



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	The University of Texas at Austin
Semester & Year of Exchange	Spring 2020
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Communications and Marketing

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
CMS344K Lying and Deception	English	MFCO 300 level
CMS334K Nonverbal Communication	English	MFCO 300 level
ADV348S The Business of Sports Media	English	MART 300 level
GOV310L American Government	English	POLS 100 level

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

Any comments about these papers?

I took these papers, as Otago did not offer similar equivalents in my given departments. The Moody College of Communication is ranked as one of the best in the world and it really showed, the content was super interesting, and we had guest lecturers from the likes of the New York Times. My business paper was taught by professionals in the sports media industry, one being the CEO for the Vancouver Whitecaps, the other a former president of the Southwest Sports Group, and the last one, a CEO of AXS one of the largest ticketing companies in the world. This meant they would fly in once a week from the likes of Vancouver and Los Angeles specifically to teach that class. It meant the learning environment was super unique as we were getting the inside scoop of what was really happening in the industry. Taking the American Government class was extremely interesting, it gave a very insightful look into the basics of their government system.

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

The biggest difference was that I had no tutorials for all my classes although we could always our TAs for help also each class would run for between 2-3 hours. The structure was very different from Otago in that sense. I found with the classes I took put huge emphasis on class discussion and they were far less essay and final exam heavy and more focused on weekly in class multi-choice quizzes, conducted research projects and short answer exams. The workload was pretty similar to that of Otago as well as the lecture style.

After Spring break, the Covid situation had gotten pretty bad, which meant all classes were put online, UT transitioned well and all of my classes accommodated for my time difference accordingly as by this point I was back in New Zealand which is 17 hours ahead of Austin.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in Laurel Co-op, it was a rewarding and memorable experience. Cooperative living was not something I had heard of previously before looking for accommodation in Austin.

Essentially it is self-governed accommodation where the residents within the house make all the decisions, from where the co-ops money should be spent, to what food we wanted to eat etc.

The accommodation was cheaper than other options as residents are obligated to complete 4 hours of labour each week. It isn't as bad as it sounds, you can make good friends with the others you are rostered on with. Laurel was relatively small with about 45 residents, it meant you became close with everyone and there was a good mix of both International and American residents. Laurel was also a part of a Super Co-op, there were two other Co-ops attached above Laurel called Nueces, and Halstead. We shared the courtyard with them and did collaborative social activities. This meant that the environment/atmosphere was very much that of a giant family, we all got along really well.

Money matters

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

Flights can be quite expensive, but I managed to get a return flight for \$2,000. However, because of Covid I had to book a rather expensive flight quite hastily back home. I didn't get a monetary refund for my return flight, instead got credit to use with the airline within a three-year expiry date.

My accommodation was cheaper than living in the likes of a hall of residence. It was \$1,500 for a single room monthly, which covered rent, power, internet and meals etc and was even cheaper if you opted to have a roommate.

Regarding the Visa process, I had to pay for flights up to Auckland for a US Consulate meeting as well as a mandatory \$160 application fee. You also must pay a Congress mandated SEVIS fee which was \$220 USD (\$342 NZD)

I paid for comprehensive travel insurance from the AA which was \$700, as well as compulsory health insurance through UT if you are UNDER the age of 21, which was \$800 USD (\$1,245 NZD)

I didn't find eating out that expensive, it's good to have money saved up that you can fall back on, plus you can also receive Study link while over there. For travel within the US I found the Google Flights application a great way to secure cheap flights. For example, I got a return flight from Austin to Denver

for \$60USD which is \$93 NZD. Just be aware of tax, which is not included in the prices advertised, that goes for everything you buy.

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

I just used my Westpac Debit card, it worked fine. Westpac has a global alliance with the Bank of America, which meant if you used their ATMs then you don't have to pay an international transaction fee. I also had a Paypal account for online transactions. I would also recommend getting Venmo, American's use it a lot to pay back friends etc.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, I had to apply for a J-1 Visa, it was a very lengthy process and I highly recommend getting onto it as soon as possible. Especially with your DS-160 form, which MUST be sent from the States to you. This is required BEFORE you visit the Consular-General in Auckland where they will either approve or not approve your visa. Just make sure you have ALL the documents before booking your Consular visit, pay for anything that needs to be paid for prior.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, mandatory health insurance as mentioned above. \$1,245 NZD

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There is an abundance of different groups and clubs to be involved in, the global office runs fun excursions, and I partook in two of them. One was to the NASA centre in Houston, and the other to a rodeo in San Antonio. I would recommend joining any of the events they run, as both were exciting day trips.

If you happen to choose to live in a Co-Op there are a lot of fun activities and weekend trips. These include the likes of themed party events, camping trips, and at Laurel they even organised a barge party. However, due to Covid, I didn't get to experience as many fun activities as I would have liked too. They usually do more of them once it got warmer (Jan-March is their winter)

Greek life is also a big thing in the US, they often advertise events along the university's speedway. If you make some American friends, you can get invited along to their parties which is epic.

What was the university/ city like?

It is like Dunedin, it's a very student orientated city, but it is more similar in size to Auckland. The students take immense pride in being a Longhorn. Everyone on campus wears some form of burnt orange attire (their school colours are burnt orange and white), which was awesome to see and be a

part of. Matthew McConaughey is a professor in my department, it was neat seeing him walk around campus. They are very big into sports, especially Football but their spring semester isn't when Football occurs instead it's Baseball. The bus service around the city is free with your UT EID, which is a great way to explore Austin. Austin itself is a huge melting pot with endless activities to do, places to eat etc. I wasn't there long enough to get to do everything. Let's just say you won't get bored/ stuck with nothing to do in Austin as there is always something going on.

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

It is a very outdoorsy place so I would recommend going to the likes of Zilker Park, Barton Springs, Hamilton pools, Mt Bonnell or even paddle boarding on Lady Bird Lake. It also has an amazing live music scene and bars, such as Shakespeare.

I also highly recommend trying as much Tex Mex and BBQ as possible, Austin's food scene is incredible, definitely go to Torchys Tacos.

Any tips for future students?

Participate in any/all opportunities thrown at you, you are only there for a small amount of time and it will make for a much more memorable experience if you try out lots of different things.

I would also try making friends with a mixture of both International and American students. It will help you get a more authentic American college experience.

If you have the funds TRAVEL, there will always be people keen to do something, really make the most of your weekends and explore Texas, its huge, or get a cheap flight and leave the city for the weekend to another state.

Overall Experience

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

Choosing to go to UT was by far the most rewarding, memorable and exciting decision I have made so far. It truly exceeded my expectations. Austin is a gem of a city and the UT experience is something that cannot be matched. I met the most wonderful people, and now have friends not only all over America, but also the world, due to the fact I lived in a co-op. Laurel is amazing and I highly recommend living there. Academically it was incredible. Being able to experience a different style of learning has been beneficial in helping me decide what I am passionate about. I also got to travel to some awesome places outside of Austin such as Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, California and Utah. America has so much to offer and the opportunity to see some of the best landscapes in the world is something I will not forget. Despite the fact Covid cut my exchange short, I still managed to pack a lot into the 3 months I was away, and it only makes me more determined to return there one day.

If you have read this far, bite the bullet and go on an exchange to UT, you will not regret becoming a Longhorn #hookemhorns.



Laurel Co- Op



Zion National Park- Canyon overlook, Utah



Grand Canyon, Arizona



San Antonio Rodeo



Bernie Sanders rally I attended with friends as part of my American Government class



UT welcome sign and bell tower



Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada