



Student Exchange Evaluation

BASIC INFORMATION

Otago degree

Master of Planning

Host University

Queens University,
Kingston, Canada

Semester & Year of Exchange

Semester 2, August-
December 2017

ACADEMICS:

At Queens University I studied within the School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP). I absolutely loved being in SURP and would highly recommend Queens to all Master of Planning students at Otago!! The school is very social and is always holding lots of events, so you get to know your classmates really well. They offer a broad range of interesting course choices and have professors from diverse backgrounds and fields of expertise.

I took three courses (papers), one of which was worth double the credits, therefore equating to four papers at Otago. Sign up for these courses occurred on the first day of orientation week, meaning I didn't have to worry about applying online before I went. However, this made it important to have lots of papers signed off on my learning agreement to ensure that I had several options in case courses were full. The courses I took are listed below.



SURP First Year Orientation Week

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
SURP817 – An Intellectual History of Urban and Regional Planning	English	PLAN411	3
SURP823 – Health and Social Project	English	PLAN435/PLAN535	6
SURP886 – Functional Planning – Public Dispute Resolution: Negotiation, Mediation and Facilitation (ADR) in Public Sector Disputes	English		3



SURP History Trip to Montreal

I enjoyed all of the courses I took and would highly recommend taking the history course as it involved 3 weekend-long fieldtrips to Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa which was a great way to travel and learn about the cities. The project course was challenging as it you were working for a real-life client; however, it was good to experience a practical application of planning in a Canadian setting. The dispute resolution course was not like anything offered at Otago, and I gained some valuable skills that will be helpful throughout my planning career.

In terms of workload, I found that it was less work at Queens than Otago. Assignments were similar including things such as weekly journals, essays, presentations and group reports. The style of teaching was also similar to Otago – being a master’s course it was taught classroom style with discussion about ideas and readings also expected of you. Professor relationships were also like Otago’s in that they were always happy to answer your questions and help you out with any problems you may be having. One thing that was different was that classes were three hours and there was only one class for each course per week. I also found that I was marked easier at Queens compared to Otago.

ACCOMMODATION

During my time at Queens I stayed in the Kingston Student Housing Co-operative and I cannot emphasise enough what an excellent choice this was!!! The Co-op is an affordable and convenient accommodation option for any student attending Queens University.

Applying: You can apply online at <http://www.studenthousingkingston.ca/> for either a 4- or 8-month lease. Keep an eye out for when applications open and apply as soon as you can as spots fill up fast!

Costs: All costs for the co-op can be found on their website. A deposit is required once you are accepted into the co-op and the balance is paid on arrival. It was great not having to pay rent and utilities each month and sort out international transfers. The overall cost would be similar to flatting and was cheaper than going into an international hall.

Food: You can choose whether to be in a meal plan or non-meal plan house. I was on the meal plan which included breakfast, lunch and dinner from Monday to Friday and brunch on the weekends. Each house also receives a food package over the weekend which includes basics such as bread, milk, pasta etc. so you will never go hungry! As part of the meal plan you are required to do a 3-hour kitchen shift each week to help with things like cooking, baking, bread making and cleaning. I found this a great way to make friends and learn new cooking skills! I would definitely recommend the meal plan for convenience – saving time cooking means more time for exploring Canada!!

Operations hours: Each member of the co-op has to complete 3 operations hours per semester which can include things like helping at events, selling tickets for events, or any other jobs that are needed around the co-op. For my operations hours I helped with decorations and food for the semi-formal.

Events: The Co-op holds lots of social events throughout the semester including themed house parties, a boat party cruise, Home Coming celebrations, Halloween house crawl, Thanks Giving dinner, and a semi-formal. This is a good way to meet others in the co-op and experience typical Canadian traditions.

