



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	The University of Bristol
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 2, 2017
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Bachelor of Arts
<i>Major(s)</i>	Theatre and Gender Studies

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
SOCI20049 Environment & Society	English	GEND2__	18
SOCI30091 Gender and Migration	English	GEND2__	18
		GEND3__	18
THEA30056 Site Specific and Immersive Performance	English	THEA2__	18

Any comments about these papers?

I loved my sociology papers, it was great to hear new perspectives on things like gender, the environment and migration and compare them with views held in New Zealand. The University of Bristol seemed to have a strong International relations focus within their social sciences which I really valued. Site specific and immersive performance is something not on offer at Otago, so it was great to explore this area. It was an enjoyable balance of research driven and practice-based work.

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

The University of Bristol differs from Otago in that it has a lot of formative work, as well as the usual summative. Which means it receives feedback but is not part of your final grade. I found this quite stressful as both my sociology papers only had one final summative essay that made up 100% of each final grade. They were due during the January exam period after the accommodation at my hall had come to an end and I was travelling in Europe. I think this style of teaching is beneficial but perhaps not as easy for exchange students to adjust to. I did, however, thoroughly enjoy the classroom teaching style with a large focus on discussion of the readings in small group tutorials.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in a student Hall of Residence called Wills Hall. This style of accommodation is commonplace for exchange students and there was a large number in my hall. Much like Otago, Bristol has a great Hall culture and almost every first-year student attends one. My Hall was part of a larger hub of halls in a suburb called Stoke Bishop, 3km from central campus. This was quite far, a 40-minute downhill walk to campus and a 50+ minute walk back up the hill to get home. However, very rarely did you have to do this. The University has a very efficient bus service for students and all Stoke Bishop Hall residents get a bus card which makes all bus use to and from campus free! They leave from the central hub in Stoke Bishop every 7 minutes and the ride is only 13 minutes. So, I could (theoretically) leave my room 30 minutes before my lecture and get there on time!

I enjoyed being in a hall full of first years and exchange students because it was everyone's first semester at Bristol which made it so easy to make friends and meet people. The halls are very social places in general, usually having formal dinners and other events every fortnight.

It was also very practical being in a catered hall rather than a self-catered one. The food was always excellent at Wills. It was nice to come back to after a long day adventuring or studying. It removed one thing to worry about. However, if you are someone who likes to make their own meals or at least partially be able to cook on your own time, Wills did not do the best job at providing the resources to do so. There were small kitchenettes, but these only contained a toaster, sink, fridge, microwave and kettle, which meant I was quite limited.

Money matters

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

Looking back on it, I did not have as much money saved up before I left on exchange as I would have liked. I relied heavily on my student loan for support. You always need more than you think. I will break down some of the costs and explain how I personally dealt with money whilst on my exchange. My Hall of Residence cost roughly \$6000 NZD for the fourth months I was there, but keep in mind this included meals. Flights and insurance were the next biggest cost at about \$3000 NZD. However, I decided to have stopovers in Shanghai and Vancouver on the way there and back which added a small amount to this total.

One of the cost areas I spent more on than I expected was food. As I was at a catered Hall, I assumed I wouldn't have to spend that much money on food. However, most halls do not feed you for every meal of the week. My Hall provided breakfast every day of the week, Dinner just on weekdays and lunch just on weekends. So, it was up to the individual to get food during the day throughout the week and in the evenings on the weekend.

The biggest thing of all is that you are overseas to travel, to explore your destination and do things you wouldn't normally do back home, a lot of which costs money. Once you are there you are going to want to see and do a lot of different things and so it's great to have lots of savings, so you can make the most of it. I managed to go to Norway for 10 days over Reading Week to visit my friend on exchange in Bergen. And then at the end of semester I spent over a month travelling the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain. I would highly recommend the website Skyscanner to anyone looking to keep an eye on cheap flights. I managed to snag my ones to Oslo for £21 return at a few weeks'

notice!! What a bargain!

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

I tried to take as many means for accessing my finances as possible, so I could experiment with what worked best. I talked with my bank Westpac, letting them know I would be overseas and which countries I would be visiting so that my shopping in Shanghai didn't set off any alarms back home. I was also given a Global Partners card detailing Westpac's overseas partners which I could use without receiving international fees when using my debit card at an ATM. I would get out cash in £50 – £100 bundles rather than using my card as this also saved me a percentage fee on every purchase with my card. The other option I took over was a cash passport. This was great. At the time I uploaded my currency onto it in Dunedin, the New Zealand Dollar was doing significantly better than when I was on my exchange, so I saved on money as I had already done the conversion. I wish I had uploaded more. This is a risk however as the opposite could happen and you could end up paying more. If I had been in the UK for a whole year, I would have considered opening a bank account there.

