



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of California, Santa Barbara
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2, 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Communications

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
COMM145 Media Entertainment	English	MFCO301 Critical Problems in Film and Media	18
COMM113 Media Effects on the Individual	English	MFCO315 Digital Media and Society	18
COMM131 Organisational Communications: Global Perspective	English	MFCO313 Culture, Politics, Policy and Global Media	18

Any comments about these papers?

COMM131 was a paper that I took as more of a random paper, but it turned out to be one of my favourites. The professor that took this class was amazing, and she **loves** international students, as

their input and experiences help support numerous topics she discusses with the class, such as global perspectives.

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

One thing that is expected of you as a student at the University of California, along with most American universities, is to consistently participate in class lectures. Class discussion often takes up a significant portion of lectures, and the professor often relies on student participation such as answering questions or offering personal experiences that may support the topic. People in the States love the Kiwi accent, so don't be afraid to speak up. Also, make sure you refer to 'papers' as 'classes', because a paper in California refers to an assignment. I learnt this after sitting with a course advisor for 30 minutes, only to learn she thought the entire time I was referring to what assignments I wanted to do (I was referring to classes).

Accommodation

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

After reading several of these reviews, I decided to find a flat with Americans, which appeared to be the most recommended type of accommodation. I was lucky enough to end up on Del Playa Drive, the most sort after street in Isla Vista, as it was on the waterfront, and most oceanside flats offered incredible views of the water and mountains (and sunsets of course!). The view was a huge pro of this flat, and I would 100% recommend getting a flat on oceanside DP (if you're lucky enough!) as it really adds to the experience of this beachside campus. I found this by looking on the Facebook page 'Free & For Sale (UCSB)' which is the equivalent of Otago Flatting Goods. I am very happy I decided to flat, and not stay in a dorm or international housing, as some of my friends from Australia and the UK regretted that decision, and ended up flatting the following semester after I left.

Money matters

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

Because accommodation is quite expensive in Isla Vista (and rightly so, when you are living oceanfront!) it is very normal to either share a room with someone, or multiple people. I was in a double, which meant I had a roommate, so our rent was half of what it would be. My share of rent cost \$750 USD a month, which was a pretty good price compared to other flats on DP. It also included all utility costs, such as water, power, rubbish removal etc. This is something you want to try and look for, as utilities can definitely ramp up the price and you don't want to have to constantly monitor how much water you are using, when the lights are on, etc.

Visas are expensive, but they are compulsory costs. If you want to do an exchange in the States, you need a student visa. I had to pay to book my visa appointment, and then to get my DS-2019 delivered to me via mail. You also have to pay for fees such as the Sevis fee, which you need in order to get your visa, and enter the country.

Unlike Otago, it seemed quite normal for people in flats to cook their own meals, instead of group meals. Two of my flatmates did their meals together because they were both vegetarian. It seemed easier with my schedule to just do my own, but I'm sure my flatmates wouldn't have minded doing

group meals, as everyone is very chill in Isla Vista. Groceries are pretty cheap compared to NZ supermarkets, so as long as you are smart with your money and budget, this shouldn't be a huge expense.

Health insurance is mandatory for UCSB students, and I used the UCSB Gaucho Health Insurance for the quarter I was there (fall quarter is the equivalent of semester 2). This insurance only covers when classes begin and finish, so you will need extra insurance if you plan to arrive earlier/stay later for travelling, settling in etc. For the time that the UCSB Gaucho Health Insurance didn't cover my stay, I used Southern Cross Health Insurance.

My return airfare to the States was roughly \$1500 NZD return, however, flight prices fluctuate and if you are lucky that a sale falls on the time you are wanting to travel, they can be much cheaper. However, if you have chosen the University of California vs other American Universities, you generally have to wait longer to see which specific campus you will be studying at. Some campuses start a month earlier than others, so I had to wait for this information before I could book flights, hence why they weren't on sale. Also, the US is very strict on how long you can stay in the country, so make sure you double check these dates, as you can only arrive a certain amount of weeks before your classes start, and after they finish. I arrived on the earliest possible day, and left on the very last day of my visa. This allowed time for me to settle in before hand, and I also got a months worth of travel around the US after my visa had 'expired' (you have a 30 day 'grace period' to leave the country once this finishes).

Another cost to be conscious of is tipping. Tipping is expected for jobs that involve service such as waitressing, hairdressers, nail salon etc. For example, after any meal that involves a waitress or waiter, they take your card/money and then bring back the receipt. Once they bring it back, you add in the tip you want to include, which the appropriate amount whereby the person would not be insulted is around 18%. Another added price is tax, so be mindful that if you buy a T-shirt that has a \$30 price tag, it will end up being around \$32 at the checkout.

