

University of Oregon exchange- Semester 2, 2017

Arrival: I was incredibly lucky with the timing of my exchange and ended up arriving in the US on August 20th, 2017 and therefore got to experience the coolest thing I have ever seen- the total solar eclipse that occurred on Aug 21st, 2017! To say my time in America kicked off with a bang would be an understatement. Right: Hiking up a hill at sunrise before the eclipse.



I spent my first week in America staying with a friend in Eugene exploring the town and campus. Eugene is beautiful and green, lots of grassy areas to chill out on and a really awesome student-driven vibe to the town that is similar to Dunedin. Oregon is so beautiful and full of nature and the people are really friendly, down to earth, active, outdoorsy, liberal and laidback. If you are more into nature than big cities and are looking for a groovy, friendly, student town, Eugene is definitely the place for you. Downtown Eugene and Springfield (the town next door) are super easy to catch busses to and all busses are free with your UO student ID card so I would recommend picking that up as soon as you arrive. Campus itself is all in one place and relatively small so easy to walk everywhere but a lot of students also bike and a really good option for exchange students is to rent a bike, helmet and lock from the UO outdoor programme for the term/s. I was only in Eugene for a term and didn't end up renting or buying a bike because I found it really easy to just walk or bus everywhere. A few cool places to check out when you get to campus are the Museum of Natural and cultural History and the Jordan Schnitzer art museum (both free with student ID). Autzen stadium is where all the Duck's football games are held and tickets can be claimed online for free with student ID on the Sunday night the week before each game.

Travelling: I spent the next three weeks getting as much travelling in western USA done as I could. I spent a few days in Seattle, Washington staying with my friend and visited Snoqualmie Falls, Pike Place market, the Space needle, the famous Seattle gum wall, a couple of museums etc. My time in Seattle was short but I really enjoyed it and it's a really cool city! I then went on a 3-day tour to Yosemite Valley and a 9-day tour called 'Canyon's of the West' both through a company called Green Tortoise Adventure Travel which I cannot recommend highly enough! Both tours were absolutely incredible and involve getting around and sometimes sleeping on a converted bus that has a big, communal couch/bed like arrangement and promotes a fun and open community atmosphere. You get to set up camp in beautiful places and can either sleep in the bus, a tent or under the stars on mattresses. During the day you have options of hiking, swimming, sight-seeing and other adventures. You also get three meals a day provided most of the time that everyone communally helps cook and clean up after. The food is amazing and mostly vegetarian which was awesome for me but meat is also provided for meat-eaters. The atmosphere, organisation and style of the Green Tortoise adventure travel trips is such a cool experience and definitely my biggest highlight of my entire time in the US so I hope you check it out! They are based out of San Francisco and do trips across the entire US, through Canada and Alaska and also down into Mexico and Central America.

<http://www.greentortoise.com/adventure.travel.html>

The hostel that they are based out of in San Francisco is called Green Tortoise Hostel and is by far the coolest hostel I have ever stayed in so if you spend any time in San Fran I would recommend

staying there as it also one of the cheapest options I've found in the city. Before my Yosemite trip I spent a few days exploring the city of San Fran which was really cool. I really enjoyed the California Academy of Science and the de Young art museum in Golden Gate Park. To get from Eugene either up north to Washington or down south to California I used the Greyhound bus system which was the cheapest option but there are also Amtrak trains or Bolt bus.

Below: View of half-dome from the Upper Yosemite falls hike; at the top of Angel's landing hike in Zion national park, at Plateau Point in the Grand Canyon, swimming at reclamation reservoir in Utah.



I also tried to travel on weekends around Oregon and would definitely recommend checking out Crater Lake, Salt Creek waterfall, McCredie Hot Springs, Abiqua Falls, Silver Falls, Umpqua Hot Springs, Blue Pool, Wolf Rock, Terwilliger (a.k.a cougar) Hot springs, the Oregon Coast (sea lion cave, Herceta head lighthouse, Florence, sand dunes etc.), Portland, Bend and Mt Hood.

Uni classes and student life: Second semester at Otago was exchanged for fall trimester at U of O which runs for 10 weeks from September 25th to December 1st followed by a week of final exams. Due to the shorter amount of time studying this meant that the U of O papers I was taking were worth less credits than the Otago semester papers that I needed to take. The genetics department agreed that I could take two U of O genetics papers and it would be equivalent to one Otago paper and then I met the requirements for my genetics major by taking 3 other genetics papers in first semester of 2017. If you are doing the same degree you will notice that there is only 1 genetics paper offered at Otago in first semester (gene315) but along with that I took micro335 and bioc352 which substituted for the two others I needed.

So my two genetics papers at U of O were Bi425- Advanced Molecular Biology Research Laboratory and Bi427- Molecular genetics of human disease. These were worth 5 and 4 U of O credits respectively and I had to take a minimum of 12 credits to be enrolled as a full-time student so I also took Rock climbing, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi which were worth one credit each. The class sizes for my genetics papers were very small (7 people in my lab-based class and around 20 people in my lecture-based class) which is typical at U of O for high-level classes and was an aspect I really enjoyed as it meant that class participation (which is compulsory and graded) was less awkward than at Otago. It also meant that paying attention in class was a lot easier as you were often interacting with the professor/other students. In terms of difficulty, I was pleasantly surprised that I had a really good base of understanding for my genetics classes and I was among the most knowledgeable. My 1 credit PE classes were all really fun and easy to pass as long as you show up and put a decent amount of effort in.

