



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>Host University</b>                 | Durham University    |
| <b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b> | S2 2019 – S1 2020    |
| <b>Otago degree(s)</b>                 | Bachelor of Science  |
| <b>Major(s)</b>                        | Genetics and Zoology |

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

| <b>Course title</b>               | <b>Language of instruction</b> | <b>Otago equivalent</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Stem Cells and Tissue Engineering | English                        | none                    |
| Advanced Topics in Development    | English                        | GENE314                 |
| Crops for the Future              | English                        | none                    |
| Conservation Biology              | English                        | ZOOL319                 |
| Literature Review                 | English                        | none                    |
| Biology Enterprise                | English                        | none                    |
|                                   |                                |                         |
|                                   |                                |                         |
|                                   |                                |                         |

Total Otago credits gained:  54 points  72 points  108 points  \_\_\_\_\_

Any comments about these papers?

They were all really interesting papers, and since the UK offers broad biology degrees instead of being more specialised like at Otago, I could choose papers from other areas that aren't offered at Otago (e.g. biological enterprise, stem cells), and absolutely loved them.

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

The teaching style was very similar to Otago, except for science subjects having separate practical / coursework papers at third year level. However, this meant I could take 'keystone' modules such as enterprise and a literature review, and focus solely on these for the first term of the year before the taught modules began in January. In terms of workload, it was very similar, with fewer internal assessments (as no labs to write lab reports for etc.) We also had more tutorials in place of labs/practicals. However, the internal assessments that do exist (1 per module) are more practical than for my degree back at Otago. For example I had to do a several speeches/presentations, a 30

min long marketing pitch, and a practical conservation management plan. On top of this, assessment is either formative (not counting towards your grade) or summative (counts for your overall grade).

## Accommodation

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

I was lucky enough to be placed in St Chad's College. Since Durham University is entirely collegiate, whether you physically live in college or not, you will be affiliated with one of the 16 colleges. However, living in college meant that I was fully catered, lived in a community of incredible and likeminded people, and enabled me to live directly opposite the incredible Durham Cathedral, meaning I very quickly became accustomed to the constant bells chimes every 15 mins. The community aspect of being in college also was incredibly important to me, and I've met life-long friends from all around the world, all of whom lived in college.

## Money matters

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

The price of college at Durham is similar to what you would pay here, so (for a standard single room) was £7,416 -> \$14,235 for the year (excluding holiday periods). Note, each college differs, as some are catered and some are not.

I believe I paid around \$1,250 one way to the UK, with my flight back a whopping \$1,750 thanks to Covid.

Since college was fully catered, I had a very low weekly expenditure for food and other necessities (<\$20 per week).

*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, as I've used this for previous travel overseas and find it incredibly useful. However, some large fees like accommodation fees needed to be paid online, however, I found a way around this by transferring money onto my cash passport in large lump sums after and getting permission to pay by card at reception. In retrospect, since I was there for a whole year, I think it would have been easier to simply set up a UK bank account.

## Visas & Insurance

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

As a UK citizen, I didn't have to apply for a visa.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

No.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

This depends on your college, however Chad's offered a multitude of different sports and societies, as well as college events throughout the year, such as Chad's day and the Candlemas ball. In terms of college sports, I was part of ultimate frisbee, netball, badminton and squash at a college level. There are also university-level sports (at a more competitive level) and societies (I was part of the hummus society!). I also went on three organised days trips to surrounding areas - Edinburgh, Whitby and the Lake District, which I highly recommend, as well as doing other travel (if possible) to other parts of the UK and Europe, which is very nearby.

*What was the university/ city like?*

The university itself has a main science campus, with the other departments spread out around the city. However, the city is much smaller than Dunedin and so even though it's not technically a campus university, it honestly feels like it is as everything is close together and easily walkable. It's also only a 10min train ride away from Newcastle. The city itself is beautifully historic, with the cobbled central Bailey, and the cathedral and castle towering above the surrounding town. The River Wear goes through the whole town, so you're always near to a beautiful river walk wherever you are. Oh, and prepare yourself for walking up hills, is all I can say!

