



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Toronto (St George Campus)
Semester & Year of Exchange	Fall Semester, 2023
Otago degree(s)	LLB and BA
Major(s)	Law and Politics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
POL214H1 Canadian Government	English	200 level POLS
POL218H1 State, Society and Power	English	200 level POLS
POL316H1 Contemporary Canadian Federalism	English	300 level POLS
JPR374H1 Religion and Power in the Postcolony	English	300 level POLS

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points

Any comments about these papers?

I thoroughly enjoyed all of the papers I took whilst I was on exchange. I specifically chose papers pertaining to Canadian politics so as to expand my knowledge about their political system and governance structure. Canada follows a federal system, which we here in NZ do not. I wanted to learn more about it out of interest but also as I have always considered living in Canada in the future, and so gaining some knowledge about their system would be beneficial to me. I also found that unlike my degree here

in NZ, where exams can either count towards 70-100% of my grade, the papers at UofT were quite assignment heavy. Though this meant for a busy semester, it also meant for final exams that counted towards ~30% of my grade, which relieved quite a lot of pressure in the end. The assignments for my paper were open-book essay and/or critical response style assessments.



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

I really enjoyed my academic experience at UofT and still find that I miss taking classes there. UofT is the top performing university in Canada, and ranks in the top 20's globally. Entry into UofT is competitive, which meant that I was surrounded by students who were very academically driven. This meant for a class experience where students were engaged, interactive and onto it. Class



participation and tutorial participation was either strongly encouraged, or a requirement. The academic nature of the University meant that students very often contributed to class discussions, and I often found myself learning just as much from those discussions as I did from the lecturers. Classes are 2 hours long, which was an adjustment I had to make, however classes are broken up by discussion time, online interactive materials and a break time, so I found it quite manageable. I found my Professors to be quite friendly and relaxed, which I really benefited from. The lecture theatres at UofT are quite new, spacious and comfortable. Alongside feeling physically comfortable, I really enjoyed the fact that we could come in and leave as we pleased, it is quite normal over there and no questions are asked. This really aided me as someone that occasionally gets quite anxious and stressed in formal lecture settings, and so I found I could head out to the bathrooms or take a breather and pop back in easily. As someone that is academically driven, all of these factors led to me performing very well academically whilst I was over there.

Accommodation

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

I was lucky enough to have my sister living in Toronto, so I got to stay with her in the month I arrived in Toronto before semester started. I also stayed with her for the 2 weeks after the semester ended before coming back to NZ. However, I really wanted the university experience, to meet new people and have my own space, so opted to stay in a Halls of Residence during the Semester. I stayed at Tartu College, a student accommodation (not affiliated with UofT) but one that houses many UofT students, as well as students from across the different universities in Toronto (e.g. York and TMU). Tartu College is very popular with exchange students, and it felt like most exchange and international students stayed there. This in itself is a pro, as you are surrounded by people of different cultures going through a shared experience to you. It is also in a very ideal location, the Annexe neighbourhood, known to house many students. It is a very close walk to the main uni campus, and is super close to the Robarts Library. There is a supermarket, pharmacy and many restaurants and cafes within walking distance as well. Spadina station, one of the many subway stations, was less than 5 minutes away from the hall, and St George station not too far away either. Some main tourist attractions such as the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the Bata Shoe Museum are nearb the hall too. I found these all pros to the accommodation. I stayed in a suite of 6 girls (including myself), where we had a shared kitchen, 2 bathrooms (including showers) and each had our own single room which had a desk in it and adequate storage space. We also had a housekeeper who would come in, empty bins and clean the bathrooms and kitchen. The main cons that I can think of is that there is no common room space in Tartu, which is different to halls here. This means you have to put in some

extra effort to meet people, but luckily Tartu would host events on a semi-regular basis. The Annexe neighbourhood, though vibrant and student friendly (especially in regards to food options), can be a bit grungy, and a hotspot for homeless people and unfortunately, drug-addicts. I will address the mental health crisis and drug problem in Toronto later on in this report. Tartu isn't the fanciest space, however it is marketed as a more budget type residence. Their google reviews aren't the best, however it has improved a lot since, with recent developments being made. I will be honest though, I did see about 4-5 cockroaches in our suite, which is far too many for my liking (the cockroach problem is much better than it was, allegedly).