Bi427 was very literature based and I really enjoyed learning how scientists discover the genetic cause of human diseases and develop treatments. I also enjoyed learning to dissect and understand scientific papers. It was pretty easy to do well in this class because homework questions and class participation made up a considerable chunk of the grading.

Bi425 was all lab-based and I found it to be slower paced and more organised than Otago lab classes. Otago had prepared me well for this class as I found I generally had more lab knowledge, skills and experience than my peers. This class was time-consuming as you have to spend at least 12 hours in the lab a week but not too difficult because some of the grade is participation, lab notebook checks and quizzes about the work so as long as you stay on top of what you are doing it is easy to do well.

Hatha yoga 1 was my favourite class and I would highly recommend it even if you've never done any yoga before. Rock climbing 1 is also suitable for beginners and taught me some good skills and climbing technique. Tai Chi was a cool experience however it was a bit repetitive and slow paced for my liking but I don't regret giving it a go.

The U of O version of Blackboard is called Canvas, you can access it through the uoregon webpage under the student resources tab and start using it once you have your Duck ID and password which I would recommend checking before classes start because it will have heaps of important information that you need to be up to speed on before the first day of class.

The student rec centre where the PE classes were held is amazing! It is free with your student ID and has everything you need for every type of exercise imaginable. There are gym, rock climbing, swimming, yoga, cardio, basketball and boxing facilities and a ton of other ways to keep fit. Watching sports games is a big part of student life and if you are going to Eugene for fall term it will be football season so everyone is obsessed with supporting the Ducks which is the school football team.

I'm sure you will hear that underage drinking is taken much more seriously in the US which is true but it is also still very easy to go to house parties and have a good time without needing to go to bars and be over 21 so don't worry if you are heading on exchange before your 21st.

One of my favourite student resources on campus that you should make sure you visit is called the Duck Nest Wellness Centre. It is found on the ground floor of the EMU by the computer lab and is a room for students to relax, make some tea, do colouring, study or read. There is even a nap room where you can sleep between classes. The EMU is similar to 'the link' at Otago in that it is a place where students hang out between classes and study and it has heaps of food options. The computer lab is a really useful place to print stuff out using your ID and you can load printing credit onto your account through Duckweb. The Mills International Centre is also connected to the EMU and is another place to hang out and study or get help/resources for anything you need.

Money and living costs:

For accessing my money while I was in the US I didn't create a bank account over here or use a cash passport and instead I just relied on getting out large amounts of cash at a time at ATMs and paying the international fees but in retrospect that was really not the best way to do it and I probably paid way more in fees than I would have had to pay for a cash passport or a US bank account. I paid around \$2000 NZD for return flights from Auckland to Portland which I bought in early 2017.

I managed to stay with a friend for free/ was travelling for the first month that I was in the states and moved into a flat at the end of September so I only had to pay rent for October, November and December. My rent was \$530 a week in US dollars which is considerably more than standard Dunedin rent prices but is pretty typical of Eugene rent. Utilities were usually another \$30-50 US a month on top of that. Studylink will pay you living costs like usual for the duration of your exchange programme but I would have some savings backed up for the extra cost of US living prices and also

any living costs that you need to pay before or after your official exchange programme dates as studylink will only pay you during this time. I found a flat by posting on a Facebook page called UO housing and ended up living in a house with four other girls who were all juniors (in their third year of uni like myself). They were all 20 years old like me at the time which I found really good because if they were 21 I would not have been able to visit bars with them as I was underage. I chose to live off-campus because it was a lot cheaper than living in the dorms, I had already had the dorm experience at Otago and most students living on campus are in their first year so I would have been older and felt out of place. Also the bedrooms in the dorms are generally shared between two people which I wasn't too keen on.

Exchange prep-tips:

- The J-1 student visa only allows you to enter the US within 30 days of when your exchange programme starts so DON'T buy your flight until you know when that day is and then make sure you arrive no more than 30 days before (no-one told me this and it turned out to be a stressful and costly mistake).
- Start saving money ASAP and hard.
- Start the visa application process as soon as you get accepted by your host uni because it can take a while and you will also need to fly to Auckland or Wellington for an interview for it.
- Update your passport and finalise your flight details BEFORE you fill out your DS2019 and apply for your DS160 because if you don't you will have to go through a process of changing them.
- Make connections with people from your host university/state/country before you go! I was lucky enough to meet loads of Americans, several Oregonians and even 1 guy from U of O that were on exchange at Otago in the couple of semesters before I went on exchange. I am so happy that I put in the extra effort to meet and become friends with these people while I was still in Dunedin because they helped me out hugely when I went over to the US.
- Get vaccinated. You will need to upload a record of your vaccinations including MMR, meningitis and a few other ones before you can register for your classes on Duckweb so I recommend getting onto this early.

I hope this review has been helpful in your exchange planning, I hope you choose U of O and I hope you have an amazing exchange!