

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2016 – Semester 2

LLB & BCom (Finance)

If you're on the fence about exchange, or wondering how you're going to split up your 4/5-year degree and ensure that Otago is still as enjoyable as it inherently is, exchange is definitely the way to go. I did it as an ending to my 5-year degree and it was a great way to cap off my time at Otago.

I chose the University of Carolina (UNC) because I wanted to experience that true American college lifestyle. And UNC was the perfect place for this. If you're looking for a ridiculously good-looking campus in a college-dominated town, an American college sporting powerhouse and a campus that has a substantial social scene, this is the perfect place.



This was really my first proper trip overseas and so with this sort of freedom there was a chance to get out and do some travel outside Chapel Hill. I ended up going over with 3 other mates from Otago, all who were going to different American colleges. We started off with a road trip through California (pictured left) and then into Central America for a month as well as mid-semester trips in Texas for thanksgiving (pictured below) as well as rendezvousing with other New Zealanders in Chicago for the All Blacks

test and New York for a weekend. My point is, it's a great place to fit in more travel than just to your exchange university and America. Anyway, more on Chapel Hill...

Accommodation

I was placed in an 800-person sophomore (2nd year) dorm called Morrison on South Campus. While this may not be the case at other American exchange universities, dorms seemed like the only option for exchange students. Literally

all but one of the exchange students I knew lived in a dorm on campus, regardless of age. So unless you have a group already sorted, on-campus is the option. It does give you the bonus of being able to pack up and not worry about a lease at the end.



This meant that you inevitably had a roommate, which may seem horrendous but it isn't too bad. What I recommend is that there is a portal that opens when you apply for housing that is like tinder for roommates. You put up a blurb of yourself and then you get to choose both your roommates and your suitemates (the people who live in the rooms near you). I found an Australian and an English guy, who after giving them a quick Facebook stalk, seemed like chilled guys and they ended up rooming in my suite.

In terms of the hall itself, Morrison definitely had its ups and downs. The big negative was its location on campus and 20-25 minute walk from Franklin Street (the main street for food, shops and bars). Although this seems minimal, when everyone else is walking around 5 minutes to class or Franklin Street, it can seem far away. However Morrison was a little more social and had a bit more of a community feel to it so it really depends what you're looking for.

Money Matters

The biggest scam you will encounter at your time in Chapel Hill is the dining hall. There's two buffet style food halls located on campus and they are expensive, costing around US\$10.50 every time you went in. They want you to sign up for a meal plan straight away, which cost just over US\$1,000 and give you something like 100 swipes. There are no refunds on this and if you stay for two semesters, it costs around US\$200 just to cancel your meal plan.

My advice would be to not buy this. Paying cash every time you went in, only cost around US\$0.50 more than buying a meal plan and I would do this around 3-4 times a week for dinner. But it gives you a lot more flexibility and trust me you want it as you'll get sick of the food pretty quick. For lunches I often ate at the bottom of Lenoir, which has cheaper and healthier options and for dinners would either cook at Morrison in their kitchens or buy something on Franklin. This saved me a good amount of money in the long run.

I'd also recommend getting a Wells Fargo account and linking it to your student ID. Having an American account saves a lot of hassle when ordering stuff online. Also paying insurance is around US\$1,000 and the halls are around US\$4,500 so keep that in mind when budgeting.



Getting Around & Travel

Getting around campus in itself was relatively easy. Most things are in walking distance and biking is also very accessible. However, living in a relatively small town without a car you can often get a bit of cabin fever and so both Uber and Lyft were great for getting around Chapel Hill and out of town. It costs about \$20

to get to the nearest big town in Raleigh/Durham but if you go with someone, it turns out to be quite cheap. Also grocery shopping was often hard and expensive to get to so download Instacart if you want food delivered cheap. Busses would also take you up to north campus as well if you live down by Morrison but getting the timetable for that was rather hard. If you live on North Campus, getting around Chapel Hill becomes a lot easier.

I would also recommend trying to get into the mountains and different cities around North Carolina. It's easy to miss this when you plan your big trips to New York, Las Vegas etc. and it was often under utilized.

Sports

Tar Heels (what they call UNC students) love sport and are good about just about every American sport under the sun. From football to basketball, soccer, lacrosse and volleyball. If you leave Otago semester 2, you'll land in football season, which luckily for me, UNC are getting better at. It's an epic time and tailgating is something you definitely shouldn't miss. If you get a chance as well, go to a southern university for a football game. Texas in particular was unreal.

But if you go first semester you are in for a real treat with basketball season. It starts to kick off around November so I got the start of it, but being there through February and March where the season hits its peak would be unreal. They are obsessed with the mens basketball team who boost alumni such as Michael Jordan and Vince Carter and the game against Duke would be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

In terms of playing sport, I joined the rugby team there that was great fun and a great bunch of guys. So if you want to feel like Dan Carter, join that team. Otherwise there's more social sport such as basketball, flag football, soccer etc. that are very easy to join as well as multiple gym facilities around campus that are free.

Social Life

The people you meet here are legitimately awesome. The stereotype of American's will be thrown out once you live in Chapel Hill as well as the other exchange people being a great time. The State Fair is an awesome thing to do, as well as the exchange group throwing a couple of good events.

As far as weekend-to-weekend activities go, our favourite was Country Fried Duck. Awesome Place. There are around 6 to 7 bars that are viable alternatives for nights out, although if you are under 21 this narrows down to about 2 or 3 bars. Greek life is also more prominent the more south in America you go and North Carolina's Greek life was quite prominent. Luckily we became friendly with a smallish frat that were real accommodating to us and took us under their wing.

Meeting up with friends in different cities as well were some of the best weekends I had over there as well, and so any chance to do so you should definitely jump at it.

All in all it was an awesome experience and one that you'll never forget.