



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Semester & Year of Exchange	Second semester 2023 (Which is the first semester at UCM)
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Spanish

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Arte Español del Siglo XX	Spanish	SPAN341
Historia de Madrid en la Edad Contemporánea	Spanish	SPAN350
Traducción Argumentada	Spanish	
Curso de Español para Extranjeros	Spanish	SPAN332

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

Any comments about these papers?

These papers are taught in native Spanish and are for 3rd/4th year Spanish students at the university. Therefore, it is a challenge to keep up with course content and understand everything due to the speed, accent, vocabulary, and content. They are interesting and rewarding if you complete them.

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

The lectures are 1.5-2 hours long without breaks compared to the 50-minute lectures at Otago, which makes it difficult to adjust, especially if there are several back-to-back. Depending on your timetable, some classes are until 9 pm.

The teachers talk non-stop and only occasionally stop for questions. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to know whether they are starting a new theme or continuing the old one. The lecture slides are only sometimes uploaded, and recordings are not available.

It is up to the student to find their timetable, room numbers, exam times, tutorial rooms, etc., all located online in different locations. Teachers don't tend to repeat this information in class, and the University does not provide a timetable with all papers at the beginning of the term.

Overall, it was a rewarding experience, and I learned a lot; however, since everything is different (which is expected), it takes a lot of time to get used to. Due to the size of the university, the faculties often don't communicate, and it is difficult to find information for everything.

Accommodation

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

Madrid is trendy, and finding reliable and affordable accommodation can be challenging. I have heard stories of people getting scammed online, so be extra careful because you might not be able to get that money back.

The property owners only care about money; therefore, it is first in first served. As soon as you're interested, you must pay your deposit and rent to secure the property. Furthermore, often, you are asked to pay rent in cash because the landlords want to avoid paying extra taxes, which is a standard practice, even though it is illegal.

I started looking in July for accommodation for the end of August (this is recommended because you are more likely to find something; in September, it is difficult to find something affordable because the demand is high due to classes starting).

I started paying rent in mid-July even though I was only moving to Madrid at the end of August to secure an affordable flat in the city centre. Paying rent before moving in was worth it because the longer you wait, the more difficult it is to find a flat. Keep in mind the rent is usually reduced during July and August due to less demand; this means from September onwards, the properties can easily cost 100-200 euros more per month, so make sure you read all the details of the contract before signing.

I found my accommodation on Idealista and lived in a three-person furnished flat in Lavapies, which had two bathrooms. I lived with two other internationals in the flat, and we got along very well, but that is a matter of luck. Lavapies is known to be dangerous. However, I had no problems whatsoever, and it was an ideal location to walk and catch the metro to anywhere in Madrid.

Money matters

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

Rent: 550euros per month + 50euros bills (wifi, electricity, water, gas)

Flights: approx 4500NZD return - flew into Zurich and flying out of Madrid (due to booking at the last minute, it could be cheaper when booking in advance; however, I had not heard back from my university earlier).

Public transport: While I was there, the government subsidised public transport; therefore, it was only 8 euros per month for people under 26, which included everywhere in Madrid as well as 1-hour driving distance outside. For people over 26 you have to pay per zone; the primary zone (A) is 21.80 euros/month, including the Airport. Download the metro app and public transport app for Madrid.

Insurance: Studentsafe Outbound (can't remember the price but included all of Europe)

Meal: 15Euros

Coffee or Tea: 1.50Euros

Beverages in restaurants while eating: 2-4euros

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

This does not apply to me since I already had a bank account in another European country which also uses euros.

Visas & Insurance

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

Not applicable

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Not that I was aware of

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Talk to as many other students as possible; this way, you find out what WhatsApp groups to join, what Instagram pages to follow, etc. They always post social gatherings, sports events, cultural events and trips to other cities and countries on those platforms. For example, SmartInsiders and CityLife are fantastic; they even have free events. You can also join clubs at the university.

Many more events are available for Erasmus students, but you may still be able to take part, even if you don't have a European passport.

Even if you want to do things outside of the student circle, there are many websites/apps where you can find events for the general public, for example board game nights, pub crawls, beer pong tournaments and soccer meet-ups on the following apps: Eventbrite, bclever, meetup and fever.

What was the university/ city like?

- University is very large and almost like a small city with faculties reachable via bus
- There is so much variety
- it is very lively
- there is always something happening, at all hours
- there is excellent public transport,
- it is reasonably safe compared to other major cities;
- also a popular tourist destination (including for Spanish tourists)

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

Retiro Park, Gran Via, Chueca, El Rastro, Puerta del Sol, Museo del Prado. You will get to know all these places and more while you are there. El Tigre has many tapas accompanying the drinks you buy; Lidl and Mercadona are the most affordable supermarkets, and Vermut de Grifo is typical for Madrid.

Any tips for future students?

- Take any opportunity to participate in events and trips; I travelled to Morocco and Portugal twice while on Exchange and didn't regret missing a few lectures. You can get relatively cheap flights to the Canary Islands or any other country.
- Train or bus tickets are also cheap; they just take longer.
- I travelled to Europe two months before classes started, so I visited family and friends and had a proper holiday; I highly recommend this, even afterwards if you have time.
- Don't be afraid to talk to other exchange students and even locals; even though you might be the only Kiwi (which I was), everyone is experiencing a new environment for the first time and is eager to make friends.
- Even though university can be overwhelming, especially with everything being in Spanish and the unfamiliar environment, try to focus on the positive and embrace the challenge; it will be rewarding.

Overall Experience

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

Going on an exchange is a unique and rewarding experience. Albeit challenging, it will help you grow and become open-minded about the world's wide variety of people and cultures. Madrid is an international hub with many foreigners from all over the world, so it is your opportunity to experience the Spanish culture and that of others. By enrolling in classes for local Spanish students (compared to courses taught in English or for exchange students) and challenging yourself to speak Spanish wherever you can, your language skills will improve immensely. Remember you are not alone; many people are going through the same experience, so don't be afraid to talk and mingle. I met some incredible people from around the world whom I will keep in touch with. Remember not to doubt yourself too much; you will be amazed with what you can do of if you set your mind to it. Lastly, have fun 😊