Other information: All of the Co-op houses are fully furnished (even down to towels, sheets and pillows etc,) meaning you can just turn up and everything you need is already there. The houses are close to campus and are in good condition, with monthly cleaning and maintenance. The fact that they offer both four and eight-month leases is also very convenient as most flats only offer 12-month leases, which is not ideal for exchange students. Majority of people in the co-op are also internationals; I was lucky enough to live with 8 others from across the globe including Sweden, Spain, England, Scotland, Wales and Canada, meaning lots of new friends and travel buddies. My exchange would not have been the same without the co-op! I met so many amazing people and didn't have to worry about paying monthly rent and bills or cooking for myself every day.



Co-op Semi-Formal



Co-op Halloween Party



Co-op Boat Cruise Party around the Thousand Islands

*****I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE CO-OP TO ANYONE ATTENDING QUEENS!!!*****

MONEY MATTERS

Going on an exchange is not cheap, however it is worth every penny and is definitely do-able if you put your mind to it and plan well. I worked 25 hours a week whilst studying in the first semester and lived at home to save money. I applied for as many scholarships and grants as I could and was lucky enough to receive a masters scholarship which made a huge difference. I would recommend applying for anything you can as every little bit helps! In general, life in Kingston costs roughly the same as Otago, however there are many additional costs associated with going on an exchange:

- Flights to Canada: \$1000 NZD
- Flights home: \$2000 NZD (Christmas time is an expensive time to fly so book as early as possible!!)

- Accommodation: \$5000 CAD (including rent, power, internet, food, all necessities, fully furnished room and house)
- Insurance: \$600 NZD
- University insurance: \$200 CAD

I would recommend saving as much as you can so that you can make the most of your time in Canada. I spent most of my money travelling to other places in Canada as well as across to the States as Kingston is very close to Boston, New York and Chicago.

In terms of how I managed my money I took over a cash passport from my bank, which I could transfer money onto from my New Zealand account. I would highly recommend this card as it has almost no fees (apart from initial set up cost and \$1 transfer fees) and it is accepted everywhere that has credit (which is almost everywhere in Canada and the USA). Another good thing about this card is that you can load multiple currencies at the same time, so I could have CAD and USD on there for travelling. I could also take out cash at any ATM from this card and the ones on campus only charge a \$1.50 CAD withdrawal fee. In addition to this card I took my New Zealand debit card and credit card, however I very rarely used either of these. A lot of other exchange students set up a Canadian bank account with CIBC bank as they do special deals for students, though I would only recommend this if you were there for the whole year.

VISAS & INSURANCE

If you are studying in Canada for less than six months (i.e. one semester) you do not need to apply for a visa or study permit. However, you do need to apply for an eTA (Electronic Travel Authorisation) which allows you to travel to Canada for a period of up to six months. You can do this online before you go and it's a very straightforward and inexpensive process. I would also recommend printing off your Queens acceptance letter as you may be required to show this to customs on entry to Canada.

In terms of insurance, I got full coverage travel insurance, that extended over the duration of my travels, prior to leaving New Zealand. I got this insurance through my travel agent who also organised my flights and pre-exchange travel. On arrival in Kingston I was required to sign up to UHIP (University Health Insurance Plan) which is mandatory for all Queens University International Insurance. You are automatically enrolled in this insurance plan and will receive an email before you arrive at Queens about the plan. The cost of UHIP is about \$200 CAD and can be paid when you arrive.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR/SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Kingston

The City of Kingston is a lot like Dunedin – it is a student dominated city, with a student area located close to downtown with bars and shops only minutes from campus. All students get free buses with their student ID card so getting around the city is easy and the buses are very reliable. Kingston is also centrally located so that it is close to the three major cities in Ontario – Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, and is also close to Niagara and the US New York State boarder.



View of Kingston Downtown from Fort Henry

Queens University

Queens University is a fantastic University! Their school spirit is like nothing I've even seen, and it makes for a great exchange experience. The campus is a lot like Otago's with a mix of new and historic buildings. It is located close to the edge of Lake Ontario which makes for a good swimming spot during the warmer months. Orientation week at Queens is a huge event, and each course organises something for their incoming students. There is also an orientation for international students called NEWTS week which is where a lot of international students make their first friends. Home Coming is also a massive tradition at Queens and students wear Queens colours and celebrate with returning alumni.



