



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

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| <b>Host University</b>                 | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill                |
| <b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b> | Fall Semester 2019<br>(2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester for Otago) |
| <b>Otago degree(s)</b>                 | Bachelor of Arts   |
| <b>Major(s)</b>                        | Computer Science   |

### 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> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| COMP 523 Software Engineering Lab | English                        | COSC345                 | 18 points                 |
| CLAS121 The Greeks                | English                        | Unspecified ARTS        | 12 points                 |
| ARTS132 Collage                   | English                        | Unspecified ARTS        | 12 points                 |
| LFIT108 Outdoor Sports            | English                        | Unspecified             | 4 points                  |
| MUSC112 Group Lessons in Strings  | English                        | Unspecified             | 4 points                  |
|                                   |                                |                         |                           |
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*Any comments about these papers?*

I really enjoyed my Collage class; the teacher was really nice and the assignments were simply making different collages. She also took us on field trips to various art galleries and we had workshops in the dark room and maker spaces. This was a studio art paper, many of the other studio art papers sounded like they would be really good too. LFIT and Greeks were mostly taken by freshmen to satisfy their general education requirements so I was a lot older than the rest of my class members but I still enjoyed these papers. However, if you were to take a one credit class like an LFIT I would recommend a PHY class. From what I've been told, they are aimed more at juniors and seniors (3rd/4th years) so they don't have as many quizzes and labs you have to complete and they are on more exciting topics such as scuba diving and skiing. I didn't realise until it was too late that the guitar class costs an extra \$400USD above general class fees. I think it is the same for most music lesson classes and possibly some others so I would recommend looking out for extra fees like that when applying for classes. I really enjoyed my computer science paper; we were put in groups at the start of the semester and given a client and a mentor. The client had a technological idea for us to create and the mentor was an experienced computer scientist who we met with weekly to check we were on track with what we were doing and to guide/help us where needed. My group created a hair stylist android app that the client was planning to pitch to some interested investors.

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

The classes were a lot more work internally than Otago but the exams were worth much less, more like ~20% each. The classes that satisfied general education requirements were often graded a bit harder than others. However, the LFIT class was pretty easy to get a decent grade in. My teachers for my COMP and guitar class both graded easily. My comp lecturer graded easily because it was a very time-consuming class and most of the focus was on completing the prototype. The classes I was in were lot smaller than many of my Otago classes. The Art and music classes had around 12 members, however, Greeks and comp had around 50-60 members. Classes were smaller because participation is a big deal at Chapel Hill, at least 10% of my grade in most of my classes was from participation. However, this often included class attendance which was compulsory. You have to check your class syllabus but often you can get away with missing 2-3 classes before it effects your grades. I didn't find the work load too hard but I was taking reasonably easy papers and the minimum course load, a lot of my friends had a lot harder work load than me and struggled a bit more to manage it. Because the classes were heavier internally there were a lot more readings, quizzes and essays than I was used to, especially in my Greeks class, but they weren't too hard just a lot of busy work.

## Accommodation

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

I stayed in on-campus accommodation in Hardin. It was suite style which meant I had a roommate and shared a bathroom with her and another two girls in the room adjacent to us. This was nice as I automatically got to know 3 people as soon as I moved in. However, Hardin was much quieter than Otago halls and I didn't get to know many others in my hall at all. My roommate was randomly assigned but we both got on very well. There is a way to pick a roommate on the site where you sign up or apparently there are some Facebook pages for future UNC Chapel Hill students to find roommates, however, these might be mainly for incoming first year students. I didn't get a meal plan as it was very expensive, most of the time it was cheaper to eat on Franklin street or at one of the places on campus than to eat in the dining hall. My roommate had a fridge and there was an oven in our hall so I mostly tried to cook my own meals. The difficulty with this was getting to a grocery store as the only one within walking distance to campus was a small Target that didn't seem to have many options and is a little more expensive than normal, however, I had friends that had cars so I normally caught rides with them whenever they went to get groceries. Hardin was on South Campus so it was a bit of a walk to classes, Franklin St and the middle of campus, but it was a really pretty walk and only took around 10 mins to get to most of my classes. There are also free busses that go around campus and Chapel Hill but it was normally quicker to walk. I would recommend staying in halls around mid-campus such as Joyner, Teague etc. as they are really close to everything but still have a reasonably lively community. They also have tennis courts and basketball courts.

