

## University of California, Berkeley

### Semester 1, 2017 - BA (Politics)

Hi! If you are reading this and are not quite sure yet whether you should go on exchange...GO ON EXCHANGE! It's been said before, it's cliché and it's cheesy but without a doubt the 6 months I spent in California were the most incredible 6 months of my life. It's not an opportunity that you should pass up on! Obviously I am a particular fan of Berkeley and the USA. Pretty much up until applying for exchange in third year I had always been set on studying somewhere in Europe but in the end the chance to get an American college experience was too good to miss.

#### Admin

Choosing to go on exchange to the USA unfortunately means quite a bit of paperwork. This is the only downside of an American exchange but is completely worth it once it's sorted. The Exchange Office will tell you to get onto this early and they are right! If you get accepted into UC by the Otago Exchange Office, they will give you the information to then apply for three different UC campuses. When you apply for these campuses you write a wee spiel on why you want to go to the campus you have listed as your number one preference. It's only a short write up but definitely put plenty of thought into this as it plays quite a big role in campus assignments. In terms of all the visa stuff get it out of the way as early as possible. You have to go up to Auckland for an interview at the Consulate so just keep that in mind.

#### Housing

Getting housing in Berkeley is part of the admin. Housing in Berkeley and in the Bay Area in general is expensive (the average monthly rent is about \$1000 USD and you'll still probably be sharing a room with someone). The most obvious option for exchange students is International House. I-House is beautiful and their food is great but it's expensive and you end up sharing a room, in bunk beds. My recommendation is find friends who live there who can bring you over for meals but don't live there yourself.

The co-ops (co-operative living) are the way to go. Think of the co-ops like small halls without wardens/RAs, or as supersized flats. There are lots of different co-ops you can live in, some as small as 17 and some as large as 140. I am entirely biased towards CZ (or Casa Zimbabwe) because that is where I lived. CZ is home to 124 people and was the most amazing place to stay during exchange. It's crazy, overwhelming, kind of dirty and completely wonderful. It's also mostly filled with American students so it's definitely a more authentic experience. 😊. You'll end up sharing a room (with 1 or 2 other people) but this was an awesome way to meet people right from the start. There are of course other co-ops beside CZ. I made a few friends in Hoyt, which was a lot smaller (60) and female-identified only. Hoyt also seemed like a very cool (if slightly less wild) place to live, so there are lots of options out there for you if CZ doesn't sound like your style.

The co-ops are some of the most affordable places to live on campus (I think it works out to be about \$850 USD a month, including food and other utilities) so you need to get onto this quickly! If you are putting UCB as your first choice campus I would put yourself on the waitlist for the co-ops before you find out whether you've gotten Berkeley. Follow this link <https://www.bsc.coop/> to sign up. The only thing you lose if you don't end up at Berkeley is the \$25 registration fee.

#### Classes

Classes are another thing you should get onto early! There are lots of papers to choose from but the popular ones fill up pretty quickly so it's not like Otago where you can pretty much guarantee you will

get in to all of your classes. Paper selection is all done online through CalCentral (which you can access once UCB have emailed you about activating your student profile/account) on your personal login. It's quite a straightforward process and the Berkeley International Office (BIO) webpage has lots of info on how to do it if you get confused.

A few of the Otago student exchange experiences I read before sorting my papers recommended getting a bunch of papers signed off before I went to Berkeley but when I went to get them signed off by the Otago advisor in my department they told me to just pick my favourites and that we would deal with signing other papers off later if I needed. I ended up missing out on 3 of the 4 papers I had signed up for but the Exchange Office at Otago and my advisor were really relaxed about signing off extra papers for me via email so it didn't end up being a big deal at all.

The classes at Berkeley (as I'm sure you've read in all the other summaries) are amazing!! The lecturers and the GSIs (Berkeley's version of tutors) are so passionate and talented. Try to take classes that you wouldn't be able to get here. I'm a Politics student but ended up taking classes in the History and the Legal Studies departments as well because I had points that I could fill from any Arts department (depending on the content you might be able to credit some of the Legal Studies papers back as Politics ones). Legal Studies 185AC on the American prison system was super fascinating, as was my History paper on race relations in America (125B) and my Politics paper on the political economy of Israel (149S). I also ended up taking a decal to meet my course requirements. Decals are student run classes that are worth fewer credits. You definitely don't want to cram your timetable too much but if you can take a decal definitely do so. They are a bit less formal and there are so many different topics you can sign up for!

## **Money**

Just be warned (although don't let it stop you from applying!) the USA is expensive. The one cost I didn't anticipate before doing some research was health insurance. You need health insurance and University of California requires you to purchase their specific health insurance (SHIP). This was definitely the one thing that I was so reluctant/did not enjoy paying for (everything else was worth it). SHIP costs approx. \$2000 NZD per semester. You don't have the option of not getting it and obviously if something did go wrong it is great health coverage. I know some people who used it for dental check ups etc. just to make the most of it in some way.

## **Culture Shock**

Culture shock was not a massive thing at all for me or for other people I've talked to who were in the USA. That being said the best piece of advice I was given by a friend of mine who had been on exchange was to not stress out too much if I found that it took me at least 4 or 5 weeks to feel totally settled and at home. Everybody is super friendly and lovely (Americans definitely get a bad rap), and living in a place like CZ made it easy to make friends, but it still definitely took a little bit of time to feel completely comfortable.

## **Travel**

I did most of my travel in the 2 weeks I spent in the US before the semester started and then in the 2 months that I spent there after the semester ended, but I also went away for a week during spring break and had a couple of weekend trips away.

Technically once the semester ends your J-1 student visa only authorises you to be in the USA for another 30 days. But if you are like me and want to travel for longer there is a pretty easy fix. I left the

USA a couple of days before my visa expired and went up to visit my brother in Canada. I spent about a week in Canada and then came back into the US for another month. All you need to do before you re-enter the US is apply for an ESTA online. It's a pretty simple, stress-free process!

The USA is HUGE. This seems like an obvious statement but I definitely overestimated how much I would be able to see. I still managed to see quite a lot though and it is honestly amazing how different each place and each state is to the next. Make the most of being in California! It is a beautiful state. Would 100% recommend road tripping down the Pacific Coast Highway and making lots of stops along the way in places like Pismo Beach, Santa Barbara and San Diego (if you make it that far). Would also 10/10 recommend heading to Napa Valley, Yosemite or Lake Tahoe.

There are way too many highlights from my time in the USA but some of my favourites outside of Cali would be New Orleans, Las Vegas, Washington DC, and Portland. In terms of transport if you're travelling around the West Coast (Cali, Oregon, Washington and even up into the West Coast of Canada) Bolt Bus is an awesome and affordable option for travel! Greyhound is pretty good too. If you need to fly then Spirit Airlines is your best bet for cheap flights.

### To conclude...

It was super difficult writing this summary because there is so so much I could have said about my time away! I'm happy to be home now but Berkeley and the USA was a hard place to say goodbye to. I met the most amazing people, saw some incredible places and had an experience I could never have dreamed of having in New Zealand. If you have any questions feel free to email me at [menso437@otago.student.ac.nz](mailto:menso437@otago.student.ac.nz) 😊

### *UCB campus: Memorial Glade & the Campanile*

### *The roof of CZ; my fav place*



*Women's March, SF →*



*San Francisco*



*CZ with my roommates Alex & Jess*



*Yosemite*



*One of the many murals in CZ!*



*Red Rock Canyon, Nevada*