Queens Homecoming



Queens Football Game

Extra-curricular activities

As I have previously said, my course SURP and the Co-op organised lots of social events throughout the year which was great. I would recommend taking any opportunity you can to get out and attend events and try new activities as it makes you exchange experience even more worthwhile.

In terms of clubs, JOIN THE OUTDOORS CLUB!! They organise several trips each weekend to different places across Canada and the US and they are much more affordable than if you were to do it by yourself (not to mention all of the amazing people you meet also)! To sign up to the club it was only \$20 CAD for the semester and this included free gear hire. Trips included camping, hiking, kayaking, canoeing, spelunking (caving) and skiing along with a huge number of other activities. By going on these trips, you get to explore the hidden treasures of Canada, and make great friends along the way.

Intra-murals are also a huge thing at Queens. Essentially, they are sports teams that you put together yourself and enter into the competition to play against other teams. They are great fun and provide opportunities for you to try new sports in a social setting such as innertube water-polo and curling.



Hiking with the Outdoors Club at Fall Festival

Travel recommendations

Prior to my arrival in Canada, I spent two weeks travelling the States with a friend on a Topdeck tour. We travelled to Los Angeles, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, Napa Valley, Yosemite National Park, and San Francisco. This was a great way to ease into travelling and being away from home, before venturing off by myself to Canada.



Grand Canyon



San Francisco



Yosemite National Park

WHILST IN CANADA TRAVEL AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE!!! Weekend trips to places in Ontario are a must! Toronto and Montreal are accessible by Megabus and you can get cheap tickets if you keep an eye out on the website. Megabus does not go to Ottawa, however you can take the train or use other bus companies. Megabus also goes to Niagara Falls, which is a must visit when you are so close to it! The States are also very close to Kingston and cheap flights can be found to New York, Boston and Chicago, so making weekend trips there is relatively easy. I used Skyscanner and set up alerts to notify me when flights were cheap to the US, so I would recommend doing this. There are also lots of places just outside of Kingston which are great to visit if you or a friend has a car including Rock Dunder, Frontenac Provincial Park, Charleston Lake and Prince Edward County. Other international students are always keen to travel, so getting a group together to explore all of these places is a great way to travel and make friends. One thing to note when travelling is that Kingston's airport is not very big, therefore you will have to fly in and out of Toronto or Montreal and take the Megabus to/from Kingston as flights directly to Kingston are very expensive.



Toronto Christmas Market - It's a Must Do!



View from Parliament Hill in Ottawa

Tips for Life in Canada

- Tipping: this takes a while to get used to, but the general rule is 10-15% for services and around 20% for food and dining.
- Domestic travel: flying within Canada is very expensive! (it was cheaper to fly from Toronto to the UK than it was to Vancouver), therefore keep an eye out for cheap flights and take advantage of them when you can and make use of bus and train services.
- Seasons: if you are going on an exchange in semester 2 (their fall semester), you will arrive to hot temperatures and sunny days. As the semester progresses into Fall temperatures will drop but are still comfortable and ideal for travelling as the leaves change to gorgeous colours. In late-November to early December snow will arrive and this is when it can get really cold! I think the coldest temperature I experienced was -26°C , so it's important to bring warm clothing and good footwear to cope with the snow.



Fall Leaves Changing During Thanks Giving

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

I cannot express how much I enjoyed my exchange to Queens and I wish it was something that every student was able to experience. I had the best 4 months of my life and met so many amazing people whom I will be friends with for many years to come. I am so thankful for all the opportunities I was provided with whilst on my exchange, and I urge people to take every chance they get to try something new and step out of their comfort zone. Canada is an amazing country and there are so many beautiful places to explore. An exchange is something you will never regret doing! It has been the highlight of my time at university and the memories I have created will be ones I remember forever.



Cruising through the Thousand Islands



Thanks Giving in Pointe Au Baril