



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Colorado, Boulder
Semester & Year of Exchange	First Semester, 2019 (4 th Year)
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Economics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
ECON4242 (Urban Economics)	English	Unspecified 300-level	13.5 points
ECON4534 (Chinese Economic History)	English	Unspecified 300-level	13.5 points
ECON4545 (Environmental Economics)	English	Unspecified 300-level	13.5 points
ECON4555 (Transportation Economics and Policy)	English	Unspecified 300-level	13.5 points

Any comments about these papers?

I had to take all Economics classes to fill in my major, so at times I felt like it would have been nice to have some other subjects. However, there was a lot of choice within the Economics department at this level, definitely more than Otago. At lower levels this isn't really the case as students are required to take a wider variety of core subjects in their first couple of years.

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

Going into it, I expected each class to be slightly less intense than a regular Otago paper, since four classes was the minimum requirement for a full-time course load. This didn't really turn out to be the case though. Each class felt roughly the same to ones previously experienced at Otago, so it made for a semester that was slightly fuller than the ideal scenario. That was just Economics though, I'm sure other departments would have more relaxed papers. The style of learning was a bit

different though. The classrooms all had blackboards and the teachers used them a lot so it felt slightly old-school in that regard. The semester is two weeks longer than an Otago semester as well, so that made room for more content to get pushed in. In most cases though, there was much less fuss over final exams, as the assessment was spread more over internal assignments and mid-terms. Quite a few classes had two mid-terms instead of one. Plus, the final exam period is over only about a week, so I had four exams in that time. It sounds daunting, but it actually felt good getting them done so quickly. One final thing, the lecturers will shift your grade depending on the distribution of grades in the class. For example, my whole class got 22 percentage points added to one of our mid-terms because the test didn't yield as higher grades as the lecturer was hoping for. So that's something that can help you if you're struggling but there's absolutely no guarantee that will happen every time. You want to feel like you can make it without the curve.

Accommodation

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

I was incredibly lucky with my accommodation. My family has a connection with a couple that we know through our church. So I was able to stay in their beautiful house and have home-cooked meals, which was awesome. I had actually stayed with them previously when my family had gone on a holiday there, so it was great having that familiar environment while I adjusted to life in Boulder. They also lived only like a 3 minute bike ride (6-7 minute walk) from the Economics building, so that was super convenient. There was an 8-week period though when they went away on vacation, so that's when I had to re-establish the cooking skills. Plus, they hired a house-sitter, who turned out to be an interesting character. We didn't always get on that well, but it was a good learning experience I guess. The only other con would have been that I wasn't living the same apartment building as a lot of the other exchange students. This didn't really matter in the end though because everyone started making their own other friends.

Money matters

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

I paid a lump sum of about \$1200NZD to my hosts before I flew over. This is a lot less than what I would pay for being in an apartment or flat so that just emphasises how lucky I was. They didn't want me to pay them anything at first, but that would have been ridiculous. While they were away on vacation my weekly shop would cost no more than \$50USD, so that was no problem at all.

We booked the return flights to Denver well in advance, but in total they still rounded out to about \$2500NZD. If anything, we may have booked them slightly too early, as sales came in a bit later on. Domestic flights within the USA are surprisingly expensive.

The visa process is also expensive for the USA. It requires a trip to Auckland to visit the American Consulate for a visa approval interview. To acquire the actual visa it cost \$240NZD but I also had to pay a \$180USD SEVIS fee as part of the process as well.

In terms of insurance I paid about \$650NZD for comprehensive travel insurance through AA. Then for health insurance, we found an American firm which had a \$413USD student secure option. That ended up being a lot cheaper than the insurance that the University of Colorado recommended. Finally, I paid \$175USD for something called the 'Campus Care Supplement'. This just allowed me to use the student health centre on campus if I needed to, but I didn't need to in the end.

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

I used a 'Loaded for Travel' debit card through Kiwibank. So if you're with Kiwibank normally, it's super easy to set up and just like having a regular card back home. The only thing to be wary of is when you're using an ATM. The fees for withdrawing cash weren't that friendly, so you want to get out large amounts at a time. In all fairness though, I didn't need cash nearly as much as what I thought I would.

Visas & Insurance

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

This are probably the hardest part about sorting an exchange in the USA. It's just a lot of niggly paperwork that the University of Otago gives you almost no help with as they are not allowed to. As I said before, you have to apply for the visa first, then once you've got a confirmation of that, you have to arrange an appointment with the consulate in Auckland. Before going there though, I had to wait for the University of Colorado to send through my DS-2019, which is your most important document when entering the US as an exchange student. Because Colorado was a new exchange partner, things took a bit longer to come through and I felt a little bit pushed for time. But it all worked out. You take the DS-2019, your passport and a bunch of other documents to the consulate where you have a couple of short interviews and explain the purpose of your trip over. They then take your passport, stamp it with the visa stuff around it and send it back to you within a few days.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes. Obviously as exchange students we needed travel insurance which I've already detailed. But there was mandatory health insurance as well. At the University of Colorado, they have an insurance plan called 'CU Gold'. This gives you anything you could possibly need health wise while on exchange. However it costs about \$2000USD per semester! The plan gets automatically added to your enrolment unless you intentionally waive it. Like I said, I found another firm that gave me plenty of cover for just \$413USD and then got the 'Campus Care Supplement' for an extra \$175. So yeah, if you don't want to pay heaps you want to make sure you waive the CU Gold and apply for the other stuff before the deadlines.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Like most Universities, there is a lot of stuff to get involved with. Like at Otago, they have a massive clubs day called the 'Involvement Fair' where you can go and explore all the different options. Because I went from during the American spring (their second semester), the one I went to may not have been as big than what it would've been for their Fall semester (August to December).