Money matters

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

Flights: I flew through Dunedin to Auckland (Air NZ), Auckland to Vancouver (Air NZ) and Vancouver to Toronto (Westjet). I went through the same route (but obviously in reverse) to get back home. Overall, flights to and from Toronto cost me around about \$3000 NZD.

Accommodation: Staying at Tartu costs about \$1600 NZD per month, where you pay a month in advance as a bond, and this bond then covers your last month of stay.

Visa: I did not need a visa, I just needed an ETA which cost about \$8 NZD.

Food: Grocery shopping can be expensive in Canada, especially in Toronto. While I cannot give a certain amount regarding how much I spent on groceries and food there, I can provide some pointers! Do make use of Dollarama while you are in Canada, they sell snacks and basics (tea, coffee, condiments, staples) for a lot cheaper than you would get at the supermarket, despite them both stocking the same brands. When I was in Toronto, *Metro*, one of the supermarket chains, offered a 10% discount for students, you just needed to show them your ID card. If you're one to buy coffees during the day, and are looking for a cheap option, do try out Tim Hortons. You get decent drip coffee for \$2 CAD or so. I found it much cheaper buying takeout in Toronto than in NZ. You don't need to tip when purchasing takeout, however, do note that when dining in, you are expected to tip (usually 15% at the very least, but generally 18-20% is expected).



Insurance: The mandatory insurance price depends on your travel dates, the excess amount you choose and whether you have a discount code available to you (the exchange office provided us with a 25% discount). I ended up paying about \$580-600 NZD for this insurance.

When I was in Toronto, UHIP was a mandatory insurance you had to purchase. It cost me about \$300 NZD for the one semester.

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

I used the Wise app whilst overseas. It is super easy to use, I just signed up online and was sent a Wise card, which operates very similarly to EFTPOS. Through the Wise app, you can transfer money from your NZ bank account into the app, where it converts it into Canadian dollars (or the currency

you desire) and loads it up onto your card. This was a lot more convenient to use than setting up a bank account in my opinion.

Visas & Insurance

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

As I was going to be staying in Canada for less than 6 months, I did not need to apply for a visa, rather, just needed an ETA. The process for applying for an ETA was super simple. It is all done online and only costs about \$8 NZD. The Exchange department was super helpful in sending us the relevant links and letting us know how to go about this process.

Did your host university have mandatory insurance?

Yes, all students had to sign up for UHIP (University Health Insurance Plan). This cost about \$252 CAD (about \$300 NZD) for one semester. Though this seems like a large sum of money, I was incredibly grateful for UHIP. UofT has a medical centre very similar to that of Student Health here at Otago. With UHIP, doctor's appointments and mental health services are free as they are covered by insurance. Diagnostic services such as blood tests and psychiatry are also free under UHIP. It is important to note that the dentist or medication are not covered under UHIP, so try and get all of that sorted in NZ to save you some money (I had to pay about \$70 CAD for a medication that would otherwise cost \$5 here!).

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There are an absolute plethora of clubs and activities available for exchange students. There are plenty of affiliated clubs and associations at UofT you can become a part of. There are also activities which places like the recreation centre at UofT organise (e.g. I took part in an African dance workshop which was super fun!). The exchange department over there also holds a bunch of social events for exchange students, be it



relaxed coffee hours to events relating to holidays like Halloween and Christmas. Varsity Blues is also available to students, where students can watch UofT's multiple sports teams compete against other Canadian universities. Such sports include baseball, ice-hockey, basketball and are free to watch for students.

I wish I was more involved in extracurricular and social activities, however I found myself very busy so I struggled to find the time. I would definitely recommend having a look at what is available to you, what sparks your interest and just having a go! Considering UofT's competitive and rigorous nature, involving yourself in extracurriculars will definitely help you blow off steam and meet people who you may not otherwise meet in class.

What was the university/ city like?

I absolutely adored going to UofT. I really liked my professors, the style of teaching and just how academically inclined all the students were. I would caution that as it is quite academic, it is very normal for students to keep to themselves and it definitely takes more work to meet people and make friends. It is very normal for students to sit by themselves in class, rather than at Otago where I feel like there is quite a social culture. I was quite comfortable contributing both in class and in tutorials. I met two of my really good friends from one of my tutorials purely due to the fact that we hung around at the end of class just to carry on the discussion we had been having in the tutorial. So, I would definitely recommend being comfortable putting yourself out there. People love hearing that you're an exchange student, and New Zealand has such a good reputation overseas, so I'd definitely recommend that for a conversation starter! The University also hosts a wide range of services, and I found that I really benefited from their Accessibility services and their Health and Wellness centre. I would definitely recommend getting in touch with those centres if you require their services!



