

# Exchange at FIU

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## Basic Facts

Host University: Florida International University (FIU)

Degree: Bachelor of Applied Sciences, majoring in Forensic Analytical Science

Attended at FIU in 2016 during the first Otago semester which is the Spring semester at FIU.



## Academics and workload

The grading system at FIU is slightly different to those at Otago, there is no A+ and an A grade requires 94% or higher. Even though this might sound scary but personally I found it easier to achieve A at FIU. To maintain a straight A grade, it is important to listen in class, do all quizzes and homework. It is common to see that most exchange students are there to travel and study is only their second priority but attending every class is very important as lecturers can give out extra credits during class. These extra credits often are the difference between an A and an A-. I found that the marking schedule at FIU may be more lenient than Otago. Often I find that as long as I have included the core concepts that was taught in class and text book, any personal opinion that I express with reasonable support, the professor will often give full marks.

Workload can vary between courses, for example most of my time was spent on the 4000 level courses. These include bi-weekly lab reports, blackboard discussions, weekly quizzes and occasional homework. The work involved may not necessarily be challenging but it is very helpful in familiarizing with the course content. In general, studying at FIU is usually busier than studying at Otago but at the same time, more pressure is taken off of the final exam.

## Transportation

After I arrived in Miami, my roommates did not recommend me to take the bus or metro, the best way to get around the city is by Uber or Lyft. Driving in Miami can be dangerous as first of all, they drive on the opposite side of the road to New Zealand and second, the drivers in Miami generally drive carelessly which can be dangerous. Getting around by Uber and Lyft can be expensive as most of the shops are well spread out, each round trip may be at least around \$20 USD (approximately \$30 NZD).

## Weather

Miami is warm or hot most of the times, generally above 27 degrees Celsius during the semester abroad. It is also very humid as it is a subtropical area and may result in the temperature feeling hotter than it actually is. Though a light jacket is still recommended, at the start of spring in the morning can be quite cool. Generally, Miami is always sunny but can rain the next second. When it rains, it pours heavily with constant thunder and wind so a strong umbrella is recommended.

After the semester ended and during the semester I also went around a few other cities. The first city I went to was Boston, around April and it was freezing over there, around 0 degrees Celsius. Then I went to Orlando during May and the weather was very similar to Miami. Las Vegas is very hot during day time and very dry, at night the temperature and humidity is perfect. California during May is similar to Spring in New Zealand. So if you decide to travel during or after the exchange semester, it is important to bring clothes that is suitable for all seasons.

## Food!!!

Food is a big part of my life, so I tend to keep an extra look out for food. In Florida, the food mainly consists of Mexican food and South American food, also all food come in big portions. Lamb is rare in the States, often it is quite expensive in the fancier restaurants, for example \$50 USD for one lamb main. There are more Asian food stores in California and more variety of food in general. If you happen to go to Boston, eating lobster and seafood is a must!

## Things to do

I highly recommend students who go on exchange to travel to other cities during and after the semester. There are so many places to visit, it will be hard to go to all places if all of them is left till after the semester. Going to Miami to study means I was very close to Orlando, which means

going to Disney World and Universal is a must! Universal is for the Harry Potter fans and Disney World is the largest Disney theme park in the world. I suggest going to them on separate occasions as going through the whole park can be exhausting and Disney World require a few days to go through all of the parks.

There is a cherry blossom season during April in Washington DC, Washington DC is also not far from New York so visiting two places on one trip is possible. Boston is also nearby, which holds many fine art museums and often I can spend a whole day in one museum. The museums often have cafes and restaurants in the complex so you do not have to leave the museum for the whole day. New York is also a wonderful city to visit, many attractions to visit such as the Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty, Times Square and many Broadway shows.

On the west coast, there are cities in California such as Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and not too far from California, Las Vegas in Nevada. All worth while to visit but these cities requires a few more days than the tourist filled city such as New York. California is a more laid back state and requires more time to feel the cities in this state. Other attractions such as the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam are closer to Las Vegas.

## Money

After I arrived in the States, I found out that many things that we get for free in New Zealand, all require money in the States. Such as watching a movie on the plane, using trolley carts in the airport all require money. Also prices that you see in the store are all prices before tax, tax differs by state and city and when eating at a restaurant or even when getting take out and delivery, you also need to pay tip. Tips often vary between 15-20% so often the total amount you will pay at the end of a meal is 30% more than the price you see on the menu.

All the tourist attraction and theme parks also require tickets to get in, theme parks are generally \$100 USD per day. When travelling, accommodation is also a big part of the expenses. Motels are not recommended as it is not safe and hotels can be expensive so it is better to travel in groups or book accommodation on Air bnb.

Living on campus at FIU does not require much money as there is a meal plan available so you do not need extra money to buy food. Accommodation is also paid for before you leave as exchange students are required to live on campus. Going out and partying in Miami can be expensive due to transportation and drinks are expensive. Going out as a group can lower transportation costs by sharing and also as most meals are served in big portions, a group of people can order a few plates and share which can also help lower the cost.