



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	Western University
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	Semester two 2019
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	LLB and BSc
<b>Major(s)</b>	Law and Human Nutrition

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>	<b>Otago credit value</b>
Environment Law	English	1 LAW 400 level paper	15 points
Public International Law	English	1 LAW 400 level paper	15 points
Family Law	English	1 LAW 400 level paper	15 points
Statutory Interpretation	English	1 LAW 400 level paper	15 points

*Any comments about these papers?*

Western University does not allow any clashes so the papers were more of a combination of what made a good timetable and what did not clash. I am happy that I was able to take family and environmental law though.

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

The academic experience was, on a whole, quite different to Otago. Firstly, law is postgraduate in Canada, so the students have finished one degree already but this did not make as big of a difference as I was expecting it to. The classes are much more interactive and Canadian students love putting their hands up and discussing topics with the teacher – far more than New Zealand students do! I don't think the workload is very different but they have more contact hours. Here, the lectures are 50 minutes whereas over there, they range from 2 hours, 3 hours and even four hours (although they never really go until the end). They also have 10 minute breaks at least (or more, depending on the lecturer). You learn law from a textbook rather than course materials like you do at Otago which took a bit of getting used to. I would recommend just using textbooks from the library because they are so expensive! The style of teaching is also different. At Otago, the lecturer fits so much into a lecture but

over there I feel like it's more chill and there is a lot of discussion. It really depends on the lecturer you have. They do not focus on exams as much as they do here. Only two of my papers had exams, and that is because I chose the exam option. Lots of papers allow you to choose if you want to write an exam or an assignment instead. The assignments are not the typical 'opinion' you do here either – there is a lot more 'what do you think about this?' and they are very relaxed about word count (they use word pages instead)!

## Accommodation

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

I stayed in a hall called Alumni Hall and I could not recommend enough! This is the perfect accommodation as an exchange student. At Western, there are lots of halls to choose from, but there are only two 'upper student' halls: Alumni and London. London is smaller (there is only 2 or 3 to each apartment, whereas Alumni is 4) and London is more expensive. There are also first year halls you can choose as well as off campus accommodation. Although on campus accommodation is a bit more expensive than off campus, I would definitely recommend Alumni. I made the majority of my friends there and had such an amazing flat! We were all exchange students and I would guess that 80% of the whole hall are exchange students. This means that you are surrounded by people in the same boat as you and that all want to do the same things as you. It is about a 15 minute walk from university. The negative is that it is not a really nice looking place, a bit small and a bit old, but I am so happy I chose it!

## Money matters

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

Accommodation for one semester at Alumni Hall was about \$4000 CD. Flights were about \$2500 NZD. I did not require a visa, only an ETA to get into Canada and an ESTA to get into the U.S. I did get insurance while I was in the U.S. because I travelled for a month beforehand but the insurance while you are at University is included! London has heaps of supermarkets and places to get food at different prices. I probably spent about \$50-70 CD a week on food.

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

I mainly used cash because I found it easier to track how much I was spending. If I were to do the exchange again though, I would probably open up a bank account.

## Visas & Insurance

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

No, if you are only going for one semester. If you choose to do two semesters then you need to apply for a student visa. For only one semester you only need to apply for an ETA which only takes a few minutes and you do this online – it is very easy. Because London is so close to the U.S, you will probably travel here as well. If that is the case, you only need to apply for an ESTA, which takes a few days to process and you also can do this online.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

My university had insurance included. You pay a small amount for insurance in your fees and then you can use services such as the doctor etc. for free while you are there.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Western University has the reputation of being the student university in Canada. The whole place is full of students, very similar to Dunedin. There are so many clubs to join and things to do. As a law student, the law society offers so many organised social events that you can go to and they are really fun! Because the law school is slightly separate to the rest of the university they really try and make it feel like a big family. I would recommend going to these social events – they call them ‘Dennings’ and even if that isn’t for you, there’s a snow club, outdoors club etc. The university is big on sports and has the most amazing gym and facilities so if you wanted to play a sport while you were there then this would be possible too. I would recommend getting stuck in and making the most of the gym because there’s a 50m pool, and the equipment is really good! Get stuck into anything, Western has everything for students!

*What was the university/ city like?*

The university is so huge. It is the main part of the city. London is very much a student town and has a student feel about it. London itself isn’t a big or particularly ‘fancy’ place but I absolutely loved my time there. It is also very close to both Toronto and Niagara Falls and many other places, so it makes travel relatively easy (considering how huge Canada is!) The city has a quite a good nightlife as well, because of the students. The university is huge on team spirit and (for free) you can go and see any of the sports teams – American football, ice hockey etc. I wouldn’t have gone anywhere else on exchange – it is exactly the type of place you want to go if you want to be around lots of other exchange students and lots of other students in general.

