



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	The University of Texas at Austin
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1 and 2 of 2019
Otago degree(s)	Human Nutrition
Major(s)	Nutritional Sciences

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Community Nutrition	English	HUNT 343	18 pts
Nutrition Education and Counselling	English	HUNT 341	18 pts
Advanced Food Systems Management	English	HUNT 344	36 pts
Medical Nutrition Therapy I	English	HUNT 342	18 pts
Nutrition Through Life Cycle	English	HUNT 243	18 pts
Standards/Ethics/Credentials Dietetic Practice	English		
International Nutrition: Social and Environmental Policies	English		
Human Sexuality	English		
Stroke Technique and Fitness Swim	English		
Weight Training	English		

Any comments about these papers?

The bottom five papers were additional to my degree's requirements. I saw them as either complementary papers or a unique experience.

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

I really liked that we were required to stay on top of the workload with weekly quizzes, assignments, readings, and exams. This meant that I did not have the same pressure on my final exams, which I always had at Otago. However, this meant that I was less likely to be free on weekends to travel around the States. I still found a few weekends where I could travel, but I had to be incredibly organised.

Accommodation

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

I stayed co-operative housing called Pearl Street Co-op. This was by far the cheapest and most social option in Austin, and it included meals cooked by my fellow co-ops. It is similar to a hostel, with 120 people aged 18-25. It provided some great social options considering I was 19-20 and the drinking age is 21. I loved that we have a huge pool which was a fantastic venue for socialising, or for when it was 40 degrees Celsius! The accommodation is so cheap because you are required to perform four hours of labour a week. Luckily, I love to cook and was able to do this the entire year. I also made a large sum of money by covering other student's labour for \$10 USD cash an hour, which is around \$15 NZD. The demographic is mostly exchange students, I would say around 60% International and 40% American. This was great because you are able to be immersed in American culture e.g. Football, Thanksgiving. However, you are also able to travel with international students who have the same goals as you. The negatives of this accommodation is that because the entire co-op is run by students, things can be disorganised and often go wrong. For example, some co-ops went without hot water for a few weeks and we had a flea infestation. If you can put up with a Dunedin flat, you should be okay. Also, if you can't wear earplugs you may find it loud at night.

Money matters

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

Living at Pearl Street Co-op was \$5,800 NZD per semester - still the cheapest option in Austin and you can break your contract after one semester for \$150 which is much cheaper than apartments. Flights were around \$3000 NZD return because I flew at busy times (Jan/Dec). I believe my J1 visa was \$160 NZD for the whole year. Food was included with the co-op price, which I saw as a free bonus as it was still cheaper than any apartment that doesn't even include food. I would generally buy dinner once a week with friends which would cost \$20 NZD. Insurance was mandatory and cost about \$1,500 NZD per semester. It was useful to have this as I received free physiotherapy for months and very cheap antibiotics. If you are planning to travel around the States, be aware that the hostels can cost between \$50-75 NZD which is ridiculous. I would recommend finding a few friends and booking Airbnb's or camping in free (legal) locations.

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

I used OneSmart which is run by Air New Zealand. This was super easy and cost \$1 a month to maintain. You can also get cash out a few times a month for free. The only problem is that I couldn't use it to pay for lump sums e.g. accommodation. I got a student bank account with Chase which was entirely free. This meant I could easily transfer money amongst most American bank accounts via Zelle pay, without incurring fees.

Visas & Insurance

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

I applied for a J1 visa. It was a long time ago now so I don't remember much. I went into the US Consulate in Auckland and answered a few questions about my intentions in the US. It was very simple.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, as stated previously it is \$1,500 NZD per semester with Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

It is very easy to participate in many intra-mural sports which give students the opportunity to try sports unique to America e.g. Lacrosse, Football. I would recommend joining the Students Fighting Climate Change organisation. There are many org's like this that focus on helping the community and spreading awareness. I would say that these are a much better use of a student's time than joining a sorority or fraternity. However, if you are looking for something like this, I know close friends in spirit groups who love it. These are a more low key version of Greek life that are often co-ed.

What was the university/ city like?

It is quite similar to Dunedin as it is a university city. However, it is more similar to the size of Auckland. The public transport is fantastic and free with your student ID card. You can easily take a free bus from the University to the Airport. The city itself is very much into live music and partying. There is always something going on downtown, which made the New Zealand party scene seem very tame. Austin is a very healthy city compared to the majority of America, with a lot of options to exercise e.g. footpaths, bike lanes, kayak and SUP hire. My favourite part of the University was the swimming facilities. I am usually an avid runner but I found the homeless population to be a little threatening when running in the evenings (and it was often too hot to be running during the day). The gym has free access to three swimming pools, a hot tub, steam rooms, and saunas. This was the perfect way to wind down after a busy day in classes. I also enjoyed the 'group fitness' component at the gym. This included the popular F45 workouts which were insanely cheap compared to NZ. I paid \$150 for a semester Texercise membership which also included spin, yoga etc.

