



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of California San Diego (UCSD)
Semester & Year of Exchange	Fall Quarter 2025
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Psychology

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
PSYC 169	English	300-level unspecified
PSYC 184	English	300-level unspecified
PSYC 145	English	300-level unspecified

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points 36 points

Any comments about these papers?

Psych 169 was a more cognitive science based, whereas PSYC 184 was behavioural economics and PSYC 145 was more language and cognitive based as well.

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

The workload was significantly easier, weekly quizzes made up almost half of the grades in some classes. The exams were worth a lot less, and the professors were very accommodating. Some classes the lowest result out of the two mandatory midterms and final exam would be dropped so you were guaranteed the best grade. The classes were also much more involved, a lot more discussion with the lecturer. However, the grade scale was much tougher and in order to achieve an A range grade you would need to be scoring 90 and up. A fail was sometimes a 60 or a 70 (it differed based on the class), so in that way it was a lot harder to do well.

Accommodation

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

I lived in International House (I-House) on campus which was a part of Eleanor Roosevelt College (ERC). I had to apply for this accommodation, which was a stressful process but made my life on exchange much more convenient. The campus is very large so there is still a lot of walking required to get around. However, we had access to lots of facilities and events hosted by I-house which made it a lot easier to make friends. Cons involve the price, which was a lot and you must purchase the meal plan which increased the price significantly. Living off campus would have been cheaper, and there were lots of close off campus options where lots of other exchange students lived if I-house is too much financial strain.

Money matters

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

I-house + Meal Plan = \$5400 NZD + Initial Payment I-House = \$764.94 NZD

Flights = \$1563.45 NZD (AKL to LAX and the from JFK to AKL) \$2800 NZD

Travelling whitening the states = \$4000 NZD

However this is very dependent as I did a lot of travelling throughout my quarter, it could definitely be cheaper. But also keep in mind California and especially San Diego is one of the richest and therefore most expensive cities in USA, so things like sales tax, food, coffee, fuel is more expensive here. \$1 NZD is around 0.55 cents in USD to a coffee is around \$14 NZD here. Be prepared for that, I was quite shocked.

Visa + Sevis Fee = \$323.75 NZD + \$377.53 NZD

Insurance = \$536 NZD

I waived the UC SHIP insurance as it was extremely expensive, and found another alternative which was supported by UC San Diego for international students called Student Medcover and it was significantly cheaper.

Otago Insurance = \$612.25 NZD

Student Safe Outbound. So UC San Diego didn't accept Student Safe Outbound so I needed an insurance for UoO and UCSD which was a shock but good to know for others going.

ESIM (Airlo) = \$86.93 for 20GB Data and 100 calls and 200 texts a month (x3)

Immunisations = \$405 NZD

UCSD was very strict about receiving all their required immunisations, some of which are not required in NZ, but I had to get them to do my classes otherwise they put hold on enrolment.

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

I originally used WISE which is free and very convenient. However, I quickly realised you will be transferring a lot of money from NZD to USD and transferring money to friends from travels etc. So I changed to REVOLUT which is very commonly used amongst exchange students. Its an app and very easy to register. It gives you a minimum limit a month of how much money you can exhale from currency to currency per month with no fees (although the fees aren't bad). You can apple pay money from you NZ card into revolt and exchange funds in seconds which was very convenient as in WISE you have to bank transfer and wait days. It's VISA/Debit so works online and in store. You can also get a physical card for about \$10 NZD (I managed without one). I loved it, it made my life a whole lot easier.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, I did. It was very tedious. The visa appointment has to be booked well in advance before getting a appointment date with the consular. You also have to pay a SEVIS fee before booking your appointment. And then. D-160 fee which is what you use to apply for the student VISA. After the appointment, it's easy. I also did have a special case as I was applying when Visa's where stopped and not being issued for a while due to the new social media vetting rule.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, I mentioned it above. UC SHIP. However, you can waive it and get your own insurance that is cheaper but they have a very tough criteria, they'd decline me a lot before I got into contact and they told me about Student Medicover which they partner with and it's much cheaper and more ideal for quarter only students.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There were so many! Endless opportunities, but unfortunately because it's a D-1 school a lot of sports were off the table, although there were social sports teams. A lot of clubs also only took students for a year. But Surf Club, Girls who Run, Betty Boarders and Trailblazers were some of my favourites a great way to meet people and explore! (Especially Trailblazers, they do lots of trips!) Also these clubs do a lot of open events like bonfires at the start of the Fall Quarter which is a great way to get the vibe of if you'd enjoy it and meet people (a lot of exchange students go)

What was the university/ city like?