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

I used a cash passport card for majority of my time in the US. I would recommend waiting for a good exchange rate and transferring most of your money to your cash passport card to begin with, because what I found was after the first transfer, the cash passport exchange rate is significantly lower, so much so, that I refused to transfer any more money. Basically, the cash passport card was great and worked everywhere, but the exchange rate offered through cash passport is only good for your first transfer. Once I ran out of money on my cash passport card, I spent the last month and a half using my NZ visa debit card or cash. There is a small fee every time you use your visa debit card, so I found that it was better to take out cash.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, student visas are mandatory. Be aware, this is a very long process, so start as soon as you can. Gaining the approval for a visa from your host university requires you to fill out a lot of forms for them, such as proof of certain immunisations, so I can't stress enough – do everything as soon as you can for a stress-free experience. All the paper work is very worth it in the end obviously, so just think of your end goal (going on exchange!)

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There are sooo many extra curricular/social activities you can participate in while at UCSB that are fun and also a great way to meet people. Not only can you join sports teams, but there are so many extras. I was a reporter for their KCSB radio, which was so much fun! I also did a trip to Yosemite through UCSB Recreation, which was seriously one of the highlights of my entire trip, if not the top highlight. I also met friends on this trip who I continued to spend time with for the rest of the quarter, and would consider friends for life. UCSB Recreation offers awesome trips that I would definitely recommend taking as they are offered at a great price and make travelling easy for you. Some of the other trips offered are Canoeing in Colorado, Backpacking in Joshua Tree National Park, Santa Cruz Island weekend, and the list goes on. Another great thing to join is the Excursion club. The excursion club is a student run, volunteer organisation that offers awesome trips weekly, that range from a local hike to skiing in Mammoth. There is a small fee to join (I think around \$30 USD) and you also have unlimited access to their equipment such as surfboards, kayaks, wetsuits, tents, backpacks etc. I would definitely recommend joining the Excursion Club!

What was the university/ city like?

The University is located in the most BEAUTIFUL and dreamy spot, smack bang on a beach, with amazing weather day in and day out. The campus has awesome trails running alongside the beach, (which you can take to class!) and also a lagoon. I loved this university and city so much – picture a super chill, surfer vibe with people long boarding or biking to classes. The town that all of the students live in (right next to campus) is very similar to North Dunedin in terms of being a student town, which added to the experience even more.

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

My tops highlights of my US trip was backpacking in Yosemite, Seattle and New York City. I would recommend travelling around Santa Barbara and California first, because there are some hidden gems on this coastline that not a lot of people know about. Santa Barbara also offers awesome hikes, great surfing and delicious food and wine. State Street in downtown Santa Barbara was a place I visited regularly, offering many shops, food, and tourist attractions. I would definitely recommend having a picnic and watching the sunset from Lizard's Mouth (the most gorgeous view!), visiting Knapp's Castle and hiking Inspiration Point. These are local activities and ones that didn't disappoint. My favourite café in Isla Vista was Cajé, which was a 5 minute walk from campus or my flat, and offered delicious acai bowls, bagels, smoothies and great coffee. IV has great food in general, such as bagel café, blaze pizza, Buddha bowls and so many more.

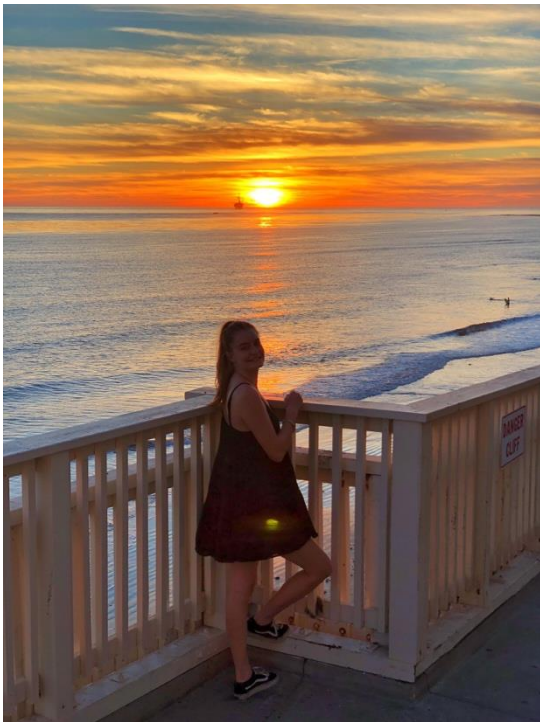
Any tips for future students?

COME TO UCSB! Stay in Isla Vista, and try to get a flat oceanfront on Del Playa Drive!

Overall Experience

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

How do I sum up the best experience of my life? I'll start by saying I honestly could not recommend doing an exchange more to other students. As cliché as it sounds (its true though!), I had the time of my life, made lifelong friends and created memories that I know will last a lifetime. UCSB now holds a special place in my heart, and I could not recommend studying at this campus more. What's not to love about a campus located on the beach? I can promise you that you will not regret doing an exchange, and you will get so many opportunities to do amazing things. I am beyond thankful to the University of Otago and the awesome staff that help to organise exchanges that gave me and others this incredible opportunity which has truly been life changing. Go on an exchange!!!!



View from my flat in Isla Vista



Weekend trip to New York City



Backpacking in Yosemite – View from Clouds Rest