



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Memorial University of Newfoundland
Semester & Year of Exchange	Fall semester (September to December) – <i>Otago Semester 2</i>
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts and Science
Major(s)	Ecology and Human Geography

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Critical Indigenous studies (ANTH2414)	English	Non specific credit/Elective
EASC111	English	EAOS101
GEOG4300	English	AQFI301

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

Any comments about these papers?

Critical indigenous studies gave a great introduction to many indigenous cultures throughout North America, and the legacy of colonisation historically and contemporary.

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

I would say the workload felt about 20% easier than at Otago. This was influenced by being on the pass/fall system, however even with a lot less time spent on studies at Memorial I still achieved good grades.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in the Hatcher house residence on Campus. I was assigned to this residence after asking if there were any single rooms available, as in some other residences on campus students are required to share a double room. The administration staff at Memorial said I could have a single room, but it would be in Hatcher house, which was reserved for students 24 years and older, mostly for students in postgraduate studies. As an older student I felt this suited me anyway so was ideal. The rooms are built to accommodate two people so have two single beds and desks, but I had it to myself. Some of my friends were in rooms with double beds and they said they just requested it when applying, so you could do that if you would like one.

If you are under 24 and thinking of going to Memorial I would recommend requesting a single room early in the process. You might also want to request a room in Shiwak and Cluett halls as they are the most modern and include a shared bathroom whereas other residences (including Hatcher) typically have one large bathroom per floor.

Something else to consider is room temperature. The buildings in Canada are very well insulated and Hatcher did not have air conditioning, so I found that my room could get very humid, and I struggled with sleep. I would say the more modern residences (Shiwak and Cluett) have better ventilation, but if you are in an older residence you might want to request a room on a lower floor as I think the humidity problem was influenced by me being on the top floor.

The Dining hall

Be mindful that everyone that lives on residence at Memorial (over 1000 people) are required to purchase a dining hall pass unless they live in Burtons Pond accommodation. The pass is relatively expensive, but the dining hall is also where most of the socialising happens day to day. Each residential hall is assigned to a dining table in the hall which I found great because it was easier to make friends with people while you were eating, and since you were seeing them a couple times a day, every day.

However, this means you're likely to make friends with the people from your hall and you'll be seeing a lot of them, so if you don't click with them or would like to make more friends, I would recommend making a big effort to socialise with people from different halls early on in the semester, while friend groups are forming. You are always allowed to go sit at other tables but if you don't make connections early the dining table allocation can make it difficult to bridge these gaps. The international students are spread throughout the residences and as they are in the same boat as you in the beginning it's easy to make friends with them early on. Find the people you like and settle in!

Money matters

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

Accommodation and Food

My exchange was on scholarship with the Tūrangawaewae Pōkai Whenua Indigenous exchange opportunity. Alongside a substantial grant from the scholarship, the agreement with Memorial also suggested residence and food fees at the campus dining hall would be covered by Memorial.

However, Memorial no longer covers these fees, and I believe are making a change to the agreement so be aware that if you are with the TPW exchange programme I think you will be required to pay the accommodation and food fees if you choose to live on campus which was \$4957 CAD in 2024.

Remember that if you choose to live on residence then you are required to subscribe to the Dining hall also. If you choose to live off campus then be aware that St John's (city where Memorial University is) is experiencing a housing shortage so accommodation might be hard to find and expensive, but one international student I met said she was considering this option, and it wasn't too difficult to find accommodation. You also might want to consider that making friends might not be as easy if you aren't living on campus.

Flights

I booked a one-way flight as I was going onto a second exchange in Europe, and I booked it about 6 months before going. I think I paid around \$1000 NZD. I think the best time to book to secure a cheaper deal is around 3-4 month prior to departure, when you might get it \$100 cheaper, but expect to pay around \$1000 especially if you don't want lots of connecting flights and layovers. I went from Auckland to San Francisco, then to Toronto, then to Newfoundland and I think it was the quickest route. If you fly through USA however you will need to buy an ESTA travel visa which I think is \$21 USD.

Food

As I was in the dining hall I didn't pay for much food outside, but Newfoundland food prices are a bit more expensive than mainland Canada because it needs to be transported to the Island. I would say food looked to be about 20% more expensive than in NZD when you factor in the exchange rate.

