



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Toronto
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2018
Otago degree(s)	BSc
Major(s)	Psychology

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Plants and society	Eng	Sci	
Conservation Biology	Eng	sci	
Brain and Cognition	Eng	Brain and Cognition	
Personality and its Transformations	Eng	Sci	

Any comments about these papers?

Psychology papers over here are often one three hour lecture a week. This can be very handy due to it often meaning you will have fewer days at uni (I had two days off per week) but three hours is a very long time to stay engaged. My two environment papers were incredible and if you are looking for some fun papers to do would highly recommend the assignments are actually fun. . Degrees over here are 4 years not 3 and because of this I found that this meant that the 200 level papers were at a lower level than a 200 level paper in Dunedin, especially since I had already done a semester of 200 level papers

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

UofT is the 20th best university in the world and it lets you know it. Everyone really cares about their grades and as an exchange student you will often find yourself feeling like you are doing way less work than the Canadians. Lectures are a lot more interactive than in New Zealand which took a bit of getting used to. Questions are encouraged and often can lead to "participation credits" it took me half a semester to feel comfortable enough to ask questions in lectures but once I did I found it really helped and professors will often make an effort to learn your name and goals for the course even in large classes.. Assignments over here are a lot of fun. For one of them I psychoanalysed a fictional character and another I went to urban national parks around the cities taking photos of flowers.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in Tartu college a privately owned university hall of residence generally for anyone above 1st year. It is one of the cheaper options at \$850 Canadian a month (about \$1000 NZD) You are placed in units of six with own room each and shared cooking area and bathrooms x2. It's nothing special but the location could not be better, with some of my classes being less than 5 minutes away and right by subway station and metro supermarket. Like many places in Toronto you have to get in quick to get a room. I have many friends who missed out on a place and had to live far out or in very expensive accommodation. Staff was decently friendly and helpful and I was fortunate enough to have some great suitemates who I could go to the movies and out for dinner with.

Money matters

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

The bottom line is, exchange is expensive. Toronto is an expensive city in terms of food and accommodation. Flights were also not cheap but I would highly recommend getting a return ticket as some of my kiwi friends also over here have found that buying ticket home is more expensive by itself, especially if you have blown all your money on having fun over here. I think I payed about 2500 all up without insurance.

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

I opened an account for free with Scotiabank, all I needed to do so was ID and an acceptance letter. Scotiabank was ideal as it also allows you to earn scene points which get you free movie tickets and cheap popcorn. (over course of my time here I got two free movie tickets and \$2 large popcorn). I transferred money over at the start and it lasted me up until about 3 weeks before I left, in which I used my new Zealand debit MasterCard.

Visas & Insurance

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

I just got an electronic travel visa which cost like \$7 and lasts six months. It takes about 10minutes to apply online and you generally get approved in one or two days. You can also apply for a study permit but if you are only going for one semester it is not really worth it. Side note, immigration officers tend to be surprised when you say you are coming to study but don't have a study permit, apparently, it is not common knowledge that it isn't required for study under 6 months.

Did your host university have mandatory insurance?

Yes, it is called UHIP and even though I personally never made use of it, it covers a fair amount which is nice. Costs about \$52 a month and needs to be paid before the semester starts.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There are tonnes of clubs on offer, almost too many to choose from. I joined a book club called bookends which was lovely and the people are very friendly. Intermural sports events are like the intercollege system in Otago expect it is more widely participated in by upper-level students as well as the first year. As an Arts and Science student you will be assigned a college even if you are not living on campus (Law Engineering and Grad school all have own college too) get in touch with your college and they will assign you to a team in a variety of sports. I played flag football (ripper rugby version of American football), soccer, frisbee and ice hockey.

What was the university/ city like?

Toronto is a very liveable city. It's very multicultural and welcoming of people from everywhere. Be prepared to explain everything about NZ to everyone you meet as they are genuinely fascinated. The university is quite large and spread out. St George campus is right in the heart of Toronto giving it a great vibe. It is an expensive city for everything and the fact that prices on everything don't have tax included is something to get used to. Tipping at restaurants and cafes is also generally expected between 15 and 20 percent. There are many parks and street art all around the city giving it a great feel and the squirrels that are absolutely everywhere is one thing that I have really missed since I've come home.

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

Els Furniture warehouse on Bloor street was my go-to for food. Everything to eat is \$5.00 and pretty decent (Apple Pie was my fave). It is open all day and till 2 am and has a great student vibe. The Maddison is the go-to student bar and kinda reminds me of 10bar. It's not great but the location is ideal and it has good deals on drinks and food. Often a go-to haunt for exchange students. Poutine and Beaver tails are two very quintessential Canadian foods that you have to try. I am yet to meet anyone who didn't like a Beavertail but poutine can be polarising. In terms of things to do, I would recommend trips to Niagra Falls, Bruce peninsula and Algonquin national park. Check out Parkbus for a decently priced transport option. In Toronto, I would recommend going to see at least one sporting event. Baseball and basketball are pretty affordable and fun but hockey is very expensive to go to. As a hockey player myself, I splurged but you may not be willing otherwise. To experience hockey for free I recommend going to a varsity game. Toronto Islands are also worth seeing with nice beaches an amusement park and great views of city skyline. Kensington market is a street close to campus with great shops and food and a hipster vibe, would highly recommend going on "pedestrian Sundays" which happen about once a month. I was fortunate enough to make it to Banff, Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa, and New York all of which I would recommend. However, Canada is unfathomably big making travel long and expensive.

Any tips for future students?

Embrace every opportunity. Weekend trips, clubs intramurals even study groups are all great fun. Don't be afraid to get out of your comfort zone and try something different. Make sure you have enough funds saved because the exchange is expensive. Make the most of reading week (mid-semester break) for going away but be warned profs love setting assignments over this period.

Overall Experience

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

I am not a particularly extraverted person but being on an exchange has helped me become more so. I met so many great, like-minded people and am already planning trips to see my new friends all over the world in the near future. I have officially fallen in love with Canada and am genuinely considering moving here when I finish university. Whilst I was technically studying the whole exchange experience felt like one big holiday. If you are feeling like the study is getting you down, an exchange is great to spark your curiosity and thirst for knowledge again.