Incredible! San Diego is one of the safest places in the US. It's constantly sunny and we are like a 10 minute walk from the beach and Glider port where the sunset is unreal! (I'll attach photos). The campus is the biggest UC campus and it's literally a city in itself, you could walk an hour and still be in campus. Because of that there are multiple shuttles running to make you to different parts of campus to make getting to class easier. We also got free public transport (bus and trolley) within SD as part of being a UCSD student. The campus is beautiful and has everything you'd need. They have a pub, a food court, cinema, diners, everything!

The dining halls are also very different it's more like restaurants there's a bunch who do different cuisines and you can order via an app and pick up food or dine in! They are spread all across campus so you can go wherever you want. Your student ID gets used like a debit card at these places.

There are also markets which are small grocery stores, you swipe your ID card, go in and grab whatever and walk out! They just somehow know what you grabbed and charge it off your dining dollars automatically, it's amazing!

You also have Triton cash which I would recommend choosing to have more of than dining dollars (I should have done that) because you can use that ANYWHERE like at Chik-fil-a, BJ's, Panda Express and to get merch at the bookstore!

SD is also very close to the Mexico border and the trolley takes you to the border if you want to do a trip. Close to Joshua tree (2hr drive) 2hrs away from LA!

It's amazing basically!

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

SO SO MANY! I mentioned a lot above but the Mexican food in San Diego is some of the best in the world and the only place better is Mexico itself. Because it's so close to the border the further south you go the better it gets!

I would recommend going to Joshua Tree and Big Bear Lake. If you are 21, Las Vegas is a 4 hour drive away and a perfect weekend getaway. Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Antelope Canyon and Horseshoe Bend is the perfect itinerary for a Thanksgiving trip! (I did it with friends in an RV).

Any tips for future students?

Say YES to everything. You can balance study and travel if you manage your time well. Go outside, the sun is incredible especially in Fall, the beach is right next to you and I'm pretty sure I watched every sunset I could and it never got old. I only just left SD and I miss it already so really do everything. You can be tired later, it goes too quick to sit around!

Overall Experience

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

I think I raved enough already, but it's incredible. I originally wanted to go to Europe but man am I glad I ended up in SD. The people really do make the place, so put yourself out there! My first night I knocked on everyone's doors in I-house to introduce myself (I would usually never do

something like that) and ended up meeting two of my now closest friends. I really grew more in these last 3 months than I have in the last few years. You are forced to be out of your comfort zone a lot, not knowing anyone, trying new things, meeting new people. It's truly amazing and my only regret is that I wasn't here longer. A quarter flew by and if I could have come for a year I would have. Saying goodbye is also awful but it's truly a experience like no other. I was also the only exchange student there from NZ and I met one other kiwi who was a full time, but I'm glad because I was forced to interact and now I have a friendly face in so many different parts of the world. THE UNIVERSITY ITSELF AND THE PROFESSORS ARE ALSO INCREDIBLE. It is one of the leading research institutions In the world and home to some extremely successful and famous researchers. A Nobel Prize recipient did their degree at UCSD. This university CREATED specialised pathways in the global health and Cognitive Science degrees. It is one of the best universities in the world for Psychology, Cognitive Science and Neuroscience. There are endless academic opportunities to help make connections here too! This kind of experience, exchange, it's one of a kind and it's something you can only experience in uni, so do it! If there any other questions I'd be happy to answer them! Im so lucky to have gotten this opportunity and finish undergrad on exchange! Ill definitely be back to visit SD!