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

My recommendations would be to rent a car and go to Niagara Falls, Toronto, Bruce Peninsula National Park and Algonquin National Park. All of these are relatively close to London in Ontario and are amazing. If you are going in second semester (so their first semester) you also have to go to an event called Fake Homecoming which is similar to our Hyde Street. You also must see an ice hockey game! The home team is incredible and you can go to all of the games for free! In London itself, there are some really nice pubs such as Molly Blooms, McCabes and bars such as Ceeps – check for deals because on certain nights they have really good affordable deals. There is one main street – Richmond Street – which is similar to our George Street where everything is. You can get anywhere really easily as well because you have a bus pass that you pay for as part of your fees.

*Any tips for future students?*

Make the most of everything! I went to Montreal and Quebec City, Vermont, Toronto, a few nearby National Parks, Banff and Jasper in Alberta, Niagara Falls, Chicago and Detroit while I was on exchange as well as the east coast of the U.S. beforehand. Surround yourself with other exchange students from all over to really experience other cultures. Many of the friends I made were from the U.K or Australia, but even then we had so many cultural differences. I was lucky to be in a flat with all exchange students – one girl from the U.K and two boys from the Netherlands and they became some of my closest friends. It was so interesting being with people from other countries. I met a few friends over there that I am still calling regularly and I know I am lucky enough to call friends for life. Go out, and have fun! Use the incredible facilities they have at Western (if that is where you decide to go) and get to know as many people as you can! If you want to go somewhere and no one else does, don’t let being by yourself stop you either!

## Overall Experience

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

In short, and without sounding too dramatic, exchange was the best thing I have ever done for myself. That is not to say that everything went smoothly or that it was always happy. Rather, that even when things were hard, I learnt so much about myself and how to deal with things. Resilience and confidence are the two main qualities I learnt on exchange.

Firstly, I spent a month travelling on my own on the east coast of the U.S. I flew into New York City and had organised three nights of accommodation and that was it. I had not really planned anything but knew a few things I wanted to see. When I think back to that, I feel as though she is different person. I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. I arrived with a 10kg pack and with no idea how to get to my hostel. After a few days in New York, I fell in love with the place and got to know my way around really well. I loved spending my time in hostels. I managed to meet so many people, from all areas of the world. Everyone is always so excited to meet a New Zealander. Travelling alone was one of the most incredible experiences – you have so much freedom to do whatever you like and you gain so much confidence and strength in yourself. I think all of your emotions and feelings are heightened; everything feels far more intense because you are experiencing them on your own. In saying that, I spent some time with an exchange student who I had met in New Zealand and people I met along the way. It was the perfect way to begin my exchange because I felt as though, because I had got through that with all of its challenges, I was ready for anything when I arrived in Canada.

Straight away, on the first day in Canada, I met people who I got along with. My flatmates were amazing and one became my best friend while I was over there. We still keep in contact by calling each other at least weekly. We spent so much time at the beginning going out, meeting new people and seeing all of the main travel locations together. I remember the time at the beginning felt so surreal – I couldn't quite believe that I was in Canada and I had friends and I was enjoying it so much – I thought it was all too good to be true. In saying that, I strongly remember a period of about 10 days at the end of my first month there where I started to struggle a bit. I am so used to being in a routine and always studying while at Otago. While on exchange, I was definitely not in a routine at all, every day was different, every weekend was different and studying was not the first priority it had always been. I would be lying if I did not say that this sometimes made me feel quite uncomfortable and unsure. It was as though I was living differently to how I had ever lived before and not being myself because of that. It was only when I came to realise that exchange is like this package of a few months which you will never get again. I thought to myself that I would probably be in a routine for so much of my life that instead of this being a source of discomfort, to embrace it wholeheartedly, for the short period of time I had.

One semester ended up not being enough. There is a part of me that wishes I could have done a year there, but I know I managed to fit so much into one semester. I have been back for a full month now and I still miss it so much. I spoke to a friend who has also been on exchange and I was feeling particularly blue about being back and said, 'perhaps it would have been easier if I had never went at all, then I wouldn't have had to go through these hard feelings of being back.' This, of course, is not the right way of looking at it. All of those experiences have meant that I have made friends for life, developed skills for life and, in many ways, realised how amazing New Zealand is. Only by leaving and living somewhere else do you realise the things you take for granted at home. I would never change my exchange experience for anything and I cannot recommend it enough. It has become a part of me and I will always look back at it fondly. It got me out of my comfort zone, I met people from all different cultures and it installed in me, even more, a yearning for travel and adventure. Exchange, I try and tell myself now, was only the beginning!