A lot of people complained about the food in the Dining hall as sometimes being a bit repetitive, but I thought it was very high quality. There are massive amounts of selection, and you can go and eat whenever you want and as many times as you would like throughout the day.

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

After doing some research I opted for a Wise Card. I also took two NZ travel cash passport cards (offered by mastercard) as a back-up, but in terms of fees Wise ended up best. I would recommend speaking to your bank before going because if you want to make payments to your wise account or for anything else they will likely prevent the transaction as they suspect fraud. I always got a request to verify my text message but I didn't receive texts being overseas. Try to sort alternative verification methods before you go or upload all the money you will need to Wise before you go.

Visas & Insurance

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

You need to get an ETA to enter Canada and print off your study permit which is sent to your email if I recall correctly.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Initially I tried to get coverage with Nomad travel insurance, but it didn't have the coverage required by the University of Otago, so I ended up just going with StudentSafe Outbound which was recommended by the University for peace of mind as they have a good reputation and strong coverage. Annoyingly, you must also pay for a mandatory health insurance from Memorial (I'm not sure if this was a Memorial policy or is Canada wide) so I ended up doubling up on health coverage, and it cost \$250 CAD.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The exchange office is really good at organising events for international students, and Kathryn (exchange coordinator) is very friendly and great to deal with. The residential assistants in the halls of residence also organise events throughout the semester for your hall which are great to meet new people.

If you are on the TPW exchange, Val, Katie and Sonja from Juniper house are so welcoming and hospitable. Val was always inviting me to go and do things in the community, and she would even come and watch my Rugby. She really made me feel a part of the family. I got to go with some other Indigenous students to a First Nations Pow Wow on the west coast in Corner book which was awesome and gave me the chance to get to know some other students. If there are any students at Otago while you are still at home, I would recommend catching up with them and give what you can to help them enjoy their exchange experience. I met Mason who was on the TPW programme at Otago while I was still in Dunedin, and he became one of my closest friends at Memorial and did a lot to make me feel welcomed. Something you will realise on exchange is that it can be hard to do what you want to do being in a foreign place and so making friends with locals is the greatest way you can immerse yourself. It is great to offer what you can to exchange students while you are at home to reciprocate.

I joined the Memorial Rugby Union team which I found the most fun part of my exchange. We got flow out to Nova Scotia to compete at the Atlantic Championship which we won and then got to travel to Ottawa to compete at Nationals, and the club covered travel and accommodation costs. I asked the Manager to change the date of my return flight from Nova Scotia so got to spend a few days checking it out.

I hadn't played Rugby in 5 years and was not really conditioned for it but the level in Canada is quite a bit lower than in New Zealand, so I slotted in fine, and the locals really appreciate having a Kiwi playing with a different perspective. It was an awesome way to meet local guys and the vibe at the club and general Rugby Community there is so strong, they really love the game and it's an awesome culture to experience, notably different from the culture in New Zealand. If you are an active player in New Zealand even at club level, you'll find you will be really appreciated here and should definitely consider Memorial. The lower playing standard and less pressure here gives an opportunity to develop skills that you wouldn't be able to at home because there are more opportunities in-game and has been really good for my Rugby development. If you do well, there may be additional support available from club affiliates to consider studying Master's and job opportunities etc as there is a strong support network. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you would like to know more.

What was the university/ city like?

The city of St John's is great, it has a harbour and a nice downtown. It is famous for having the most pubs per person in the world and the atmosphere in the weekend down there is great. A lot of students go downtown on Thursday's, Friday's and Saturday's and it's a great chance to witness the culture. Newfoundlanders are a great people; they are descended from Irish settlers who came to fish Cod along the coast and the rural communities still speak with a strongly Irish accent. They are known for being the friendliest people in Canada, which I would definitely agree with. There is strong Irish music culture and they're not too worried about being prim and proper.

The University has the lowest fees in Canada, which comes with some implications. One awesome upshot of this is that it attracts a lot of international students from all over the world, not just affluent countries. This makes Memorial a very multicultural place, and most live on residence so it's

an awesome opportunity to make friends from everywhere. (Students in my residence included Egyptian, Iranian, French, Azerbaijan, Turkish, Indian, Pakistani, lots from Europe and more)

The downside of the lowest fees is that the quality of education in some departments can be lower. My lecturers were excellent, but I had many friends that said their lecturers and curriculum was at quite a low standard. As I was mostly focused on the experience rather than the studies it did not worry me too much but if you are seeking out high quality education you might be disappointed in some departments. However, Memorial's Marine department is the best in the country, and Folklore studies are an area they have expertise as well.