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

I highly recommend walking up observatory hill at night to see the skyline of the cathedral and town from above. Definitely make an effort to complete a college bar crawl (either hill, bailey or both), as each college has their own bar – with really cheap drinks (and sometimes food), and they provide a really chill environment for socialising. The best places to eat out include *Lebaneat*, which is slightly on the pricier side but does the most amazing Lebanese food, *la Spaghattata (Spags)*, *Bell's* for the best fish and chips (trust me, we tried them all), and *Flat White* for the best coffee shop in town.

*Any tips for future students?*

Really put yourself out there and push yourself to experience as much as possible on your year abroad. I tried to join as many sports and societies as possible, and used college as an opportunity to meet as many people as possible, and am incredibly thankful I did as I now have lots of incredible friends. At the same time, don't set the bar for yourself too high, go into this experience with an open mind and grab opportunities as they come. Overall, just enjoy yourself, I'm desperate to go back already and would do it all over again in a heartbeat!

## Overall Experience

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

I arrived in the UK in late June 2019, allowing me to spend the summer before the beginning of the academic year with my relatives. By the time September rolled around, I was so excited to move into college, and in the first week up in Durham I set myself the challenge of talking to as many people as possible. We had a few days of just settling in with the other international students, which was when I discovered there were 11 others in the exact same situation as me – on exchange at Durham from their home universities all around the world. We quickly formed a group and all got on so well.

When the domestic students moved in for fresher's week, there were so many events organised in college, plus matriculation, I honestly don't think I had time to myself for longer than 10mins here and there. It was incredibly busy, yet by far one of the best weeks of the year. Saying this, take it from me - you DON'T have to go out every night of fresher's – pace yourself, and make the most of the fun staying in options in college, such as baking, quiz night, movie night etc. After going to the fresher's fair, I made the last minute decision to do the polo taster session. I knew NOTHING about polo, but have been around horses a lot, and honestly had such a blast... and even though I didn't carry on with it, what an experience it was!

After the excitement of fresher's week, classes started (all 2 of mine, as the rest started after Christmas), and I got myself back into the swing of using my brain again. Every Tuesday and Thursday, my college had formals, meaning you could sign up to go to gowned formal dinner, with girls in dresses/formalwear and guys in suits (yes, it felt very much like Harry Potter). These formals initially intimidated me, but after the first few I felt I had to sign up to ALL of them, because not only was the food amazing, but it was such a cool experience dressing up and having a formal meal and a few glasses of wine with all of your friends.

Every second weekend of first term, I went on day trips to Edinburgh, Whitby and the Lake district on bus tours (called *Don't be a Tourist*) with many other international students. I actually met several friends through doing this that, to this day, I'm still in contact with, and it was an incredible opportunity to explore the north of the UK, outside of Durham. Unfortunately, I got really ill when my friends went on a trip to Spain and Belgium, meaning that I sadly never got to leave the UK. However, I never once got cabin fever from staying in Durham, as there were so many events organised by college to keep me going, as well as the biannual light festival - *Lumiere*. These included several balls, including the biggest of the year – Candlemas. This started at 7pm and had events organised until 4am, which was nuts, but the most fun I had all year. We also had Chad's day, which consisted of the entire college waking up at 6am and getting sufficiently green, having a champagne reception at 7am, before proceeding to wake up the entire bailey by banging pots and pans at 7:30. The rest of the day had many (very green) events organised and ended with a silent disco, as usual, in the quad.

Although my year ended rather abruptly due to Covid, I honestly could not have imagined a better year abroad and am so grateful I was presented with the opportunity. I used to laugh at people who came back from exchange and told me it had 'changed their life', but now here I am. I have to admit it... after going on my year abroad to Durham, I can hands down say it was the best year of my life.

(If you'd like to check out more of my exchange, have a peep at my Instagram @karma\_chameleon99).