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

Here are some of my favourite things to do in Austin:

- Visit the South Congress Bat Bridge at sunset
- Mount Bonnell has great views at sunset
- Franklin's Barbeque - requires you to line-up at 7am until 12pm, food is sold out by 1pm (go on a weekday)
- Lots of yummy vegan and non-vegan food trucks
- Black swan yoga is fantastic donation based yoga
- Yoga with Adriene is a popular youtuber who often hosts yoga in her hometown Austin
- Kesos Tacos has \$2 Margaritas on Tuesday and they are very strong!
- 6th Street for Thursday or Saturday night
- Rainey Street for a casual drink on Sunday night
- Bike ride along Ladybird Lake
- Day trip to San Antonio - rodeo, riverwalk, Six Fags theme park
- Studying in one of the many cute coffee shops
- Try to find Matthew McConaughey at a Football game
- San Marcos shopping outlet
- Greenbelt for swimming, climbing, mountain biking

- Go to Austin City Limits festival if you are there in Fall (semester 2)
- Travel as much as possible on weekends!!! (avoid busy classes on Monday/Friday) - you can generally get return tickets to another State for under \$150 NZD, Skyscanner is a useful website for this

Any tips for future students?

I really liked going for our first and second semester because it meant I had all summer to travel (May-August). It also meant I got to meet two cohorts of exchange students and now I have friends all over the world which I can visit!

Overall Experience

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

I will treasure my exchange experience forever. I have met some of my best friends for life in the past year. My maturity levels have grown immensely as I have had to fend for myself for an entire year; planning trips, treating illnesses, and dealing with conflicts. I believe that these are all important skills to have as a young adult because I now feel prepared to tackle whatever life throws at me. Living in Pearl Street Coop was also a very important factor for this experience. If I had decided to live in an apartment I would have easily had half the fun. I have always had someone to share an opportunity or a laugh with while living there, and for that I am eternally grateful. I truly could not recommend any other place to live in Austin for an international student. Becoming a longhorn in Austin has been incredible. I don't think I will ever find anywhere quite like this magical city.



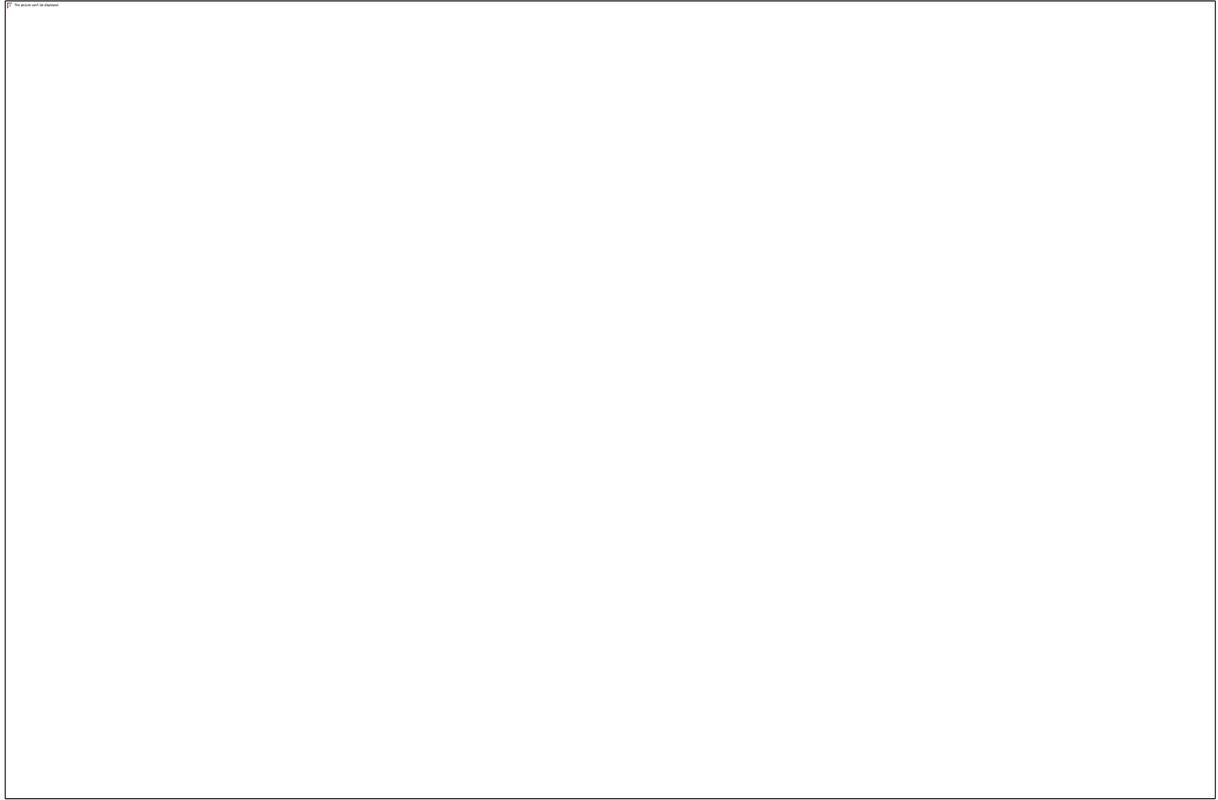
Pearl Street Co-op Fall 2019



Getting ready to go to the Football game



Hook em' horns outside the UT tower



Saying goodbye is always the hardest - can name students from at least 11 different countries in this photo!