The campus in Boulder has an outstanding recreation centre. It's got masses of gym equipment, basketball courts, an ice rink, indoor and outdoor pools, rooftop tennis, martial arts and dance classes, and an artificial turf for a bunch of other sports. There's also the Intramural sports competitions, where you and a bunch of friends can enrol for a few games of social sport. Of course some of the sports are different to the ones you get in NZ, but there's still potential for lots of fun if your team is organised. Unfortunately, my ultimate frisbee team was not.

Being an exchange student, it's really good to get involved with the ISSS (International Student and Scholar Services). Their main weekly event is International Coffee Hour. This was a really easy way to

go and meet some new people from other countries, but some American students would come along as well. The ISSS also did a bunch of other events too. They would organise things like Ice-Skating, Bowling, Escape Rooms, hikes and dinner events, so there really was something for everyone.

I personally joined up with a group on campus called Christian Challenge, who were super welcoming and fun to hang out with. I understand that religion is not everyone's cup of tea, but it was so valuable having a community of like-minded people around me. I got to know everyone really well and made some incredible friendships through that group. I also went away on a trip over Spring Break with them, helping a small-town church with a kids holiday programme and doing a selection of other touristy things. That was probably the biggest highlight of my entire exchange.

What was the university/ city like?

The campus is pretty large. I was lucky in that I only had classes on at one end of the campus, so I never had to walk any great distances to class. Aesthetically, all the buildings are rather nice on the outside. On the inside though, a few of them are probably a bit dull, but nothing particularly bad. Boulder in general, along with the vibe around campus is pretty relaxed most of the time. My perception of Americans beforehand was that they were going to be really loud and over the top, but this wasn't really the case at all. Boulder is a beautiful city, but it's similar to Dunedin in the fact that it centres around the University. It's really easy to get around as well, they have real easy bike lanes and everyone gets a bus pass with their enrolment, so you can ride all the local buses for free. This includes buses into Denver and out to the Airport as well, so that's super convenient. It is known for being a bit of a party hub as well, so if you're that way inclined, you'll be well looked after.

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

The Rocky Mountains are literally right on your doorstep, so when the weather is good, it makes for an outdoor paradise. There are so many hiking trails in and around Boulder, but if you travel for no more than an hour you hit Rocky Mountain National Park. Skiing is also flipping awesome! The snow is ten times better than anywhere in New Zealand and some parks are open as late as May or even June (which is basically their summer time). There's a local resort named Eldora which is only about 30 minute's drive, but the more popular and larger resorts are about 1.5-2 hours away.

It's worthwhile going into Denver to look around at things seeing as it's only like 45 minutes away by bus. I was lucky enough to go and watch a Colorado Rockies Baseball game and also a Denver Nuggets NBA playoff game.

University Hill, which is located right next to campus, has some great places to hang out and eat. Everything from Burgers, Mexican, Coffee and Beer to 'Cosmos Pizza', which puts pretty all New Zealand pizza to shame. Also, the campus has a huge buffet dining hall at the Centre for Community (C4C). You can load a meal plan onto your ID card and eat there as much as you want, so again that's pretty handy. Pearl Street in downtown Boulder is another great place to go and experience the culture of the city.

Any tips for future students?

While Boulder and Colorado are absolutely awesome places to live, there are a few things to be aware of. Firstly, the altitude of the Denver/Boulder is over one mile high (1600m). It's really important for the first week or two that you really take care when exercising and take things easy. Get used to having a bottle of water around you, this is the best way to fight any altitude sickness. I

was fine but I know a couple of the other exchange students had a bit of a hard time adjusting. It's amazing how you get used to it though. Secondly, I arrived at the height of their winter time and temperatures were pretty cold for the first two months. We had -19 degrees one day and snow was a regular occurrence. After that, things start to warm up really nicely but be prepared to rug up. All the houses are very well heated though, nowhere near the freezing levels of the North Dunedin ghetto. Finally, smoking marijuana is legal in the state of Colorado. However, this doesn't apply to exchange students as we have to abide by national law and not state law. I'm not a smoker personally but it's just something else to keep in mind when you're walking around the place.

Overall Experience

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

Two years ago, I was pretty against the idea of going on exchange. I'm not the biggest fan of travelling and thought it would be too far outside of my comfort zone. Once Colorado became a new exchange partner though, my perception was changed seeing as I had family friends I could stay with. Things all just seemed to fall into place, and I left Dunedin knowing that this was the right thing to do. It's amazing to be more than just a tourist, and get used to some of the lesser known things in a particular place. Boulder is great for so many reasons. Even though it gets a bit cold at times, there's so much sunshine and so many outdoor things that you can still get into. Boulder is a classic college town with great spirit and a fairly laid-back culture. It will always hold a place in my heart and it's somewhere every student should consider going if the United States is on the radar.

SCO BUFFS!!!



Norlin Library (CU Boulder Campus)



Hike up 'The Flatirons'



Zion National Park, Utah



Skiing at Winter Park Resort



Weekend trip to Seattle