



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of British Columbia
Semester & Year of Exchange	S2 2017
Otago degree(s)	BSc
Major(s)	Geography

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Geographies of the Middle East (400 level)	English	GEOG379 – Special Topic in Human Geography	18 points
Ecohydrology (400 level)	English	GEOG399 – Freshwater Resources: Monitoring and Management	18 points
Anthropology of First Nations of B.C (200 level)	English	ANTH205 – Anthropology and the Contemporary Pacific	18 points

Any comments about these papers?

It was so important to me that I took a local anthropology course, it really helped me to understand the First Nations culture and the place of the university and myself on these lands. The indigenous culture is so beautiful and strong, despite the horrible history of colonization. I think that all exchange students should take a course focusing on the First Nations history and experience. So many Canadians and visitors are ignorant to the violent colonization process that has led us to be on this land, and are unappreciative of how much we owe to the First Nations of this area for preserving the nature that we are fortunate enough to experience here. The professor of the course I took has both First Nations and Maori roots, and it was really interesting to think about similarities and differences between these indigenous cultures and the colonization processes.

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

There was an integrative approach to learning, with a combination of small tests, lab tests, online discussions and working with community partners across all of my courses. In the 400 level courses there was a pretty heavy workload and high expectations of class preparation.

Accommodation

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

I found a shared house in a nearby neighbourhood to the university. I didn't want to live in a halls of residence because I wanted more autonomy and campus accommodation is very expensive. This was great for me because I felt more integrated with the city rather than just the university. The UBC campus can be very isolating as it is geographically and socially separated from the rest of Vancouver. I am grateful that I was able to experience the campus but also explore the rest of the city more than I would have if I lived on campus.

Money matters

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

I paid \$700 a month for rent in a 7 bedroom house in Kitsilano. Flights were around \$900 each way, my student visa was around \$150. I paid roughly \$30 a week for food, shopping at local produce stores and budget supermarkets, but the food is pretty expensive anyway. I paid around \$1000 for travel insurance for the year that I was away.

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

I set up a local bank account which definitely made things easier, and as I ended up staying and getting a job in a café it made sense.

Visas & Insurance

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

I applied for a student visa. The process was pretty straightforward and I picked up the document at the airport on my arrival. The whole process of applying can be done online and it's fairly easy for New Zealand passport holders, although the processing took a while so I would recommend to apply as soon as possible.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

There is a mandatory health insurance for the first 3 months for exchange students, and then it is encouraged to apply for the medical services plan that Canadian residents use.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

I joined the Varsity Outdoor Club at UBC which is how I made a lot of my good friends. I did get a little tired of the macho male energy in the group, but outdoor adventures can be a great way to connect with people who you can then build friendships outside of the club with. There are a lot of organised events for exchange students and a facebook group where people can organise activities, but I wasn't too involved with this as I preferred to carve my own way around the city.

What was the university/ city like?

UBC covers a huge area of land and is basically a separate city to Vancouver. It also has a very capitalist, industrialised feel about it. All of the food places in the main area of campus are very expensive, as is the bookshop and the extensive collection of merchandise. All over campus there are displays of wealth that show that prestige is one of the main values of UBC. Overall the university feels more like a corporation than a centre of learning.

However, there are counter-communities to this dominant attitude at UBC. There is a co-operative vegan café called Seedlings that has cheap food and a very inclusive vibe. There are a lot of hidden yet strong communities at UBC, and the key is to find the community that fits you best. I found my community in the pottery studio, seedlings café, and partly in the Varsity Outdoor Club.

I really grew to love the city of Vancouver. It is small in population but very spread out, which makes it feel disconnected at first. However, again it is a matter of finding the communities within the city that you connect with and linking it all up. It is pretty special to be able to access the mountains by public transport, and that there are so many beaches and parks to spend sunny days in. The city is very polarised by the seasons, and is a bit sad in the winter and incredibly vibrant in the spring and summer months.

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

The Naam of 4th avenue in Kitsilano has great vegetarian and vegan food and is one of the original restaurants from the area's hippy times. The gulf islands off the coast are easy to get to by ferry and so magical to visit in the summer. Wreck beach on campus is a beautiful nudist beach with the cleanest water out of all the Vancouver beaches. Spartacus books near Commercial drive is a great radical anarchist bookshop and community space. I worked at Arbutus coffee in Kitsilano and it's the cosiest café in an old house. It feels different to a lot of the cafes in Vancouver which tend to be more commercial.

Any tips for future students?

Get a bike! It changed my experience of Vancouver completely when I was given a bike by my friend. The city has an amazing network of bike paths and it is so easy to get around on them. There are also some amazing rides around the coast you can do, and I found it so much easier to explore the city with my bike. For the winter months pick up a hobby or get really into skiing. Whistler is amazing but very expensive, but there are a few ski fields close to the city accessible by bus! If you're staying on campus you should really try and get out into the rest of the city. There are always interesting events happening around the city, and so many new areas to explore. Getting out in the winter can be hard because everyone feels like hunkering down, but there will be some dance party happening to shake you out of it!

Overall Experience

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

Before I arrived in Vancouver I was travelling for two months around Eastern Europe, and I learnt so much about the world and gained a lot of perspective. This meant though, that by the time I came to study at UBC I felt like I was over university, so wasn't as committed and engulfed in my studies as I was back home. This was hard for me as I was very studious back home, and led to me ending my exchange study after one semester instead of two, which worked out fine because I had enough credits to graduate anyway. I had planned to be away from home for a year, and by December felt that I had just started setting up real roots. I decided to apply for a work permit and get a job in a café until I felt ready to go home. Most of my good experiences of Vancouver were whilst I was working and living in the city rather than when I was studying at UBC. As I mentioned though, I met a lot of my good friends through the outdoor club and other UBC clubs so I am grateful for that.

I am also grateful that the exchange experience is what facilitated me living in Vancouver, as I wouldn't have just moved here without that opportunity. British Columbia is a beautiful place, and there are an overwhelming amount of areas to explore. The things that were most special to me living in BC were exploring the islands and mountains and connecting with the First Nations histories and communities.

In general, an exchange at UBC can be what you make it. I think because the university is so big it can feel hard to find a sense of community, and that was very different for me coming from Otago. It would be a different exchange experience if you were living on campus, and you would likely feel more connected with other exchange students and the university if that is what you're looking for. Personally, I am so glad that I was less connected with the university and more connected with the city, especially as I was growing away from university culture at the time. The exchange didn't define my time in Vancouver, in that I wasn't too focused on university and didn't get super involved with the exchange student community. However, the exchange opportunity was what pushed me to leave home, and set me up with an initial purpose in Vancouver. It also helped me to make lots of long-lasting connections that stayed with me throughout my time there.