



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	University of California Los Angeles
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 2 2024
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Bachelor of Arts
<i>Major(s)</i>	Global Studies & Spanish

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

<i>Course title</i>	<i>Language of instruction</i>	<i>Otago equivalent</i>
Chinese C175 Introduction to Chinese Thought	English	200/300 level approved paper for Global studies major
SPAN 5 Spanish 5	Spanish and English	SPAN 200 level = SPAN232
SEASIAN 135 RELIGION & SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA	English	200/300 level approved paper for Global studies major

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

Taking Chinese C175 helped me develop a deeper understanding of early Chinese thought especially how figures like Mozi and Mengzi shaped ethical and political debates. SEASIAN 135 was particularly engaging because it explored how religion evolves in response to social change. Spanish 5 was both challenging and rewarding that pushing me to improve my fluency and engage more deeply with the language. Overall, these courses broadened my perspectives and gave me new ways to analyze philosophy, religion, and language in different cultural contexts.

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

I believe that UCLA's academic experience felt more fast-paced and discussion-driven with a strong emphasis on critical engagement through more readings, essays, and class participation. The workload was more intense with frequent assignments and a heavier focus on independent analysis. UCLA's professors encourage debate and diverse perspectives while Otago's style leans slightly more towards structured lectures with guided discussions.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in a UCLA apartment, mainly for transfer students, sharing a room with one other person. The apartment had its own kitchen which was great for cooking and saving money on food. One downside was that it was a bit far from campus buildings so getting to class took more time. Overall, it was a good place to live, with a mix of privacy and social life.

Money matters

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

My biggest cost was accommodation which was quite expensive but included basic utilities. Flights to and from the U.S. were another major expense, as I flew from Malaysia, along with the visa application fee. Food costs depended on whether I ate out or cooked in my apartment with groceries being the cheaper option. I also had to pay for health insurance which was required by UCLA adding to the overall budget as I am an international student in Otago, New Zealand.

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

My parents supported me financially during my exchange so I didn't have to worry too much about managing income. I opened a Bank of America account while in the U.S., which I highly recommend because it was easy to set up and made everyday transactions more convenient. Using a local bank account helped to avoid high foreign transaction fees and made it easier to withdraw cash when needed. While credit cards are useful for emergencies and online payments, I believe that having a U.S. bank account was the most practical option for daily expenses.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, I had to apply for a student visa to study at UCLA. Since I am an international student from Malaysia studying in Otago, New Zealand, the process was a bit more complicated. I had to travel to Wellington, New Zealand for an in-person visa interview at the U.S. embassy which added extra time and cost to the process. After the interview, it took around two weeks for my visa to be approved and issued. While the process required careful planning, it was straightforward as long as I had all the necessary documents prepared in advance.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

UCLA offered an option for health insurance, meaning students could either use their own coverage or purchase UCLA's insurance plan. Since I am an international student from Malaysia studying in Otago, New Zealand, I couldn't use New Zealand's student insurance for my exchange in the U.S. Besides that, my home country also doesn't have strong overseas insurance options that would cover my time at UCLA. Because of this, I decided to go with UCLA's insurance as it provided comprehensive coverage and ensured I had access to medical care if needed.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

UCLA offered a wide range of organized activities for students, including sports competitions, job fairs and guest lectures by professors from different fields. These events provided great opportunities to stay active, network, and learn beyond regular coursework. For future exchange students, I highly recommend joining clubs related to their home country as these can provide a sense of community and support while studying abroad. International student clubs and sports clubs are also great options for meeting new people, making friends and fully experiencing campus life at UCLA.

What was the university/ city like?

UCLA has a beautiful and lively campus with great facilities including libraries, gyms, and study spaces. The university has a strong academic atmosphere but there are also plenty of social events and activities for students. Los Angeles is a huge, diverse city with many things to explore, from beaches and hiking trails to museums and entertainment spots. However, public transportation isn't the best so getting around can be challenging without a car.

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

Near UCLA, Westwood has great places to eat, like In-N-Out for a classic burger or Diddy Riese for affordable ice cream sandwiches. The Getty Center is a must-visit for amazing art and views of the city. If you like nature, hiking at Runyon Canyon or visiting Santa Monica Beach is a great way to enjoy the outdoors. For shopping and sightseeing, places like Rodeo Drive and The Grove are worth checking out.

Any tips for future students?

Future exchange students should plan their budget carefully as living expenses in Los Angeles can be high especially for accommodation and food. It's also a good idea to open a U.S. bank account to avoid high foreign transaction fees. Getting involved in student clubs and activities is a great way to make friends and feel more connected to campus life. Lastly, as public transportation in LA isn't the most convenient so learning to navigate ride-sharing apps or finding housing closer to campus can make daily life much easier.

Overall Experience

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

My exchange experience at UCLA was an exciting and enriching journey that gave me the opportunity to study in a world-class academic environment while exploring a new culture. The courses were engaging and challenging that pushing me to think critically and adapt to a fast-paced learning style. Living in Los Angeles was both exciting and overwhelming with so many things to see and do, from visiting iconic landmarks to trying diverse foods. Although adjusting to the high cost of living and transportation challenges took some time, but being part of an international student community made the experience more enjoyable. Overall, studying at UCLA broadened my perspective that helped me grow academically and personally. This exchange journey definitely gave me unforgettable memories.