The campus itself was great, it is so convenient living on residence because you are so close to the dining hall, classes and an on-campus gym that has pool, running track, basketball/volleyball courts, football pitches and multiple work out areas. It's a 5-minute walk from residence!

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

'The Rooms' Museum is a great place to learn about the Indigenous and colonial settler history of the island, I'd recommend going early in your visit.

Go to Rob Roy's on Thursday between 11-12 for 3 for 5 – 3 drinks for \$5. It's a busy student night and great way to meet local students.

I took hiking gear and did a section of the East Coast Trail from Bay Bulls to St Johns shortly after arrival. It was still quite warm in September, and I found it a great way to settle into the place. If you like hiking, consider going early and making the most as there are some excellent trails and the nature in Newfoundland is beautiful. The coastline is stunning, and I saw jumping Tuna, schools of bait fish, Seals and Dolphins while walking the coast.

There are also several species of Whales including Humpback there up until around late August, and there is the opportunity to dive with them ethically, one of the few places in the world.

Unfortunately, I arrived after they had migrated back southward but if you are interested in this, I would definitely go early to make the most of this!

Any tips for future students?

One of the best things I did was join Facebook pages for the outdoor things that I like doing. Outdoor pages in Newfoundland are typically titled with the name of the activity followed by 'Newfoundland' e.g. 'Paddling Newfoundland', 'Climbing Newfoundland' etc. I'd recommend putting up a post before you arrive saying where you're from with a couple of photos of you doing the activity and ask if you can join along with anyone on events. Offer to return the favour or pay it forward for anyone coming to NZ also helps, as it is somewhere that a lot of people would like to go and the offer can tempt people to take you out! I got invited on a 4-day Moose hunting trip with two local guys by doing this who became really good friends and I ended up doing a lot with.

Bear in mind it costs \$1000's to get car insurance as a foreign national, so buying a car for while your there is pretty much off the table.

It's great to be friendly with other international students because they are always interested in going on trips, people typically make WhatsApp groups early in the semester to arrange trips so another reason to make lots of friends early on. By going as a group you can rent a car and an AirBnB and make it affordable.

I would recommend making a trip to Gros Morne National Park on the West Coast, and I was also recommended going to a place called the Burgeo which sounded beautiful, but I didn't make it. Visit some of the 'outports', small fishing villages dotted along the coast to see what life was like for early settlers.

Overall Experience

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

Overall experience was awesome, especially the culture. If you want to go on exchange to immerse yourself in different cultures, Newfoundland takes some beating. Firstly, there is a whole culture and world to learn about with the Mi'kmaq Indigenous peoples of the island who maintain strong presence with many Bands and are active politically and socially. There are also many Inuit in Newfoundland that come from Labrador for work and study, and they are well represented at the University and host events. The massive diversity of Indigenous peoples in Canada is something wholly different to New Zealand and is something you can learn about by taking ANTH2414.

The Indigenous organisation First Light host events for the community weekly, for non-indigenous and diverse indigenous groups, and there were several other Indigenous events from Mainland Canada that came to run events while I was there such as Caribou antler carving workshop with Billy Gauthier (renowned Inuit carver who has a massive Fin Whale Bone carving on exhibition at the Rooms), and Inuit singing event which showed traditional throat singing and the First Indigenous Oprah singer Deantha Edmunds.

In terms of the colonial settler culture in Newfoundland, some might say it's relatively similar to NZ European culture, and therefore perhaps not as meaningful of a cultural experience as somewhere with different ethnicities/languages. That's how I felt before this exchange but my time in Newfoundland taught me that the ability to speak the same language and having some similarity to the people actually makes it much more possible to be immersed in the true culture of the place. I have travelled to South America previously and because I only know a little Spanish and the culture was so different, I found that I was observing culture more than actually immersed in it. This exchange showed me what it's like to really be immersed in the culture by making friends with locals and doing local things.

