



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	University of California - Davis
<i>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</i>	<b>S2 2017</b>
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	<b>BA</b>
<i>Major(s)</i>	<b>Sociology (minoring in Criminology)</b>

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>	<b>Otago credit value</b>
SOC100 - Modern Sociological Theory	English	SOCI202 - Sociological Theory	
SOC150 - Criminology	English	CRIM201 - Criminology	
SOC151 - The Criminal Justice System	English	n/a? (GEND210 covers a little of the content)	
		3 UC papers = 2 Otago papers	

### ***Any comments about these papers?***

SOC150 and 151 were the best papers I have ever taken! The professor, Chris Smith, was really into a thing called 'team based learning' so we spent a lot of time working in groups, both in class and out. We even completed assignments together! A first for me was working in a team for part of our final exam. My favourite assignment was a research project we completed on murder rates across various Californian cities. All groups presented their findings in poster format during a special class dubbed 'poster day.' Our team won the award for the most creative presentation!

At UC Davis they run on a trimester schedule, so three shorter terms per year. The workload seemed a lot heavier than at Otago because they fit a lot of content into a very short teaching period - but you get used to it! You just have to keep on top of your workload from day one.

### **Accommodation**

My exchange was a little different in that I was lucky enough to have family living quite close to my exchange university (in Sacramento). The pros of staying with family were not having to pay for accommodation, always having someone to help you out if you got stuck. The only con I can think of was not being fully immersed in the 'student life' of Davis. Living in Sacramento was brilliant though, it's a huge city with a lot going on, all the time.

### **Money matters**

Accommodation: free (thanks Aunty and Uncle!). / Flights: \$2000. / Visa: ~\$500. Travel/Health Insurance: \$800. / UC Davis Health Insurance: \$1000 per term. / Public transport: \$300 a month. (Everything else was generously covered for me by my family, so if you have family near one of the Otago partner universities; it pays to hit them up!

While I was away I withdraw cash from my Westpac account. Westpac is partnered with the Bank of America, meaning you can withdraw cash from any Bank of America ATM without being charged a withdrawal fee (you just pay the currency conversion fee). I recommend setting up a Westpac bank account here before you leave, and taking a few Westpac debit plus cards with you.

### **Visas & Insurance**

The visa process is a simple one if you follow the instructions online. I needed a J1 Visa to study at UC Davis. You need to have your photo taken by someone who is familiar with the U.S Visa requirement, I had mine taken at Jonathan's Photo Warehouse (next to Farmers). You fill out a lot of paper work online, all your personal details, how you're going to fund the trip, a letter from your school saying you've been accepted to go there etc. You upload your photo and pay two different fees - a Visa fee, and a SEVIS (international student) fee. I think this adds up to ~\$500, don't quote me on that. Once you've submitted all the information they want, you schedule an appointment at the American Embassy in Auckland. They take your fingerprints, look at some documents and take your passport off you. My actual interview lasted 3 minutes, all they asked me was what I was studying, and why I wanted to go to UC Davis. They sent me back my passport with the Visa issued within a week.

The University of California have a compulsory health insurance plan you have to pay for (it is possible to waive the insurance if you have another plan, but this is VERY VERY difficult to do - travel insurance does not suffice). The plan is called UC SHIP and costs around \$1000 per term.

### **Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

UC Davis has a bajillion clubs and societies (and frats/sororities) you can join; not even exaggerating. There's a club for every different culture, religion, area of study, sport. Pretty much any interest you may have, there'll be a club for it. If you jump on Facebook and join the UC Davis community using the school email they give you, you'll be able to see all the cool social goings on. I think the coolest extra curricular activity I saw on offer was horse riding lessons at the school barn!

The city of Davis and the UC Davis campus are beautiful, it's very green and clean there. The population is around 68,000; it's a university city much like Dunedin. It's a very close knit community. To give you an idea; the mayor while I was there, Robb Davis, also worked closely with students at the international students office. The main mode of transport around the university is bicycle; UC Davis is widely known for having a massive bike population. One of the traditions I thought was hilarious is at the start off the year, older students camp out on deck chairs on the lawn to watch freshers crash off their bikes as they're learning to navigate the heavy traffic on campus. (Mean, but funny!)

While I was on exchange I went for two police ride alongs! Once with the UC Davis campus police, and another with the Sacramento City Police Department. You get to sit in the front seat of the cop car and go on patrol for 6 hours! These were two of the coolest experiences I've ever had; I learnt a lot about American policing. If you're going to the United States I recommend applying for a police ride along with your local police department! It's definitely an experience you won't get in Dunedin ;)

At UC they have something called a 'pass time.' This is the time period in which you're allowed to choose your classes; get in early because classes over there fill up so quickly! Make sure you visit the campus before your classes start! UC Davis is basically its own little town! There are a tonne of buildings, so it pays to map out your classrooms beforehand. There are a million and one things to do on campus, make the most of everything available there, and check out all the weird and wonderful departments (visiting the cows at the dairy teaching facilities, and watching the Bakuatsu Taiko Dan drummers playing in a forest were my favourites!)

### **Overall Experience**

Taking a student exchange to the United States was very eye-opening for me. There are a lot of amazing things going on in America, it's not all doom and gloom. I had a really awesome time there! The city of Sacramento is like a second home to me, and I'm really grateful to Otago for sending me over there to experience a real life American college (it's just like the movies!) 110% recommend UC Davis as a host university if you're thinking about going to America.