



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	University of California, Berkeley
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Fall Semester, 2017
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Bachelor of Arts
<i>Major(s)</i>	Education (Psychology minor)

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Psychological Anthropology	English	General BA credits	18
Youth, Justice and Culture	English	General BA credits	18
Psychology and Law	English	General BA credits	18
Developmental Psychopathology	English	General BA credits	18

Any comments about these papers?

Psychological Anthropology - this paper was more on the philosophical side of psychology. It involved looking at racism and prejudice through a Freudian lens.

Youth, Justice and Culture - this paper was a great combination of sociology, anthropology, psychology and law all with a focus on children and youth around the world.

Psychology and Law - this paper would substitute for Psychology and Law at Otago. A very interesting course with a focus on US law, of course.

Developmental Psychopathology - this is like clinical psychology papers at Otago except with a focus on children. This paper has no direct equivalent at Otago but can count as a general psychology paper.

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

The only significant difference I noticed was the requirement of participation in classes. Participation counted as part of the overall grade and this generally required contributing in tutorials every week. The teaching style was similar, with lecturers up the front speaking to a powerpoint. There were tutorials each week to recap important information and add new content. The workload was similar, depending on the course.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in an apartment about 15 minutes walk from campus. Finding accommodation was one of the most difficult parts of organising my stay. There is limited university accommodation that is available for 6 months (most were for a year) and there is a shortage of university housing for American students, let alone international students. To find an apartment is a time consuming process and I would recommend being in the area to meet the people and look at the place to determine whether you want to live there. The apartment I found eventually was great and I shared a room which made it more affordable. In the Bay Area housing is expensive and rent is high which makes sharing a room both sensible and normal. The best thing about being in an apartment was the independence I had to do things like cook. The negative was having to put in extra effort to meet new people since I wasn't in a complex of some kind.

Money matters

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

Flights: flights to the USA, especially San Francisco or LA are a lot cheaper and there are deals every now and then. They are usually around \$1300 but can be more or less depending on sales.

Accommodation: is expensive in the Bay Area. I was paying USD \$750 a month. This equals to approximately \$250 NZD a week for a shared room. This was a standard price for a standard shared room in an apartment.

Visa: around \$500 NZD. There are several parts of this process and it could amount to more than this including postage costs.

Food: in the area I was in, I found that food was only slightly cheaper than in NZ but the portion sizes were twice the size! I would recommend asking for the rest of your meal to take away to last for another meal. It will be a lot cheaper then! I budgeted between \$50 and \$100 NZD a week for food which worked well.

Insurance: this added up fast. It totalled around \$2500 for the semester. \$500 for Southern Cross travel insurance (covering the complete travel time), \$2000 for compulsory university health insurance (covering just the semester). See more details below.

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

I did not set up a US bank account. Instead I had a Westpac account and because Westpac has an association with Bank of America, I was able to withdraw cash from Bank of America ATMS with no additional charge. Cash is widely accepted as a form of payment so this worked quite well. In making online purchases, or purchases that were too large to use cash, I used my debit card linked with a different bank that had a better exchange rate.

I also used an app called TransferWise which was able to electronically send money from my bank account to another persons in the States. This was how rent was paid and friends were repaid. This app is reliable and has minimal additional fees.

This worked well for me, however, it was becoming difficult towards the end. If you are planning on staying longer than 6 months, I would recommend setting up a bank account as it makes it a lot easier!

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, this is a long process so I recommend you get onto this as soon as possible. As you are an exchange student, you will be applying for the J-1 visa. Information on how to apply for a US visa in NZ can be found here: <https://nz.usembassy.gov/visas/how-to-apply-process/>. The US visa application process involves an 'interview' at the US embassy in Auckland. This must happen in person so be prepared to travel. There are a number of documents you MUST have for this interview.