Visas & Insurance

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

I was relatively lucky with my visa and it was an easy process. The Visa needed for a student exchange in the UK does not cost, they just send you the student visa letter in an email. You do need to make sure you have this document printed to show when you go through customs upon entering the UK for the first time. A very important note is to remember that you need it to get back in if you take a trip out of the country during your exchange!

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

The only insurance I purchased for my exchange was travel insurance which I purchased with Flight Centre alongside my tickets to and from the UK.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The University of Bristol is well known for its extensive clubs, societies and teams. During welcome week they have a Fresher Fair on The Clifton Downs with stalls and free giveaways. I highly recommend going along to this to check out what Bristol had to offer. I signed up to the Fine Arts Society, Photography Club, a student magazine, and several of the University's drama and performing arts clubs. As well as University teams and clubs, there are also plenty of opportunities in the Halls for inter-hall competitions or groups specific to your accommodation. For example, Wills had a theatre club which put on a Christmas Pantomime. There are no classes on Wednesday afternoons as this is when much of the Halls and University run sports competitions. Even if you don't want to join one of these teams it's great to go along to watch and cheer for your hall.

What was the university/ city like?

Bristol is a city of 450,000 people and 22,000 of those are University Students. Despite its large population Bristol never feels like a big city like Auckland or London. With very few large buildings you can be in some areas of town and feel like you are in a cute little English town. The architecture in Bristol is very old and beautiful, especially around the University and Clifton area. The hills, greenery, and yellow stone buildings always make for great views when walking around campus. Bristol, like Otago, is very much a student city, well at least it feels like that when you're studying there. There are so many opportunities for students. Bristol has great nightlife and The Triangle is always buzzing whether it's a Monday or a Saturday. With many great pubs, clubs, restaurants, cinemas, theatres and concert venues there is something to do every night of the week.

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

Some personal favourite locations around the city included Brandon Hill and Cabot Tower, a park on the hill overlooking the University with an old watch tower at the summit. Cabot Tower provides the best views of the city and is a must do walk up its spiral staircase to orientate yourself with the layout of Bristol. The Watershed Cinema was another favourite, at the bottom of Park Street by the harbourside, this little cinema has great art house and cult classic screenings alongside the usual blockbusters – and tickets are incredibly cheap for students.

Any tips for future students?

Immerse yourself in all an exchange has to offer, if you're going somewhere like the UK make the most of being so close to Europe. It's not every day that you get to travel to the other side of the world. I managed to go to Norway for 10 days during my reading week to visit one of my best friends from Otago who was doing her exchange at the University of Bergen. I stayed in London for a week after semester was over. Then I went to Devon in West England with my best friend that I had made on exchange and her family hosted me over Christmas and New Year. It was amazing to get an English Christmas. Following the New Year, I travelled Germany, Italy and Spain with two different guys I had met over the course of my exchange, one was German and one Italian. Don't underestimate the joys of free accommodation. Make friends with lots of exchange and international students and you'll never have to pay for accommodation ever again.

Overall Experience

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

Going travelling for that long is always going to change who you are as a person, sometimes not visibly, make sure you take what you gained from it and apply it to life once back in New Zealand, the feeling of being on exchange does not have to end, if you decide so. This year I have been living as a Kiwi Host in a Uni Flat, living with 5 exchange students from North America and Europe. It's an awesome way to keep myself on my toes, keep the adrenalin flowing and view our country with new found appreciation. New Zealand and Otago have so much to offer and sometimes it takes leaving for 5 months to realise that. I am so grateful for the International and Exchange office at Otago and all the opportunities they have provided me.



Reading week in Bergen and Oslo with my friend Tara which included Halloween!



Bristol is only a bus ride away from London. I stayed in the city a week either side of my semester. I couldn't stay away during semester either, seeing musicals, concerts, meeting friends or doing Christmas shopping. Here's me surfing the tube.



The view from Cabot Tower at the top of Brandon Hill with friends. It was the best spot for Guy Fawkes!





My first ever Roller Coaster in Hyde Park's Winter Wonderland during the weeks leading up to Christmas. 4 Loop the Loops 😊

I made friends with internationals and locals alike. I was incredibly lucky to meet friends who hosted me for Christmas and New Year and gave me places to stay in countries across Europe.



Boxing Day dip in the sea on the coast of Devon. It was hailing.



Sun or snow, Wills Hall was beautiful and I had lovely big windows in my room which looked out onto the perfectly mowed lawn. This Halls experience gave me Oxford, Cambridge vibes – a very fun little fantasy to live out. And yes we got snow even as far south as Bristol in early December!!





I played Conrad in Cat in the Hat as part of a show the University's Drama Society put on. I met some of my closest friends through the opportunity – all from signing up to audition at the Fresher Fair in the first week. The best decision of my exchange!



Going on exchange is not that scary. I was even able to vote from the New Zealand embassy in London! Take that leap and go see the world!