As for Toronto, to be quite frank, I did find myself having a love hate relationship with it. I think it's definitely an awesome city that truly is a melting pot of diversity and different cultures. I loved the different languages you'd hear, cultural events and types of food that were so readily available everywhere you went. However, Toronto is the biggest city in Canada, and like any big city, it can feel quite daunting. The hustle and bustle of a big city is real in Toronto, and I found myself missing the friendliness and sense of community I would feel back home in Dunedin. Like any big city, people in Toronto mostly keep to themselves, so you need to put in some extra effort to make friends and meet new people, however it is entirely possible! It can be dirty in some areas and is definitely a concrete jungle, where I found myself missing being surrounded by the lush nature we're so lucky to have here in NZ. That being said, there is some beautiful nature in Canada, and definitely also in Toronto, however you may need to leave the downtown core

to access it. What I found most jarring and confronting is the drug crisis that I saw not only in Toronto, but also in Ottawa and Montreal, and I have heard it is far worse in Vancouver. It is very normal to see people on the streets in quite a state, be it absolutely out of it (think zombie vibes) to quite erratic/psychotic. It is also not uncommon to see people using, though this does not happen incredibly regularly. I honestly found this both tragic and also a bit scary when I first arrived, however I came to learn that minding your business, not engaging but being vigilant is your best bet in terms

of being safe. I would especially recommend being extra vigilant in the subway and public transport (TTC) as there have occasionally been some safety incidents that have occurred, though there are decent precautions, safe zones and alarm systems in the subway and inside the train too. You can also hop out of the train if you feel unsafe and the next one is only ever 2-5 mins away. But to reiterate, there are some wonderful areas of Toronto to explore and the diversity and variety of things you can do there is unmatched!



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

I would recommend exploring the different neighbourhoods in Toronto. My personal favourites were Ossington, Kensington Market and the Distillery District. Do also go look at the cultural neighbourhoods such as: Chinatown, Little Italy, Greektown, Koreatown, Little Tibet etc. The neighbourhoods all have a unique vibe to them and distinct cultures within them, e.g. Kensington Market being artsy and known for its Jamaican influence and thrifting whilst Ossington is a bit more gentrified and 'hipster'. I would also recommend visiting the ROM, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Aga Khan Museum, Riverdale Park (for a glorious sunset!), the harbourfront, Casa Loma and High Park. Obviously tourist attractions such as the CN Tower, the Rogers Centre, Toronto Islands and St Lawrence Market are must see places! As Toronto is a big city, you'll find that that draws celebrities, be it artists or sports teams to perform/play. If you're a sports buff that

means watching the Raptors play live, or if you're like me, you might catch some of your favourite artists performing. I was lucky enough to watch Men I Trust and Kaytranada, two of my favourite artists, perform live!

My favourite place in Toronto was a little hidden gem called Stakt Market. It is a gorgeous, creative space designed completely out of shipping containers, where small businesses and artists operate their own shops and studios. I would recommend swinging by Courage Cookies for the best cookies in Toronto and Jew creations for some cute crochet creations, yummy Jamaican patties and the sweetest owners!



For food, I would recommend visiting The Momo House in Yorkville, Azhar and Levant on Ossington and The Kettle on Queen St West (also a fabulous neighbourhood for shopping). If you find yourself missing New Zealand, head over to Hemmingways in Yorkville, which is a Kiwi bar and restaurant! Coffee/bakery places I would recommend are Nadege, Nord Lyon, Found, Coffee Island, Jimmy's, Pilot Coffee, Balzacs and it wouldn't be a Canadian experience if you didn't grab a Beaver Tail or Tim Hortons (highly recommend the iced capp and french vanilla!).

Any tips for future students?

Don't leave preparing for your exchange to the last minute. Chip away at it slowly so you're not super stressed just before you're due to leave! Do talk to the exchange office, student development and look into UofT before you head over just to make sure that paper selection and things like graduation are all sorted! Also, recognise that though exchanges are life-changing and an incredible opportunity, they can be hard. This is something I found most people do not talk about, however most people I know who have gone on exchange have felt some level of difficulty whilst overseas. It is a big deal to be away from home, and homesickness can definitely hit. I personally had some health issues on top of all of this which made things difficult at the start. Luckily, I was prompt to reach out and get help and support, which made for a successful exchange in the end. Make sure you are taking care of yourself and make use of the people, resources and services you have around you, afterall, their primary job is to make sure that you are thriving whilst on this exciting endeavour! Also, do some research on Canada and Toronto before you get there. Scoping out the scene before you get there may ease the culture shock a bit when you arrive there.