Documents needed:

- DS-2019: To begin the process, you must have a DS-2019 which is supplied by the partner university. This will get sent to you once you have been accepted into the programme and is like a certificate of eligibility as it shows you are eligible to apply for an exchange visa. This is sent in the post which can take a while so include this in your calculations.
- DS-160: You must then complete the online DS-160 which is the first step in applying for the visa. This produces a confirmation page (with a barcode) that you must take to your interview.
- Passport
- Photo: like a passport photo but with slightly different specifications, this is for your visa
- SEVIS payment confirmation: SEVIS is the organisation that handles international students and these payments are what keep it running. It's like paying for them to organise your exchange status.
- Proof you are leaving the USA: they don't really want you to stay. You may need to provide proof that you are coming back to New Zealand. You could use return flights or you could show financial information that shows you have significant ties to NZ.

Once you have gathered your documents, pay the visa application fee and book an interview (online) as soon as possible. They can be quite busy and only certain times of the day are available. After the interview, they can take up to two weeks to be processed (sometimes longer if there are issues) so make sure this is organised well in advance of your departure. My visa interview was within 10 days of leaving NZ and this was very stressful (although it did come through in time).

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

The university had compulsory health insurance which covered the time at the university but there were times before and after the semester that I was travelling which this didn't cover. It also didn't cover my travel mishaps should they occur, like getting back home in an emergency. I had to purchase travel insurance which covered the rest of it (\$500, Southern Cross). I wasn't able to not use the university health insurance as they needed extensive proof of a good replacement insurance plan (this is because health care is not funded by the government but has to be paid for always by the patient - we have it good in NZ!) The university health insurance cost just over \$2000 NZD per semester!

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Berkeley has an excellent orientation which lasts a week. You are part of a group of other international and transfer (Americans who transferred from another college) students and there are activities and events all week that help you get to know the university (and American) culture and where to access all the resources.

There were always events on at International House which were fun and there were a couple of 'club days' where all the clubs had tables. Make the most of these and sign up to lots of things as they have more opportunities than at Otago. I took part in the Salsa club which was great. I had never done salsa and once a week they held a free class, then an open dance time after. They assumed you were beginner so it was ok :)

What was the university/ city like?

The university is an interesting mix of highly academic students who are taking subjects such as engineering and mathematics, and extremely liberal students who are taking political science. Berkeley was where the free speech movement was centred and this is still very much a large part of the culture there. It is one of the most multicultural universities in the USA and there are people from all kinds of backgrounds and beliefs.

Berkeley city is great, a quirky, relatively quiet area with a park just over the hills. It has a great mixture of everything you need but San Francisco is the place to go for shopping. Berkeley city (and the Bay area in general) has a good programme for the homeless - which is great - but this means there are a high number of homeless people. Many of these people are also mentally ill due to various factors. This can make certain areas unsafe.

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

Berkeley is very close to San Francisco and Oakland! There is a very good, easy to navigate, public transport system that can take you into Oakland or SF in 15-30 minutes (depending on time of day). There are lots of things to see in the Bay area, you only need to Google! I recommend the Golden Gate bridge, Muir woods, Chinatown, the shopping district, the Mission district (where you find the best Mexican food) and places like Yosemite, LA and the Grand Canyon are relatively close.

Any tips for future students?

Start the visa application process as soon as possible and don't let any time go before starting the next step. Also, finding housing is incredibly difficult. The co-ops are meant to be great to stay in so apply for those as soon as possible. Apartments are great too, the north side of campus is the safest and you may want to be in the area to see these in person. Be prepared to share a room!

Overall Experience

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

I had an amazing time on my exchange. It was great to do something independent, to go somewhere where I knew no-one and had to start making connections with people on my own. I met people from all over the world and from many different backgrounds and I have made many lifelong friends. Academically, it was great to have options of courses that are not offered at Otago or even in NZ and it was interesting to hear how the courses were related to US events and information. Going on an exchange gives you the chance to travel but also to stay in one place for long enough to actually become part of the community. Berkeley was a great place to study and meet people but it was also a great place to be to travel around California and the rest of the USA. I think the second semester is a perfect time to go as it means you are there for Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas - the USA do these holidays to the extreme!



