

Student Exchange Evaluation

Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Commerce
Major(s)	Finance and Economics
Host University	University of California – Berkeley
Semester of Exchange	Semester One, 2018

Accommodation

I stayed in I-house (International House) which is a privately run hall mainly to international students which houses around 600 students. This place was awesome, it had both international and American students, it had an amazing food hall which left me spoiled for choice and after packing on 10kgs I had to restrict my self from going back for fourths.

It also ran a bunch of events (coffee hour, ball, ski trip, boat cruise, NBA basketball game tickets and so much more) so the social aspect was great. The only the negative of I-house was the price (\$11,900), I heard the Co-ops are much cheaper and still have a great social atmosphere, so this could be an option if your looking to do it for cheap.

I would be very careful at renting an apartment, as many make you pay a fee just to apply. I know a couple of people that got scammed out of over \$1000 as they signed up for an apartment over the internet and paid the bond but the place didn't exist when they arrived. I suggest you don't sign a contract or pay bond until you're over there unless you know the place is legit.



Money matters

Before I went I did a brief budget which ended being about \$23,000 (I will put all NZD). This was a fairly good estimate as I think I spent about \$24,000 in the end. The rough major costs for me were accommodation and meals (\$11,900), Health Insurance (\$2,000ish), Travel insurance (\$800), flights (\$3,000), visa and preparation (\$1,000) orientation (\$600), fun/travel (\$4,000). Keep in mind my accommodation was expensive and I travelled in the breaks and a couple of weekend trips also 3 weeks of extra travelling at the end of the exchange (LA, Dallas, New York, Atlanta, Nashville, Yosemite, San Francisco a bunch, Charlotte, a decent portion of California), so I did it the expensive way. I think that you could do it comfortably for 18-19 grand and still have a great time, just try to book flights early, and don't eat as much Krispy Kreme and Taco Bell as I did.

When I first got there I just took my NZ EFTPOS card and USD\$200 cash. The card had a 2.5% fee which I thought wasn't too bad. Then a few weeks into my exchange I got pickpocketed they stole my cash and cards. I ended up opening an American account (free as a student), this worked well. In all honesty I have no idea what the best way is to access money, but either NZ card, foreign card, or travel card all seem to work well.



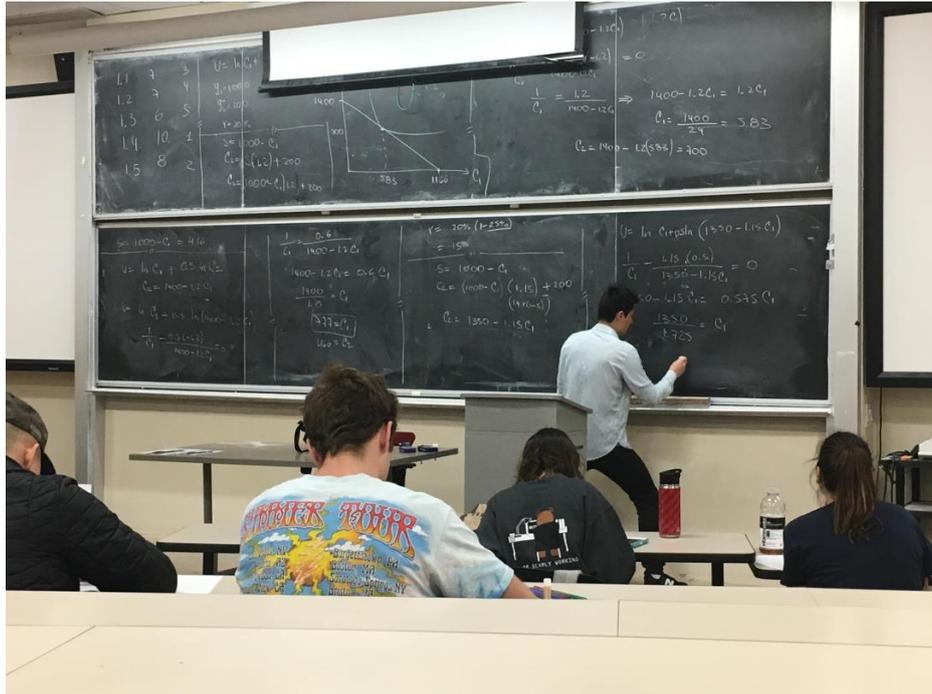
Academics/Course Load

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Public Economics	English	ECON 308	18
Wage Theory and Policy Economics	English	Unspecified ECON 300 level	18
Global Inequality and Growth	English	Unspecified ECON 300 level	18
Calculus	English	-	18

One mistake I made was not choosing papers before I left, and at Berkeley the papers are competitive entry and there is a limited amount of spots in each class, so all the good ones get taken a couple months before lectures start. So, when I arrived it was a last minute rush to get the 3 remaining economics papers. Luckily it worked out well and these papers were super easy to pass and more interesting than first anticipated.

At Berkeley the layout of class is very similar to Otago in terms of schedule. They have several (Usually 2-3) lectures per week and one tutorial. Although the lecture is a little different, I found the teaching style was a lot more informal with a lower class size, this meant the professor would go very briefly over the core concepts and a lot of questions would be asked by students. The tutorials where both an opportunity to revised these concepts and build on them. While there was a little you were meant to learn by yourself the workload was fairly small to scrape by if you're only wanting to pass.

One problem I found was that all grades are curved meaning its competitive. So everyone is competing against fellow students to get higher grades. But this worked to my advantage as everyone knew I was an exchange student and only wanted to pass so they were more than willing to help to make sure I pass.



Visas & Insurance

Going to the US, and getting a Visa is a bit of a mission. You have to fill out several forms and go to Auckland for an interview. The most annoying part was you have to put a US address which I didn't know yet, so I just put where I thought I'd end up. But overall it wasn't a hard process it was just time consuming.

At Berkeley they make you have health insurance, and they try to make you go through their system which costs about \$2000. This is what I did. In hindsight, you could probably get it for cheaper if you sort it out yourself. This whole thing was stupid as I only went to the doctor once, and still had to pay \$30. In terms of travel insurance I paid \$800.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

There were plenty of activities and social events set up by the university, I-house and the international office. Just look on their website or go into their offices, and they are happy to help.

I recommended going on the big trips like the skiing trip and NBA trip, because when they book in bulk its like a third of the price.

Berkeley is a nice small town and San Francisco is only a 30 minute drive away, or a free 1 hour bus trip away (using student card they give you). I 100% recommend spending the weekends exploring the surrounding areas because California is so beautiful and transportation is so cheap.



Travelling

I travelled way more than I planned to, but it was well worth it. You can get super cheap flights and bus rides and Uber/Lyft is pretty inexpensive. First I explored the bay area, then in a break I went to LA for 5 days and did all the tourist stuff. Then for a weekend I hired a car and went to Yosemite and national parks. Then at the end of the semester I travelled a lot for 3 weeks, this is where I spent a bulk of my extra money and went over budget. I suggest you plan your flights and plans, as mine were kind of spontaneous and way more expensive than it needed to be. I then borrowed my friends car and did a road trip around the South (Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina) which was a highlight. Meeting new people in hostels and travelling with them was awesome, I made friends with locals and had a great time.

Photos:

