

My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Toronto, St George Campus
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1, 2023 (U of T Semester 2)
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Communications and Political Science, though only studied Political Science on exchange as Communications is offered

Academics/Course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
POL309H1-S: Contemporary African Politics: Dynamics and Challenges	English	18 points
POL385H1-S: Issues in Contemporary Greece	English	18 points
POL360H1-S: Topics in Latin American Politics - Political Ecology and Extractivism in the Americas	English	18 points

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points

Any comments about these papers?

The University of Toronto has a wide and extensive Political Science department with main focuses on regional political environments and currently discussed topics. All three papers were taught exceptionally, with each lecturer coming from an area of speciality within the taught regional area. I focused on choosing papers that I have not been offered at Otago with the overall goal of expanding my world political view and knowledge from New Zealand focused to international knowledge. It should be noted that the Political Science department is competitive and large and the course enrolment process gives first choice to full-time U of T students, meaning that students looking to take papers should apply for way more than you expect to take to give yourself the best chances to take papers. These papers were not my first choice but I thoroughly enjoyed them and have no regrets about the choices.

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

The University of Toronto is a top 10 globally-ranked university and the culture both inside and outside the classroom. There are no online recordings of lectures and there is an understanding to show up to every class, with some classes taking attendance that goes towards a participation mark worth points towards the paper. For most classes, it is only one class per week (around 2 hours) and does not have a connected tutorial. Within classes, there is more discussion and questions than Otago, with more emphasis on peer discussion and reviews.

Accommodation

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

I stayed at Neil Wycik Co-op, which is located in the downtown area of the city. The location is a 30 minute walk to the University of Toronto Campus and serves as accommodation for a range of students from different Universities in the city, namely OCAD and TMU. There are good subway and tram options close by to aid in getting around the city and to classes faster. Neil Wycik is the cheapest accommodation you will find in Toronto, with my 4 month semester coming to around \$3000 NZD (which includes power, wifi, water etc.), equally to around \$180 NZD per week, same as most Dunedin flats. This is due to the Co-op nature of the accommodation, with all rent collected to keep the building functioning but not profiting a land-lord. The average range per month in Toronto starts at around \$1000 CAD, with the median being around \$1,500 CAD but can go up to \$500 CAD per week. I would say the location is a pro for Neil Wycik as it is in between the main downtown area and the University of Toronto St. George Campus. I do not have any substantial cons, particularly for the price. Another good option if you are unable to get into Neil Wycik is Tartu which borders on the U of T campus in the Spadina area and hosts the majority of U of T exchange students and costs around \$1000 CAD monthly.

Money matters

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

As previously stated, my accommodation came to around \$3000 NZD for the 4 months. My flights came to around \$3000 NZD as well, flying through Vancouver. Coming into Toronto, I would recommend making use of the UP Express train which takes you from the airport into the main city and connects straight to the subway for an easy route to your accommodation. I did not need a visa due to studying/staying in the country for under 6 months. For food, Toronto is quite expensive and it is important to remember that tax is not included within the advertised price so if something says it costs \$3.00 it never does. I had experience from my two prior years of flatting so I was able to keep food prices quite low, spending around \$60.00 CAD per week on meals. Some accommodations do require a meal plan purchase (like a hall in Dunedin), but Neil Wycik does not. I paid around \$630.00 NZD for insurance which included excess to cover my phone, laptop and overall medical. I prepared prior to leaving, having enough of my prescription medication and luckily did not need to visit any doctors while I was abroad.

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

I primarily used Wise for my overseas travels. Wise includes Apple Pay as well as a physical card and has an app which easily connects to a pre-existing bank account to access funds. The main benefits of the card is that it is not preloaded, so you can top it up whenever you need and also has a range of currencies that you are able to exchange to. The Wise card is also a visa card, which I believe is the best option, as when we travelled abroad during breaks some of my friends had issues with similar cards which functioned via Mastercard. Unless you are there for a year or plan on working during exchange, I don't think you need a Canadian bank account if using a Wise or Revolut card.

Visas & Insurance

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

If you are studying in Canada for under 6 months you do not need a study permit and they are quite expensive to get and don't boost any benefits for a under 6 month stay.

Did your host university have mandatory insurance?

It did not have mandatory insurance.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extracurricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There's a range of clubs and activities for students but personally I did not partake in any so I don't have any recommendations.

What was the university/city like?

The University is very different to Otago, as it is situated within a large city so there is little student culture like Dunedin. Toronto is very metropolitan and there is a range of things to do and the location allows for quick trips to places like Niagara Falls, Montreal and New York City. I would warn students looking to do an exchange in Toronto to research the current homelessness, addiction and mental health crisis in both Toronto and Vancouver as it is hard to ignore the current social situation. There is a very high homeless population in which many are drug-addicted and it is important to be aware of the environment, particularly when walking around alone or at night. I personally regularly walked past the city's safe injection site and it is a hot spot for altercations between homeless individuals and police interference. New Zealand cities are very different to major metropolitan cities and creating friends that you can share Ubers and your location with is super important.

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

Within the city, Kensington Market, Queen Street West, the Distillery District and St Lawrence Market are all beautiful areas to visit and have great shopping and eateries. Places like Snakes and Lattes, 2 Cats and Rebel Nightclub are must visits for Toronto Nightlife. The waterfront area and Toronto Islands are great on sunny days. I would definitely recommend visiting Niagara Falls for a small out of city trip.

Any tips for future students?

Definitely join the facebook group for inbound U of T exchange students and follow/message people also going, I made some of my best friends and allowed for easy meet-ups.

Overall Experience

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

My exchange semester was an incredible experience. Studying in the heart of Toronto in Canada, benefiting my independence, education and endurance to the cold (-20 is not for the faint of heart). Coming from New Zealand to a large metropolitan city allowed for questioning of whether I could see myself in a city like this within my adulthood as well as allowing myself to expand my self-reliance and self-determination. The experience allowed for a range of connections to be made, both for personal benefit as well as within my education and self-promotion of my career. Within my exchange I was able to travel significantly for the first time since covid, with my favourite experience was going to Mexico with 11 other girls on exchange, a much needed break from the snow back in Canada. Overall, I would recommend going on exchange to everyone contemplating going on one, the opportunity to expand your horizons both personally and academically and create friends for life.

