



My Exchange Evaluation- Hannah Fletcher

Basic Information

Host University	University of Toronto (Mississauga campus)
Semester & Year of Exchange	Fall semester 2018
Otago degree(s)	LLB/BA
Major(s)	Major in Communications and Minor in Geography

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
CCT302 - Developing and Managing Communications Campaigns and Projects	English	MFCO 300 level paper	18
CCT310 – Mass Communication and Popular Culture	English	MFCO 300 level paper	18
CCT340 – Gender, Media and Technology	English	MFCO 300 level paper	18
GGR365 – Trade and Globalisation	English	GEOG 300 level paper	18

Any comments about these papers?

I was happy with my paper selection and thoroughly enjoyed the content for each paper. I highly recommend CCT302 if you have an interest in advertising or marketing. It taught me a number of practical skills and useful information applicable to a career in the marketing industry. Also, CCT340 was probably my favourite out of the 4 because we discussed really thought provoking and controversial topics as well as looking at the future of AI technology.

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

I studied 4 papers at the University of Toronto (equivalent to 4 Otago papers). In my opinion the academic workload is very similar to Otago, with perhaps slightly more assignments worth less percentage each. Three of my four papers were internal based and so I only had one external exam at the end of semester which I found suited me really well.

The lectures are all 2 hours long. I didn't have any tutorials for my papers so it was a lot more independent and group study as the contact time scheduled was minimal. All my lectures were on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday so I had flexibility to get involved in other university activities and travel around Canada – really making the most of my semester abroad.

I really enjoyed my lectures as the Professors were extremely passionate about their field of study and encouraged a lot of student participation. They created an environment where students actually wanted to speak out, express their opinion and have a discussion. I think this style of teaching differed slightly to Otago where people are usually less inclined to speak out. Overall I thoroughly enjoyed my academic experience and would do it again in a heartbeat. I recommend choosing papers in your field of study that aren't offered at Otago because it is a great opportunity to expand your knowledge and try something new.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in 'on campus' university accommodation. I was in a flat set up with 3 other students and we had a kitchen, lounge, shared bathroom and small garden. The room fitted a desk, single bed and built in wardrobe. It was a decent size and came fully furnished (just had to buy bed sheets).

Pro: The campus location is really great in terms of convenience and having the opportunity to make friends with lots of people. There are heaps of events and activities organised throughout the semester for on campus residents. Majority of exchange students live on campus.

Con: On campus accommodation is primarily for first years, except for exchange students, and as a result the residents were quite a bit younger (lovely people though!). The exchange students were my age and I ended up doing most things with them as we had similar interests and wanted to go off adventuring all the time

Money matters

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

When I arrived in Canada I was contemplating whether to set up a Canadian bank account (which you can do for free as a student). In the end I decided not to set one up because I had a Kiwibank 'Loaded for Travel' card, which I used the whole time.

Depending on which bank you are with in New Zealand I think there are different Travel cards available but I would recommend talking to your bank about the options. I am with Kiwibank and the 'Loaded For Travel' card allows you to load money (via your online bank account) into different 'currency wallets' on your travel card. For example, I had a 'Canadian dollars wallet' on my travel card and would transfer NZ dollars into Canadian dollars (based on the exchange rate at any given time). The beauty of the travel card is that when you use it at a vendor or to pay for something online there are no additional costs so it does exactly the same thing that a Canadian card would do.

Visas & Insurance

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

I applied for an ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation), which allows you to be in Canada for 6 months. Applying for this is really straightforward and all the details are on the Immigration/Government website. I would recommend the ETA if you know you are only there for 6 months.

However, if you are going to be in Canada for longer than 6 months you will have to apply for a Student Study visa. From my knowledge this is a more complex application and also takes substantially longer to process so make sure you apply with plenty of time.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes – it was called, University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) and my host university sorted out the details etc. so it wasn't a hassle to organise.

"It is a mandatory health insurance plan for most international students to ensure you have basic health care coverage while studying in Ontario. UHIP helps to cover the cost of hospital and medical services you may need while in Ontario".

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There were lots of clubs that students could join similar to Otago. These range from environmental groups, to cultural clubs, sport teams, volunteer clubs and list goes on. There really was something for everyone and lots of options to choose from.

The university has a fully equipped gym, dance studios, basketball courts, squash courts and a swimming pool, as well as outdoor volleyball and tennis courts and playing fields. The Downtown campus also has an ice hockey stadium and athletics track, open for all Toronto students to use. The gym classes are included in the university fees so you can attend any class with no additional cost. There was a wide range of classes including Yoga, Pilates, Spin classes, HITT sessions, Karate etc.

The University ran social events, open mic nights, wellness days, careers expos and themed events such as a Halloween Haunted house.

What was the university/ city like?

Toronto University has 3 campuses that fall under the same umbrella – Downtown (in the city centre), Scarborough (I don't know anyone who has been there) and Mississauga (the one I was based at). Mississauga is about half an hour from the city centre and the university has a free shuttle throughout the week, which I used when wanting to explore the city, attend events or use the Downtown campus facilities etc. The Mississauga campus is more modern than the Downtown campus. It has a real sense of community and is surrounded by nature trails (I would see deer and squirrels daily).

I loved being based in Toronto, as it is an extremely vibrant and culturally diverse city with lots of events, festivals and activities going on all year round. It is a very easy city to navigate and is situated right on the edge of Lake Ontario. There is an abundance of cafes and restaurants as well as shops ranging from vintage second hand to high end. It has a nice lake front track and the city is scattered with parks and green spaces. I did miss the mountains a bit as Toronto and the wider area is pretty flat, however I definitely got my fix of mountains from my weekly travels!