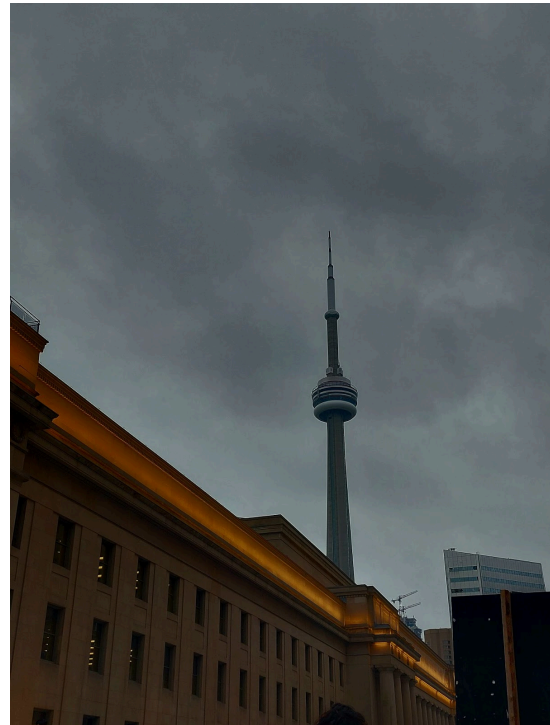
Overall Experience

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

My exchange is definitely an experience that has really had an impact on me as a person. It was an incredible experience, but it also had its challenges. I came out of it feeling fulfilled, and like I've grown as a person, with an increased sense of responsibility, confidence and knowledge of the big wide world that exists outside of little ol' Aotearoa!

I met some really lovely people who I'm still in touch and would love to catch up with again! I thoroughly enjoyed my University experience and feel like my time at such an academic university has made me come out a much better student. I look forward to ending my final year of study on a high note, and making the most out of my classes, attending lectures and feeling confident and comfortable to participate in classroom settings.

Toronto is a behemoth city, one unlike any I have ever visited, and I have lived in a big city myself (Kuala Lumpur). Toronto is often described as a concrete jungle, and I can attest to that. There are pros and cons to this. It is really cool to feel like you are part of a diverse melting pot, and be surrounded by so many cultures and backgrounds. There are so many food and shopping options available. However, I did find that sometimes living in such a big city can feel, funnily enough, quite isolating. People are less friendly and social as they would be here, where in Toronto they prefer to keep to themselves. This also is due to the fact that within a big city, you have to be a bit more guarded and vigilant. Witnessing the drug crisis upon arriving was very confronting and jarring.





I was lucky enough to get some time to do a bit of travel around Canada. I visited Niagara Falls twice, once in the Fall and once in the Winter. I got to go on the boat (on the Canadian side) and witness the Falls up close, which was an amazing experience. Though the boats don't operate in the Winter, there was a light installation and a bunch of fun things to do (think bright lights and entertainment at Clifton Hill), we quite enjoyed it as a day-trip! I visited Ottawa with a flatmate and adored it. As a self-professed law and politics nerd, it was so cool to see the federal government and its physical institutions up close. The buildings are stunning, and there are a lot of amazing museums and art galleries to visit! It was also a bit of a slower pace in comparison to Toronto which I really appreciated.

I absolutely fell in love with Montreal. I visited in both the Summer and the Winter (which saw a snow-storm with a 30 cm buildup of snow on the ground!). I adored the balance between nature and city, the unique french culture and visible European influence. My favourite bookshop in the world is located in the gorgeous Old Port (Librairie Maktaba Bookshop) and the most stunning cafe I've ever been to is a must visit (Crew Collective Cafe). There is so much you can do there, be it tucking into some delicious food (poutine is a must try in Quebec!), a bustling nightlife, art to enjoy (Place de Arts), historical buildings (Notre-Dame Basilica of Montreal and St Joseph's Oratory), wonderful shopping (Mile End) and gorgeous greenery , parks and views to enjoy (Mont Royal).

I hope you enjoy your time in Toronto and in Canada should you choose to go on exchange there!



