

University of Virginia (USA);  
2017 Semester One;  
Bachelor of Music; Contemporary Music Performance.

Hi, I study Commerce and Music at the University of Otago. I have just finished the first semester of my third year as an exchange student at the University of Virginia, in Virginia, USA. I know that everybody says that exchange is such a different and awesome experience, and everyone is always highly recommending it, and to be honest I'm going to be doing the exact same thing, because the past 5 months were without a doubt some of the best 5 months of my life. I know that making a big decision such as to go study on a different continent is crazy and daunting and there are constantly hundreds of questions to worry about, so ahead I'm just going to answer some of the questions and doubts I had before leaving.

#### Accommodation

UVA recommends that exchange students go into dorms that they have on campus (in particular the IRC) however I decided to find my own accommodation in an apartment (what we call a flat) with other UVA students. The easiest way to do this is to have a look at the UVA housing Facebook page, which is called University of Virginia (UVA) Housing, Sublets & Roommates. I quite easily found numerous potential rooms to live in and ended up settling for a shared room with one other girl, in an apartment with another shared room with two girls. Location of the apartment was ideal as it was on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which is connected to the Corner (where all the restaurants and bars are) and it was about a 15 minute walk to all my classes which was ideal. I would highly recommend trying to find accommodation in an apartment with other UVA student so as to really live the American experience, as I heard from other exchange students who were in the dorms that it just wasn't quite the same.

#### Academics/course load

At UVA, organising your course for the semester is very different to that at Otago, depending on what you are studying – thus which school within the University

are in – you take a different number of points for semester. For the main school, the College of Arts and Sciences, you need to take 15 points to get 4 paper equivalents at Otago, however you can take up to 18 points. The classes offered range in points from 0.5 to 3 points, so the number of classes you take really vary depending on which type of classes you are taking. I ended up taking 6 classes, with one of them being an interest class not directly relevant to my degree so as to make up more points. I really enjoyed the teaching methods at UVA, and the fact that I was on exchange made it far more exciting, like I didn't really feel that I was doing normal study towards my degree.

### Transportation

Transportation was a very easy matter to deal with in Charlottesville, as everything you needed was really just within walking distance – my apartment, my classes, restaurants and bars, convenience stores and where all my friends lived all within 20 minutes walk from each other. I did however make friends with quite a few students who had cars, which made life a lot easier when it came to supermarket shopping. You'll find that the people in Charlottesville are extremely kind and welcoming, and more than happy to drive a foreigner to the supermarket if you ask. There's also a really good bus and shuttle system (a shuttle is basically a prettier and slightly smaller bus), which goes Downtown (where people go for different bars and restaurants than what is offered on the Corner) and goes to the big mall where you find clothes stores, supermarkets and all kinds of other stores.

### Money Matters

Overall rent is slightly higher than in Dunedin - however it's reasonably easy to find something which is not too expensive. This is another reason why I would recommend living in an apartment as opposed to in one of the on campus dorms, as it comes out to quite a bit less expensive. Overall living including food and petrol (if you've decided to get a car) are cheaper than in NZ, however I found that I was going out for food and doing other money-spending activities (such as going to the movies, going shopping, etc.) a lot more than I was in Dunedin, thus overall I spent quite a bit more than I expected to.

## Social Matters

I wasn't 21 for any of my time at UVA so don't let that put you off. There's always so much to do even for those who are underage, honestly in Charlottesville it's not a big deal. There are always events on at people's apartments, and there are plenty of frat parties and dartys (day parties) every weekend, which made for a fun and busy semester at UVA. I lived with two girls who were in a sorority, and they were so lovely, organising to get me invited to frat functions whenever they could. The balance between study and fun was perfect at UVA, quite similar to the one at Otago to be honest, everyone is very focused on achieving highly in their classes, but also very much interested in having a good time!



My time at UVA was honestly better than I could have expected or asked for, I made the most amazing lifelong friends and lived a totally different college experience. I saw a large amount of the East Coast of the US and feel so privileged to have had this opportunity. I loved the country and the people so much that I'm hoping to moved back over to the US once I graduate from Otago, so I highly recommend the exchange experience, and the University of Virginia in particular – you'll have a great time!

