



Student Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Otago degree	Bachelor of Arts
Host University	University of Alberta
Major	Psychology
Minor	English Literature
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2/Fall Semester: August – December 2017



Academics

I took four papers while on exchange. This is equivalent to three Otago papers and is the minimum requirement for a Canadian exchange.

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
PSYCHO 371: Neurobiology of Learning and Memory	English	PSYC 317	3
ENGL 314: Postcolonial Literature – Irish Writing in English	English	ENGL 313	3
ENGL 352: 19 Century British Literature – Early Victorian Texts	English	ENGL 332	3
SPAN 111: Beginners Spanish	English		3

The teaching style and how papers are assessed in Canada is very similar to that of Otago. One difference is participation and attendance is often graded. This promotes the classes to involve more open discussion. This was the case for all of my papers and I heard that this was also the case for many of my friend's papers as well. Papers also tended to have greater weighting on mid-term results compared to the exams. My highest weighted exam was only 40%. This meant that there were plenty of assignments throughout the semester. However, with papers on exchange only being pass or fail, you can enjoy the experience without having to worry too much about getting good grades.

Accommodation

I chose to stay in HUB residence during my exchange. HUB is basically one long food court in the middle of campus with student residence on both sides. It is predominantly home to International students. I chose HUB mainly because it was the cheapest option and guaranteed the opportunity to meet plenty of exchange students. In HUB you can choose to live in either two or four room, furnished or unfurnished, apartments. The cost for the full four months was about \$2500 which is fairly reasonable for student accommodation on campus. One of the major positives of HUB is that it is close to everything, I didn't even need to go outside to get to any of my classes, the library, or the LRT transport system. A second positive is that it is full of international and exchange students. Facilitation events in the first week meant that I met heaps of exchange students, many who I would socialize and travel with over the semester. A down side of HUB is that there aren't many Canadian students who live there. Having the opportunity to meet more Canadians would have been great to gain a better understanding of Canadian culture. Another downside of HUB is that the apartments are very basic and not well maintained. Our apartment encountered few problems with mice throughout the semester. Something to bear in mind is that furnished accommodation does not mean fully furnished. You will still need to purchase living necessities like duvet's and cooking utensils. The residence services provided a bus to Ikea in the first week for those who needed to get these kind of things

Money matters

- Accommodation: ~ \$2500 for 4 months.
- Flights: I flew to and from Canada via Europe so can't provide a reflection of prices direct to Canada. However, from my experience flights were far more expensive over the Christmas period.
- Travel insurance: \$700 for full coverage for 7 months in Canada and Europe.
- University health insurance: \$32 CAD per month.

While exchange does appear expensive on the surface, when you factor in the that you still receive study link loan allowances while on exchange it appears far more achievable. I saved up about \$10,000 for my exchange over two years. However, I chose to spend the majority of this in Europe prior to exchange. As a result I didn't do any long distance travel in Canada, instead choosing to spend my time exploring Alberta's national parks. Even when the money dried up completely I still found the experience of living and studying in a foreign country without the stresses of having to achieve high grades to be a fully enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

It's worth bearing in mind that Canada is a massive country. Alberta on its own is more than twice the size of New Zealand. This means that travel costs to other provinces can be quite large. Basically the sky's the limit on exchange, the more money you save the more you can do. I had friends who went exploring in the national parks nearly every weekend. Others chose to spend their money further afield. I had friends who went to places like Toronto, Montreal, travelled in the U.S and even into South America.

In terms of general prices in Canada, prices for most things tend to be about the same as New Zealand. The Canadian exchange rate is also rather similar to New Zealand which makes assessing the price of things easy. I chose to just use cash while overseas. However, if you want to avoid the bank fees, getting something like a cash passport doesn't sound like a bad idea.

Visas & Insurance

No visa is required for a one semester exchange in Canada. The only requirement is an ETA which costs only seven Canadian dollars.

Travel insurance is something you need to factor into your exchange preparations. This came in handy when my bag went missing on my return to New Zealand.

The University also has health insurance which is mandatory for all exchange students. This costs \$32 CAD a month.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

The University has plenty of extra-curricular activities and available to students. With a student population around double that of Otago, there's plenty of University and student run organisations to get involved with, whatever your interests. The Outdoors club is a must. The outdoors club organizes great trips away for students around Alberta's outdoors. For example, within the first few weeks I was involved in a camping trip to Jasper national park with sixty other students. This was a fantastic opportunity to meet exchange students and Canadians and see some incredible sights. The club also has plenty of gear that is free to hire for trips once you become a member. Membership cost \$20.

The University

The University campus is great on the eye and has every facility you could ever want. Some of the facilities for students include a large new gym, rock climbing centre, Ice hockey rink, Football stadium, and many more. The University is held in high esteem in Canada and especially in Edmonton which is home to three other Universities.

Edmonton

The city has great public transport that makes getting to where you want to go easy.

Whyte Avenue is situated within walking distance from the University and is where all the students go on Friday and Saturday nights. There is also plenty of places to go in downtown Edmonton.

The local hockey stadium 'Rogers Place' is a state of the art facility that was host to some big music gigs while I was there, including, Coldplay, Kings of Leon and Imagine dragon's to name a few. The local NHL ice hockey team, the Edmonton oilers play regularly. However, expect to pay over \$100 for a ticket due to the high demand. There are plenty of other games that are cheaper. I managed to score a couple of ticket to a women's international Ice hockey game between Canada and the U.S for \$6 each. The University also has a hockey team that plays on campus who are among the best University teams in Canada. Hockey seems to be a big part of Edmonton's culture. If you go into any sports bar you'll hear the name of local star Connor McDavid thrown around from every direction, or



as Edmontonians' like to call him "Connor McJesus".

While Edmonton has a lot going for it, it's far from the most active and vibrant city in Canada. If you're looking for the exciting city experience on exchange there are certainly better options. However, the proximity of Canada's best national parks to Edmonton is a major draw card and played the biggest part in my decision to go there.

Travel

I visited some amazing national parks while on exchange. The Rockies provide views like you wouldn't believe. Some of the highlights included, camping under the northern lights in Jasper national park, hiking in Yoho national park, visiting tourist hot spots in Banff like Lake Louise, and day trips to Elk Island national park.



Going on exchange also provides you with an opportunity to travel before or after the semester(s). Before my exchange in Canada spent 10 weeks travelling in Europe. Over that time I visited England, Scotland, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany and France and saw some amazing sights. I caught up with friends and relatives as well as meeting some fantastic new people along the way.



Tips for life in Canada

- It's cold! – In the Winter, the temperature can drop to about -30 degrees! Make sure you equip yourself with plenty of warm clothing. A warm jacket is a must. My Kathmandu puffer jacket took an absolute beating but just about held its own in the cold.

- Tipping – The general rule is that you should tip about 15% at places like bars and restaurants.
- ID – Some bars in Edmonton didn't accept international drivers licences as a valid form of identification. They only accepted passports.

Overall Experience

My exchange and time overseas was an absolutely fantastic experience and one that will live long in the memory. I met some great people, enjoyed the University experience without having to worry about keeping the GPA up, exploring the Rockies was a dream come true and travelling Europe in the period before exchange was amazing.