## Money matters

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

On campus accommodation was quite expensive, especially because food was not included, I think it was around \$5000NZD (~\$3200USD) with the exchange rate at the time. I had a lot of American friends that lived off-campus in apartments and houses that were a lot nicer and often cheaper, however, it is harder to find people to live with before moving there so living in a hall is definitely easier. Flights were around \$2000NZD all up for me but my return flight was just after New Year's so prices were higher than usual. Domestic flights were a lot cheaper, and if you get them really early you can get some very good deals. My friends got return flights to Chicago from Raleigh for \$60USD. Food was pretty cheap at Walmart and fast food was also a lot cheaper than in NZ. However, eating out at a restaurant cost a bit more because of tipping and tax. I got insurance through Zoom insurance as it was cheap and covered everything I needed.

It came to about \$650NZD but I'm pretty sure I paid an extra \$100 to cover outdoor sports like climbing and surfing etc. I found this on [www.comparetravelinsurance.co.nz](http://www.comparetravelinsurance.co.nz). It was a lot cheaper than the "compulsory" on that the university offered.

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

I used a travel debit card from KiwiBank. This worked fine for me but it made it hard to transfer money to friends as I had to get money out of ATMs every time. Most people in America use Venmo but I couldn't use it as my Apple App Store was NZ based so it did not let me download Venom as it isn't available in NZ. It also cost around \$5 to get cash out at most ATMs. I know some people opened up a Wells Fargo bank account. There is a Wells Fargo office on campus as well as a Wells Fargo ATM so this is probably a smart idea, I just didn't look into this too much. The other issue with my travel card was that it would take a day or two for my funds to transfer from my NZ bank account to my travel card which meant that I had to wait a day or two extra for my student loan each week. This wasn't a massive deal though it just meant being smarter about how I planned my funds. However, I think KiwiBank are discontinuing their travel cards next year but you might be able to get them from other banks.

## Visas & Insurance

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

The visa process was very long and tedious so I would recommend getting on to this as soon as possible. Originally, I was planning to go to America early before class started and travel for a bit but I couldn't because my visa interview was too late. You have to go to Auckland for a visa interview for the final step in the process. A visa also costs a lot as there are a couple different fees you have to pay for. I think mine was around \$500NZD in the end. Chapel Hill helped me a bit with figuring out which forms and documents I had to sort out as well as the website [cdn.ustraveldocs.com/nz](http://cdn.ustraveldocs.com/nz). There was a bit of a line for the visa interview but the interview itself only took a couple minutes and they didn't ask very much.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Like I previously mentioned, Chapel Hill had a "mandatory" insurance that you either had to accept or waive. This insurance is very expensive so I choose to waive it. (Around \$1200USD I think) This still meant that I could use the on-campus health care such as campus health and the counselling department, but if I needed any treatment like antibiotics or anything, I had to pay for it myself or with my insurance. They only let you waive their insurance if you can prove that you have your own alternative insurance that covers what they require it to cover, so be aware of this before you purchase your travel insurance.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

UNC is very big on its sports. There are often varsity sports games happening all around campus especially in the weekends. I was there in the fall semester which meant that it was football season as well as soccer and field hockey. Everyone gets very into these games and there are marching bands, cheerleaders and dancers, you'll feel like you stepped into a movie! The football games especially were a very big deal, they had smoke machines and fireworks and half time shows. It is free for students to attend these games but the tickets are limited for the football and basketball games and you have to enter into a lottery to try obtain them. However, often people give away or sell tickets after the lottery is released and they are normally not too hard to get. There were a few basketball games near the end of the semester and I made it to one but the season is in full swing in the spring. If you are there in the spring make sure you get to the

Duke vs Tar Heels (UNC's team name) basketball game as it is the biggest event of the year and everyone gets really into it. The Duke vs Tar Heel rivalry is famous throughout America. Unfortunately, I was not there in the spring but I will definitely try stream it!



Other events in the fall that I would recommend attending on campus is 'Late Night with Roy' which kicks off the basketball season and Halloween on Franklin St where they close off Franklin St (the Main Street in Chapel Hill) and everyone floods it dressed up for Halloween. During the first week of classes there are some events such as Fall Fest (like Clubs and Socs/Tent City but with a lot of free food and a lot more hype) and Sunset Serenade (all the a cappella groups perform at sunset in the centre of campus).

