



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of St Gallen (HSG)
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 2025
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Politics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
International Relations	English	POLS
Responding to Crisis and Peacebuilding	English	POLS
Business and Politics: A Risk Perspective	English	POLS
European Governance	English	POLS
Egalitarian Capitalism in Crisis	English	POLS

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

Any comments about these papers? How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

The paper structure was varied from that of Otago. At HSG as an exchange student you cannot do the central examinations meaning that you have internal assessments for these papers. HSG also offer courses that are called "Block courses" that take place during the mid-semester break. These papers are taught by people in the industries for example Responding to Crisis and Peacebuilding was taught by a member of UN/UNICEF staff and the Business and Politics: A Risk Perspective course was taught by a business and insurance industry leader. Taking block courses, you have an intense course load for the weeklong duration but allows you to free up some workload for the rest of the semester. HSG is the in top universities in Europe for International Affairs and is held in high regard by employers so great for anyone studying politics like me!

Accommodation

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

The accommodation at HSG can be private or sought through the University. I stayed in University accommodation in a 4-bedroom flat in a building which housed 24 exchange students and had a great social/ study space on the ground floor of the building which was a great way to meet the other exchange students. There are a few buildings set up in a similar way with shared space for exchange students so we would usually move hosting duties amongst these buildings.

Money matters

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

When looking at Switzerland most people view expensive as their first reaction but there are ways to make things cheaper for example: getting train and travel cards, shopping at certain supermarkets, limiting eating out etc. The local students are great at giving you advice on the methods to save costs!

My rough breakdowns were:

Flights: \$3500 NZD

Accommodation: \$1500 – \$1700 NZD/month

Visa/ Residence Permits & Insurance: \$500-\$750 NZD

Food: \$120 NZD/week

Social activities: \$200 - \$700 NZD (or more depending on how much you get involved)

I would suggest having more than this set aside if you wish to travel around Europe, ski lots or join clubs as I did!

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

For my finances I used a Wise card which allows you to easily transfer money into different currencies (which you will need as Switzerland use the Swiss Franc whereas most surrounding countries use the Euro). Wise only charges you fees when you change money into different currencies or add money to your Wise account, but these fees are very small anyway. I would also suggest carrying a little bit of cash around in Switzerland and surrounding countries as many places do not accept card payments at all!

Visas & Insurance

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

Visa process was incredibly easy. HSG apply for it on behalf of you and send it to you then they just ask for payment.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

In order to get your residence permit in Switzerland you must hold full health insurance. I suggest getting a Swiss student insurance as they are very particular with the type of insurance that you must hold.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

HSG have an incredible programme of activities for exchange students called BuddySystem where they pair you up with a local student for advice as well as hosting activities. Some of my highlights were the St Gallen FC game at the stadium, Ski Weekend, Hiking Trips, Beer pong Tournament and Fondue Night among others. They host a great balance of social events as well as outdoor activities and cultural exchanges. The BuddySystem gives a great platform for exchange students to meet and mingle with each other and form bonds with students from all over the globe as well as experiencing what being a student in Switzerland has to offer.

On top of the BuddySystem, HSG have a wide array of clubs you can join. I took part in the Scandinavian Society who host Stambord (Social nights) as well as have a football team in weekly competitions. The highlight of my exchange must be the SGMUN club. This club take part in Model United Nations Conferences around Europe as well as weekly debate blocks and social events in St Gallen. They are incredibly welcoming and was a great way to get to know some local students as well as travel around Europe debating and mingling with students from across Europe!

What was the university/ city like?

Much like Dunedin the city of St Gallen is a student city with a population of about 75,000 St Gallen is smaller than Dunedin but with 10,000 students there is a great atmosphere around the city when the students are in town. The city is built around a beautiful old town with the Abbey of St Gall being a UNESCO World Heritage Building. The city is the capital of the Canton of St Gallen and sits in the northern, Swiss German speaking region just south of Lake Constance. It is around two hours on the train to Munich and about an hour and a half to Zurich so is central for European travel.

The University itself has a modern campus with brutalist architecture and a vast art collection and sits on the hill overlooking the city with mountain-scapes visible in the distance. There is a free University Gym as well as a football turf on campus where you can play in weekly competitions.

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

Switzerland during the winter is incredible for its skiing and with the fields only being an hour or so away by train it is super easy to jump up the mountains. In the summer there are some incredible hikes through the alps which allow for great views and scenery. It is also great for traveling into other European countries with Germany being closest to St Gallen!

Within St Gallen there are many clubs, bars and restaurants to gain an insight into Swiss culture. There are two student bars that are reasonably priced that host events throughout the semester (AdHoc on campus and Meeting Point in the city) and many bars throughout the oldtown with alfresco dining options.

Any tips for future students?

Get involved! I know it is cliché and everyone will tell you but the best way to get the most out of your exchange is to get involved. Your exchange is just as much about the study as it is the experiences you gain so join clubs, travel and enjoy everything that is offered to you!

Overall Experience

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

My exchange at the University of St Gallen was one of the most enriching experiences of my academic journey. The combination of high-quality academics, particularly in International Affairs, and innovative teaching styles—such as industry-led block courses—greatly broadened my perspective as a Politics major. Living in a flat with other exchange students created a close-knit international community, and the BuddySystem ensured we were constantly engaged with cultural, outdoor, and social events. Highlights included skiing in the Swiss Alps, exploring historic cities across Europe, and participating in MUN conferences with the incredible SGMUN club, which became a cornerstone of my exchange experience. St Gallen itself, with its charming old town and modern university campus overlooking the mountains, provided the perfect setting for both academic and personal growth. This exchange not only deepened my understanding of global politics but also allowed me to build lasting friendships, gain cultural insight, and develop the confidence to take on new challenges.

