



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Bristol
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 and 2 from 2018 to 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Sociology major, Tourism minor

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
SOCI20059 East Asian Societies	English	Sociology	18
SOCI20075 What is a Society?	English	Sociology	18
SOCI30091 Gender and Migration	English	Sociology	18
SOCI30082 Nations and Nationalism	English	Sociology	18
SOCI30062 Perspectives on Power	English	Sociology	18
ENGL29026 Darkest London	English	Arts	18

Any comments about these papers?

I enjoyed every one of them. I found all sociology papers are very high level and deep and lectures and seminars are very interesting since the content and level are very advanced. It was absolutely a valuable opportunity for me to have been able to study sociology in University of Bristol.

However, I had issues with class registration. Bristol told me that I could not take the papers I submitted in my application, even though I applied at very early stage (within a couple days when the application was opened). I had to negotiate with them via emails since my graduation at Otago would be delayed if I could not register in those papers. In the end, they told me to just come to Bristol and they cannot guarantee anything about class registration for me until I come to Bristol. It eventually turned out okay, but I was very worried and disappointed with this. Also, I was surprised after I arrived at Bristol to hear that many exchange students were in the same situation as me, and one of my flatmates decided to shorten her exchange after one semester because she could not register in the papers she needed.

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

At Otago, one paper in sociology includes two essay assessments and a final exam at the end of term. However, at Bristol, sociology papers usually have two essay assessments and one essay is short and 0% in the final grade. Instead, an essay at the end of term is worth 100%. Teaching style, including seminars, is very student-based. Although the number of assessment itself is less than Otago, a lot of readings is required each week (e.g. over 10 minimum readings each week and another 10 readings for optional). Therefore, students can access many resources and pick up information in areas of your interest. Essay questions are multiple choice such as 10 options so each student can choose and go deeper into what you are interested in. The contents and topics of discussion in seminars are very high level and I was surprised how enthusiastic and knowledgeable the other student were. Also, I liked the fact that the same professor teaches lecture and seminar in a paper since it helps the coherency throughout the paper.

Accommodation

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

University-owned accommodation

Pros

- The building itself is quiet so I was able to sleep at night (even though it was near the area where a lot of pubs gather so it sometimes got noisy at certain times in a week)
- My room has a very nice view, facing the river and trees.
- The accommodation was in the city centre so I did not have any trouble with shopping and going out with friends.
- The staff at the reception is very nice and kind.

Cons

- The washing machine is often out of order and hard to use, and there is only 5 of them in the entire building of 7 or 8 stories
- It is fixed-term contract so I needed to pay until the end of my contract even though I moved out one and a half months before.

Money matters

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

Accommodation fee is very expensive

I needed to fly to Osaka from my hometown to go to Visa office to apply for visa and I paid over 1000 dollars including the flight tickets and application fee in total.

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

I used Cash passport until I opened a bank account with Barclays, which has a good reputation for international students. I originally opened an account with Monzo, an online bank which is very popular among British and international students. You can open a Monzo account by just filling in the form online and uploading your video on Monzo app and the bank card arrives in 3 days. You can use ATM free in other European countries so many of international friends have Monzo card.

Visas & Insurance

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

I'm an international student at Otago, and I applied for the Tier IV visa (student visa) for my full year at Bristol. The process was very complicated, and it took me a lot of energy, time and money. The instruction book is over 100 pages but it was not clear. I struggled to find out exactly what documents I needed to prepare and submit. I wanted advice, but the UK visa centre does not accept personal questions at all. Only when you pay, they accept calls but do not answer questions for personal situations. Even when I went to the visa office in Osaka in Japan to submit my application and register my photo and fingerprint, they did not answer my questions at all, even though I asked the documents I prepared will be enough and I was not sure if I filled in the forms correctly. I was relieved when I got my visa, but I found the UK visa office very unkind.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

No

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Welcome party and other events for exchange students in orientation week.

I recommend the university societies and clubs, it is a good way to make friends.

What was the university/ city like?

University buildings are spread around the city centre, there is no clear 'campus'.

Bristol has a great fusion of beautiful nature and city vibe, which I really enjoyed.

There are many shops including, convenience stores and supermarkets on the way to university, so shopping was very convenient.

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

I loved just walking around the city or sitting on the parks with friends over drinks and food on sunny days.

Any tips for future students?

Apply for your visa as early as possible and do the readings to catch up discussions

Overall Experience

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

I had a great experience on exchange at Bristol. Studying sociology at Bristol was challenging, but very interesting. The papers were insightful and I was amazed by how intellectual and enthusiastic the students were. The Sociology professors were concerned with politics and international issues, since there are often complications in Europe, where countries are so close together. I learned a lot from professors and other students in lectures and discussions. Being from Asia, I don't have as much

historical knowledge on Europe. Discussions were hard for me to catch up on, but they were interesting and taught me a lot about the world. During my year at Bristol I learned from everyone, but I also had the opportunity to share my knowledge on Asian issues. This exchange of knowledge was extremely valuable and made me a better sociology student. In addition, the University of Bristol offers many unique papers. For instance, I didn't know that there was a field of sociology called animal sociology until I went to Bristol and I chose it as my essay topic. I also took a paper called 'East Asian Societies' focusing on Japan, China, and Korea. Learning about Asia from a British point of view was very interesting, and I would not have had this experience had not gone on exchange.

I met students from various countries and those strong friendship ties made my time at Bristol even more precious. I also visited 7 countries during the holidays, travel was both fun and intriguing.

Overall, I am 100% with my decision to go on exchange. It was not always easy and fun, but I grew as a student and as a person. I was lucky to have gone to the University of Bristol.