During the first few weeks the club teams also have new player camps which are like practices for new people who may be interested in joining or trying out for some of the club teams. Club teams are a step up from intramural teams (social teams) and they have practices and organise tournaments with other universities. Some of these teams can be hard to get into, like soccer and volleyball, but some you pretty much just need to turn up to make the team. I would definitely recommend trying to join a club team, it's a great way to meet Americans and they are all really friendly and welcoming. It's also a good way to get out of North Carolina and explore some neighbouring states with friends. I ended up joining the handball team and it was a lot of fun learning the sport. The team members were really friendly and most of the other members were new to the sport as well as it is not very big in America either. They practised twice a week and held scrimmages with the boys on Sunday if you could make it. We went to Philadelphia for a mini tournament against some other teams and accommodation and fees were paid for by the club. I made some really good friends through that team. Some of my international friends also joined the ultimate frisbee or flag football teams which also looked like a heap of fun. The university also had two well

maintained climbing gyms on campus.



There were a lot of acapella groups that you can try out for if you are into that, they also regularly do fundraising performances. There was an art gallery on campus and a lot of options to get involved in the performing arts and music. Another thing I would definitely recommend checking out is the BEAM makerspaces. There are multiple on campus and, after doing some free quick training sessions, you can use machines such as vinyl cutters, laser cutters, 3D printers etc.

*What was the university/ city like?*

The university was in a small student-centred town called Chapel Hill. There is one Main Street named Franklin St which has a lot of cool places to eat at including coffee shops where people study a lot, restaurants, fast food and bars/clubs. There is not a lot other than Franklin St in Chapel Hill but it isn't very far to neighbouring cities etc. Raleigh is around a 50min drive and is the capital of North Carolina so it is very big and has a lot more to do. Durham is around a 20min drive away and also has a few more options in terms of shopping and food. The free buses can also take you there but they do take a while.

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

The State Fair was on for a week during the fall semester, so if you are there in the fall, I would definitely recommend checking that out for a true Southern experience. There are a lot of weird Southern fair foods to try such as funnel cakes, deep fried anything and turkey legs.

The mountains in North Carolina are around a 2-hour drive away (depending where you go) and they are really pretty to explore with lots of cool walks and places to check out. Some of my highlights were Chimney Rock, which had a giant American flag at the top, and Pilot Mountain. I have also heard Grandfather mountain is also really cool but we didn't make it there sadly. There are a lot more places to explore and I barely scratched the surface. We camped in Asheville for the long weekend and explored some of these places from there as Asheville is in the heart of the mountains. In the winter there are also some ski fields that open up that are only a few hours' drive from Chapel Hill.



North Carolina is a coastal state meaning there are also plenty of beautiful beaches to explore around 3hrs drive away. Otherwise flights are very cheap in America so it is easy to explore some cool places outside the state if you keep an eye out for them. There are also some car rental services such as Zip cars that let you hire cars with an app, similar to how Lime Scooters work. I had some friends that used these to go on road trips around neighbouring states as normally you have to be 25 to hire cars.

*Any tips for future students?*

Keep an eye out for extra-circular activities on campus and make it to lots of sport games, not just the big ones. There is an organisation called Ease that works to connect international students coming in to Chapel Hill and it was a really good way to meet other students on exchange. The international students are normally in the same boat as you so they are always keen to go travelling/exploring. Most Americans are very friendly and they love Kiwis, especially the Americans that actually know where New Zealand is, so don't be afraid to introduce yourself. The school spirit at UNC is unlike anything else so make sure you get involved, wear some merch and hate Duke. Also look out for exchange students from UNC in Dunedin before you leave as there are usually a few. I had a friend that I met in Dunedin pick me up from the airport and helped me get settled in Chapel Hill. We became really close and her friends and her were some of my closest peers while I was there. If you are there during thanksgiving try to find a family to experience that with as it is a true American experience. Friends-giving is also a big event held before thanksgiving break in many friend groups, it was easily one of my highlights at UNC.

## Overall Experience

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

I absolutely loved Chapel Hill and would recommend it for anyone thinking of going. The culture there is unlike anything in and provided a true American University experience that was just like the movies. I had a really good roommate who I got on with well and made a lot of amazing friends both from America and around the world. The campus itself is very beautiful, especially in the fall season. North Carolina is a stunning state with a wide range of nature, from the mountains to the sea, and it is a very good location to

explore other states of America. I went to Chicago, Nashville and Philadelphia, explored North Carolina a lot then flew over to the West Coast to explore California, Denver and Washington state at the end of the year. Overall, my exchange was life changing, I made life-long friends, had the opportunity to not only experience but also be a part of American culture and became a Tar Heel.

