



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	The University of Texas at Austin
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 1 2018- Spring Semester
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	Bachelor of Commerce/Bachelor of Arts
<i>Major(s)</i>	Marketing Management/Indigenous Development

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Intro to Philosophy of Religion	ENG	1 st year Religious Studies paper	13.5 points
American Government	ENG	1 st year Politics paper	13.5 points
Western Civilization in Modern Times	ENG	1 st year History paper	13.5 points
Intro to the Study of Language	ENG	1 st year Linguistic paper	13.5 points

Any comments about these papers?

The papers above were relatively straight forward. Attendance is not mandatory. However, at times the lecturers tend to give out homework that had instructions about certain assignments. On that note, it's probably a good idea to attend all lectures just in case this happens.

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

Four papers max per semester is probably a reasonable work load in order to get the study/leisure balance right. However, this credits back to three papers back home at Otago. I also made sure that I picked papers that were all on the same day which meant that I only had to attend uni on Tuesdays and Thursday. This however was a jam packed 9:30am until 3:30pm non-stop day. However, this meant that I had a four-day weekends to have fun and dabble in extra curricular activities. The grading system tends to be more lenient compared to Otago. Grades are usually scaled. Papers are generally easier.

Accommodation

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

While I was in Austin, Texas I stayed at Pearl St Co-op. Great experience and great people. It was mostly full of international students. I also had friends that stayed in the 21st Street Co-Op which apparently was great as well. The pros of staying in Pearl St was the cheap cost of accommodation and a diverse mix of people from different backgrounds. The accommodation is cheap because residents are obligated to assign themselves to 4 hours of labour each week to off-set some of the costs. It was also real close to Uni and the gym which would take around 5-10 minutes to walk to. There were not many cons apart from the fact that some of the facilities within the co-op haven't been upgraded since the 80's.

Money matters

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

The USA is an expensive place in general. I did a lot of travelling within the USA and Mexico. Flights are usually quite cheap if you pick them up early. I payed \$1,500 NZD for a one-way ticket to Austin with the intention of travelling around the US when I finished studying. Accommodation roughly cost \$920 NZD per month which also covered food at the Co-Op which was usually 10/10 great. I purchased two lots of insurance. The health insurance through the University is compulsory and costs around \$1,100 NZD. I also had comprehensive world travel insurance which cost around \$480 for 6 months.

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

I opened a bank account with Wells Fargo. I probably should have just used my debit card. Looking back at it now it probably is just as good to use a debit card due to the reasonably strong floating exchange rate of my bank at the time. However, this would probably mean that you will be charged a withdraw fee as well as the exchange rate difference. It shouldn't cause too much of a dent in the bank account if you withdraw large sums of money at a time.

Visas & Insurance

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

You must apply online and it can be quite complicated process if you haven't applied for a visa before. The visa process includes a visit to the Consular-General in Auckland or the US Embassy in Wellington. It should only take around 10-14 working days for them to process your visa and send it back to you.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Health Insurance as mentioned above. \$1,100 NZD

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Austin is the capital of live music in the world. There is always something going on in the nightlife part of Austin down 6th Street. Additionally, there are great places to eat around 6th street that range from Mexican, Italian, Greek and Turkish delicacies. Fraternity life in Austin is also quite big and often hold "philanthropic" events that are pretty good. The kiwis on exchange entered into a frat dodgeball contest with a bunch of Australians and managed to get pass the first round which was

exciting. We even got to bust out a haka, and the Aussies done a classic shoey which was a great display of culture on our behalf!

What was the university/ city like?

University was great. There were many cheap eateries around campus. There were also around 7 different gymnasiums you could train in. The main gym also had a spa and a resort style pool attached to it which was based in the middle of campus. You would often find a lot of people bathing in the nice Texas hot sun by 1pm every day. The city also had a lot of great running/walking trails as well as lakes that were good to swim in. These lakes were usually around 15 minutes out of the city.

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

There is an outdoor rock-climbing wall about 30 minutes out of Austin that is located right next to the lake. Taco Bell and In-an out burger was usually my cheat meal Saturday cheat meal of choice. Additionally, there is place called Pluckers about a 5-minute walk from Pearl St Co-Op which is a perfect place to watch American sports before you head to Cane and Abel's. Also, try and visit Houston and go to the Rodeo.

Overall Experience

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

Going on exchange is probably the best decision I've made. Academically and socially speaking, it is the best investment I have made. Meeting new people, listening to different stories, gaining new perspectives and having an all-around great time with great people was definitely the highlight. I think that every student at some point of their degree should consider it. The opportunities that arise due to the friendships-built overtime are abundant. If you are reading this and are considering on going to the University of Texas at Austin, you're in for one heck of a great time.

