

Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada
Semester One 2016
Bachelor of Applied Science (major Aquaculture and Fisheries, minor marine science)

Dalhousie University, also known as Dal, is one of the five universities located in the city of Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada. I chose to go to Dal because of their strong ocean science programs and I particularly wanted to study in North America. Dal has many professors and researchers that are world renown as well as incredible research facilities.

Going to Canada in winter was an adventure. It got a lot colder than I was used to but the city and houses are well prepared for it. I experienced snow days; building snow forts, tobogganing down the Citadel Hill (which is an old military fortress) and regular ice skating outings, which had to be followed up with poutine or Beaver Tails (some of the unhealthiest yet most delicious foods in the world). I couldn't have asked for a better experience; the people really make this place. Going on an exchange is one of the best things I have done!



The Dalhousie University Campus at the beginning of semester one, 2016

Lifestyle/Culture:

The people here are very friendly, some of the friendliest you will ever meet. You can chat to anyone especially if it about ice hockey, fishing, Tim Hortons or just the fact that you are from New Zealand and 90% of people will say that they want to come here. Anyone is willing to help you out, even if you don't ask and just look lost. The friendliness is just as much a part of the Maritime culture as are food, music, cafes and of course beer (Halifax has a lot of bars and is very proud of it). The city itself is not too big to be overwhelming but also not too small that you run out of things to do. It is a very walkable city, about the size of Wellington, and very easy to get around.



At the Halifax Seaport Market



Typical street in Halifax, the houses are very colourful and bright!

Accommodation:

I stayed off campus in a house with 4 Canadian students but within a 5 min walk to my classes. I used Kijiji, a TradeMe-like website, as well as Facebook to find my house for the semester. There were many Facebook groups for the Dal exchange program such as house swap with Dal students going on an exchange and wanting to sublet. Rent is paid monthly and includes most amenities such as power and heating (sometimes internet is included as well) so it can seem to be more expensive than rent in Dunedin but its probably about the same or only a little more expensive in total. It is a good idea to live close to campus so you can have a short walk to your classes in the cold!

Money matters:

Cash is definitely used a lot more in Canada than in New Zealand. Most bars will only accept cash and it is a lot easier than using your card all the time. Setting up a Canadian bank account is possible although I was under the impression I couldn't do it. The orientation for exchange students that is run by the Dal international centre is super helpful with providing information on this as well as getting a local sim card for your phone and other set up things like that. Having a Canadian cell phone plan is a lot more expensive than in New Zealand, even with pre pay.

The scholarship that is provided by Dal (500 Canadian Dollars) will pay for your health insurance and bus pass. If you choose to opt out of one of the available health plans and only pay for the bus pass for one semester, you may be entitled to a refund, which can provide you with a little extra spending money (but if you want it, you have to go and sort it out!)



Jumping for joy on the Cabot Trail (a must do while in Nova Scotia) after a snowstorm

Academics/course load:

Classes tend to fill up really early (like before you have even thought about your exchange). The international office at Dal works very hard to try get overrides for you to get into the classes (not papers) that you want or to at least get on the waitlist. Even if you aren't registered for a class, go along in the beginning and make an effort to personally introduce yourself to the professor. This can help you get into the class and as always at the beginning of the semester a lot of people change their classes, so don't worry!

Classes are generally smaller than at Otago and participation is heavily encouraged as it can count for credit (one of my classes had 15% of my final grade based on participation!) so it can help bump up your marks. There is a lot more focus on assignments throughout the semester; most finals are worth less than 35% of your final grade. All of my courses involved a significant amount of group work and presentations, which can help you actually meet people in your class. It is also common to have 'take home exams' where you have a certain amount of time to complete your exam either online or via Blackboard.



Trying out curling on a Friday night

The lecturers (known as profs here) really encourage making the use of their office hours and want to get to know the students. All of my professors were very friendly and helpful with any questions I had about differences between Otago and Dal.

Transportation:

University fees include a bus pass which is great to use to get around the city area (you can also use it on the ferry). Most of the supermarkets, shops and bars are within walking distance so a car is not necessary unless you want to get somewhere a bit faster or want to head out of the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Some students do have cars and everyone is so friendly that they are willing to give you a lift if you need.

Weather:

Layers are key! It is pretty cold outside but well heated inside, especially in student accommodation. The weather is always changing due to the maritime influence on the climate. You will see that Halifax weather really has a mind of its own and snow can occur randomly at times, another great reason to have layers.



Waiting for the sunset at Point Prim Lighthouse, Digby Nova Scotia

Tips for Dal and Halifax:

- Get a Nova Scotia ID to use instead of your passport/drivers license. It can be used on flights within Canada and also for hiring ice skates for free at Oval. It's not too expensive (about \$15-\$20), but it is a difficult to get to the application office- try and get a ride with someone.
- The university has free gym memberships with your student ID at the Dalplex (the university gym). It has an indoor track, a pool, physio, a rock climbing wall and multiple weight and cardio rooms. It's a little concrete, as is the whole university, but it is really warm and is well equipped.
- If you want to go skiing, you can buy cheap and good gear off Kijiji (Canada's TradeMe) or there are a few ski outfitters around. MEC is good but you need a membership to purchase stuff from there (it's a \$5 membership).
- The staff at the Dal International centre is really supportive and friendly. They will organize some activities at a low cost/for free so take advantage of those, such as going a maple syrup farm!
- Get involved with societies! There are so many and they are very active, a lot of fun and it is a great way to meet people. The life science societies also organize tutorials with teaching assistants around the end of the semester, which can be helpful pre exams. It is also a great way to meet more Canadian students who can help you with getting used to a new university system and also provide some tips on where to travel.
- Living with locals was very helpful when getting used to a new university system and a new city. My housemates acted as my personal tour guides and I met a lot lot of Canadians/locals through them and got to experience the Haligonian way of life.
- I was very fortunate to have a great group of exchange friends who were always up for exploring Halifax and going away for the weekend. Traveling in a group in a new place is a lot of fun- you get to meet a lot of new people and it is often cheaper.

- Hire cars to explore Nova Scotia with a group- it is not too expensive and it's a great way to explore the region and make some classic road-trip memories (car is really the only way to do it). Petrol/gas is not as expensive as home however, you do have to be 21 or older to hire a car.
- If you go for semester one, there is Burger Week in March. About 100 restaurants participate and have \$6 burgers for this week. It's so worth it!
- Go to an ice hockey game. Ice hockey is the blood that runs in Canada's veins- they are a lot of fun and there are many passionate fans out there.
- Try some of the winter activities Canada has to offer such as skiing, ice skating, curling and snowshoeing
- 'When in Canada' was my motto for my exchange, it's a long way to go so you have to make it worthwhile!



At a NHL ice hockey game at the Bell Centre in Montreal.