllabus is less geared to developing research skills and independent inquiry. They assign daily, often menial, homework tasks for each class. They also hyper-direct the way you should write assignments/essays with rubrics which comprehensively break down each piece of the work. It seems to limit creativity and I found this ridged instruction very frustrating. The grade boundaries at UT are higher than Otago. While I was there my work load was certainly higher than Otago in terms of regular

homework but also the expectations from teaching staff seemed to be lower, i.e the marking was more generous as long as you kept up with the constant work load.

Accommodation

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

I lived in Avalon which was a house from Inter-Cooperative Council Austin. I really recommend living in one of their co-ops. There were 22 people in the house, we shared meals together five nights a week and while the most of the rooms were private singles there was a lot of common space in the house and someone was always around. The rent was \$790 USD (1100NZD) a month which included communal groceries and all other bills. This was 100% the best place to live. The downside was you need to have a strong do it yourself attitude as no one is “in charge” per say, this made moving in a bit stressful. The plus sides were many, mostly I made great friends here (mostly Texan but some international students also), we did different fun things at the weekend and even road tripped around the state together. Because we don’t have co-ops at Otago, living in this was on exchange is a must.

Money matters

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

Air NZ have cheaper direct flights AKL – Houston go on sale every so often so definitely always be on the lookout for these. I did this and I think my round trip ended up being \$2000NZD. I did not have to get a visa but I did need health insurance which was \$1100USD. The main out going cost was rent, and it was much easier to organise my finances when rent was all inclusive. There were a number of unexpected costs that I should have budgeted eg. Basic furnishing for my room from op shops, uber rides to-from airports, textbooks!! (I have 14 required/recommend across 4 courses). There is lots of really yummy food which is easy to spend money on, plus you have much easier access/better variety to consumer goods in the states, so it can all get a bit expensive fast. If your visa allows (I am a US citizen so was ok) it is really easy to get a job. I worked at the university swim centre for \$9 USD/hr which comprised mostly of sitting at the front desk doing my homework and answering visitor questions.

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

This was a bit tricky. I planned to use my air nz One Smart card but this wasn’t always accepted if places had older eftpos machines. It’s pretty easy to set up a US bank account and although they don’t advise it if you are there less than 6 months this seemed to me to be the best option. I got a college checking account with Chase. Be warned US banking is lightyears behind NZ in terms of accessibility eg. Making transfers takes days and you can’t send someone money without their account being validated first.

Visas & Insurance

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

No, I am a US citizen.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes. I had Blue Shield Health insurance plan, local friends affirmed it as relatively good value at \$1100USD and it was easy to use. Thankfully I only had to use it twice but it is important to carry your card around with you just in case.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

I played rugby with the UT team this was an awesome atmosphere and helped me see many of the different colleges all over the state. I really recommend joining a sports team, I think I would have had a hard time making friends outside of the house without the rugby crowd.

Also Texas and Mexico are closely intertwined and it is worthwhile attending events celebrating the Latinx history or exploring the challenges of this bicultural state.

They are not well advertised but it would be worth checking public lectures.

What was the university/ city like?

The university is big. This is kind of frustrating with all the layers of bureaucracy but also awesome because it is a really lively campus with so many things to choose from. The city is wonderful, but there is no way you can explore all of it's corners and neighbourhoods. The food is a highlight. The bus is free with UT id so make the most of it and explore. I liked going downtown to the brand new central public library, huge Zilker Park and arts events in the city.

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

Make time to get to see some of the state parks. They are amazing. I wish I did more of this!!

Eat Mexican food. This has to be as good as it gets outside of actual Mexico. I visited San Antonio and that was the best food I've had in my life. Also for food trucks try Arlo's and Cerviche.

Get stuck into the local politics, Austin Texas is a real interesting progressive capital of a conservative state. It is worthwhile paying attention to what is happening there and trying to understand some of the issues driving people.

Any tips for future students?

Make friends with some Texans and get them to show you the more rural parts of the state. Don't believe for a second international snobbery about Texans only loving Jesus and Guns or whatever else. This did not come from nothing, but there is much more to Texas and if you enter with an open mind, ready to ask lots of questions, Texas will surprise, enchant and delight you.

Overall Experience

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

My exchange at UT Austin in Semester 2 2018 brought some of the highest points of my degree. I took classes that are not offered at Otago (eg. African Diaspora and Latin American studies) and was able to broaden my academic horizons with this. I found the teaching to be a very good standard,

although the homework tasks sometimes appeared pointless. The best things about my exchange were living in a co-op, playing with the UT rugby team and campaigning for Beto during the 2018 midterms. I lived slightly out of the way in North Campus with a beautiful co-op family of 21 other students from UT and Austin Community College. This was really fun, we cooked fabulous dinners together, I made really good friends and overall felt part of a community. We lived within 10 mins walk of two great public parks, where we sometimes played kickball on Sunday afternoons. The rhythm of my exchange was lots of just hanging out in our common room (movie nights, board games etc), a fair bit of school work, a part time job, great food, exploring Austin and following US politics with fascination. The election really dominated my day to day conversations and I became increasingly involved in the Senate campaign as a student volunteer. As a US citizen it was so good to finally feel part of some really exciting changes taking place, we even convinced our Congressman to back a Green New Deal!

Definitely make time for travelling Texas (especially towards the border) but also take time to relax and enjoy what Austin has to offer. It's an awesome city, which you get to be both a comfortable resident and an excitable visitor in. I do not at all regret choosing Austin as my exchange destination!!

Pictures top from left: UT Rugby team, Cathedral of Junk Austin, River Walk San Antonio

Bottom from left: trip to Chicago, Avalon Co-operative, Austin street art.