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

There is always something happening in Toronto so you are never short of things to do. I recommend exploring the city by foot because there are so many cool shops, cafes, street art, and trendy areas of the city that you come across without even knowing they are there! The tram, train and subway systems are relatively efficient and good for getting from A to B. Check out 'BlogTO' on Instagram for local recommendations. I use the app. 'Maps.me' when travelling. It is a free app similar to Google maps but I find it has more detail and can be used when disconnected from Wi-Fi or 3G.

I recommend doing a day trip to Toronto Island, go for a bike ride along the lakefront to High Park, and explore Kensington market, Lawrence market and the Distillery District. Check out Yorkville/ Bloor street area (nice expensive houses and high end shops), lots of good museums including Bata Shoe museum (free on Thursday night) and cultural events like comedy shows and poetry slams.

Attend a baseball game (tickets are really cheap) and an ice hockey game (tickets are very expensive for the professional games but it is FREE to see the University A team play so that's what I did).

Festivals such as TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), Nuit Blanche (all night Arts festival) and in November/ December there are ice rinks and Christmas markets.

Canada in general has some amazing places to visit – read my overview at the bottom of the page for the list of places I went to and loved!!!

Any tips for future students?

Tip 1) Manage your time well and make things happen so you don't come away from exchange wishing you had done more. Make the most of every opportunity to get involved and especially in that first week make an effort to talk to people. Everyone is a little bit nervous and in the same boat so try rally up some courage and make the first move.

Tip 2) Always keep an eye out for cheap flights, trains, buses etc. and hostels because if you are organised then you can cut the costs of transport and accommodation massively :)

Tip 3) Be the initiator – if you want to do a trip or see something don't just wait for others to make it happen, do it yourself and people will usually want to get on board anyway.

Overall Experience

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

Exchange is one of those experiences where you are initially in an unfamiliar environment and it is up to you how much you want to get out of it. There are so many opportunities to meet new people, try new things, travel to new places and essentially it is one big adventure! On exchange it was so nice to have a 'home base' in Toronto where I could build a community, have a bit of routine and purpose with the academic studies but then at every available opportunity I could go away on trips and adventures around Canada. It was the best of both worlds!

I had an incredible time on my exchange in Canada and like all great things in life, time just flew by. Reflecting back on my experience I definitely crammed a lot into my 5 months. Prior to arriving in Toronto I decided to do a month of travel on the West Coast of Canada, specifically Vancouver, Vancouver Island, Squamish and Whistler. Travelling in August was fantastic as it was beautiful warm weather and perfect for long days exploring new places. I 100% recommend the West coast for

travel especially if you love the mountains and outdoors. I also went to New York for a week (amazing) and then jetted over to Toronto for Orientation week at the University.

Fall semester in my opinion is by far the better semester for going on exchange to Canadian universities. Fall semester starts in September and it is the start of their school year so all the orientation events are happening and everyone is getting to know each other. Also, during this semester you get to experience summer, autumn and the start of winter (snow but still bearable temperatures). I left at the end of December which was perfect for me as January onwards the temperatures rapidly plummet into the negatives which I have heard is insanely cold.

One of the best things about exchange is the wonderful people you get to meet from all around the world. These are friends whom you will (hopefully) be in contact with for the rest of your life and although you won't see them everyday, they are friends you can see/ visit on all your future travels. For example, straight after my exchange I went to Europe to travel and one of the places I visited was Copenhagen where I stayed with my Danish friend Emma who I had recently met on exchange.

In Canada I travelled mainly with other exchange students and went all over the country – to Niagara Falls, Hamilton and Dundas Peak, Killarney National Park, Montreal, Ottawa, Banff, Lake Louise and Calgary. The one place I travelled solo was to Banff/ Lake Louise to do some hiking for a week but even though I went by myself I met some really awesome people at 'Banff International Hostel' and that is the cool thing about travel – you are never alone. I had a really positive experience with all the people I met and on the whole I found people in Canada are really friendly, outgoing and willing to help.

I could rave about exchange for days but essentially I want to express how great such an experience is and I highly recommend you approach it with an open, positive mind-set and make the most of every opportunity.

If you are reading this and want to know more about exchange, Canada in general, the places I travelled etc. I am more than happy for you to reach out to me and ask any questions :)



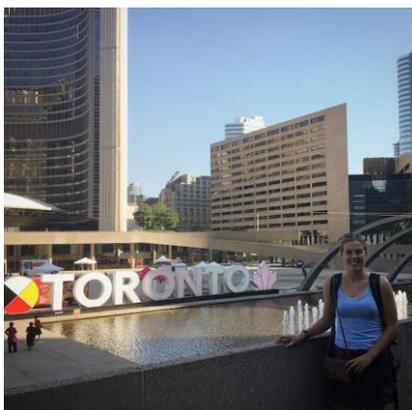
Toronto skyline



Graffiti Lane Toronto



Some of the exchange students



Toronto sign



Otago Alumni event in Toronto



Outside icerink in city centre



Niagra Falls



Dundas Peak



Ice hockey game



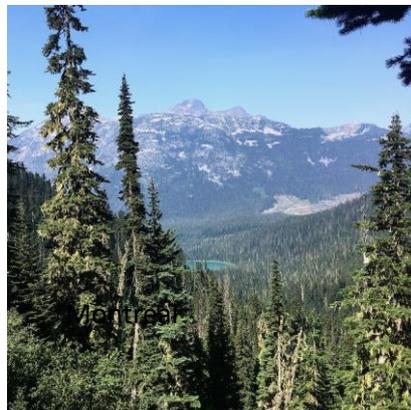
Canoeing in Killarney National park



Hiking in Killarney National park



New York



Whistler



Biking in Vancouver city