

Mt. Allison University

Third Year, Semester One Bachelor of Science – Zoology Major

Kia Ora guys!

So for my exchange I decided to go to Canada – specifically Mt. Allison University (MTA), in Sackville, New Brunswick. I went for one semester and was away for just under 6 months, and I had the best experience of my life.

I decided to go on exchange at the beginning of my second year, an entire year before I actually left. Firstly I narrowed down my country to Canada, and then chose MTA after reading through a bunch of past student evaluations. A small, rural town in a bilingual province with a population of 5500 – it definitely sounded like quite a drastic change from Dunedin, and that combined with the descriptions of campus life really sold the place to me.

There were three main things I had to take care of before leaving – that was my courses, my accommodation, and my travel. There were of course more things I had to do, but I think these were the biggest.



MTA has online descriptions of every single course available.

Although the main subjects are liberal arts, international relations, music, and similar, they boasted an impressive selection of biology courses for me to take. Although I'm majoring in zoology, I found a large selection of biology courses that the zoology department signed off. It was quite difficult for me to find information on semester availability however – one of my only negatives was that when it came to course registration, a bunch of the papers I was looking forward to weren't available my semester. I didn't mind too much in the end as all my papers ended up being awesome, and the coursework wasn't the main experience in my exchange so the papers didn't matter too much to me.

Now in around November/December I had to register online for my courses. This was pretty difficult. MTA has an equivalent to evision (Connect@MTA), and it's not too user-friendly. I played around with it for a few days, but when I got to Canada it turned out none of it had actually gone through. This was no worries, as the registration desk people were the nicest in the world and got everything sorted out for me the weekend before class started. Most people were taking five courses each semester – I definitely don't recommend this. I found the course load to be quite different to Otago, with the internal assessments being much more heavily weighted, and more hours required per week from the get go. This would definitely differ from person to person, but I would recommend three – the minimum full time course load, and also very manageable with having a good time but still studying.

I decided to stay in on-campus residence for my exchange. I would recommend this option to everybody – although there are plenty of options for flatting around the place, the number of amazing people I met and made friends with in residence was completely worth the extra cost. The halls are all right across the road from campus, split into two groups – north side and south side. North side people are lucky in that they are right near the mall hall (I'll talk about this more in a bit). These residences are also bigger – not Unicol big, but we're talking a couple of hundred people as opposed to the smaller south side residences. I was put into Bennett house, with around 80 people living in it. There were a handful of single rooms, but most of them were doubles. This means living with a roommate!! I had the bad luck of having the only bad roommate in the entire residence, but lucked out with another guy leaving and ended up with a single ensuite room after a week. People in these smaller residences were all closer than those in the larger ones were. Going into a larger residence does mean more people, but going into them would mean that you made less close friendships than you did when going into a smaller residence. This is probably because us smaller residences would all hang out together at meal hall, in the common room, go out to the pub together, while there were too many people in the larger residences for them to do that as frequently.

Unlike Otago, there was one communal meal hall for all the residences. It was awesome! One giant room, with a giant selection of food for each meal – there was vegetarian, gluten free, salad bar, sandwich bar, pasta bar, waffle bar, pizza bar, cereal, Mongolian, grill, and a 'home' zone, as well as coffee, smoothies, milk, chocolate milk, tea, and soft drink, all included in the cost. Made things so much easier not having to cook, and having this giant place where we could just go and socialise. There were four meals a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner, and late night) and if you had the meal plan, you had unlimited access using your university ID card.

So I had my courses and accommodation sorted, and had to be in Sackville for the start of semester in early January. I decided to leave NZ in December and do a little bit of travel before heading to University. This wouldn't work for everybody if you have a summer job, but it was great having an excuse to do a bit of extra travelling. Plus it was awesome to break up the giant trip – I did 12 hours to San Francisco, travelled a bit of California, and then it was just another 9 or 10 hours to Sackville (flying via Toronto). Compared to my friends who went straight there, some of them were doing 30-40 hours in transit, which ain't no fun at all.

Arriving in Sackville, it was the beginning of their second semester. Which means, no giant orientation week. Luckily they were still ready for the few of us starting late, and the winter orientation started off with free pickup from Moncton airport – the closest airport, at about 40 minutes drive. I still remember how cool it was driving down the highway surrounded by snow. The dude picking us up was one of the international staff at MTA, and they did a great job welcoming us to campus and making us feel comfortable.

Getting into Sackville, I checked into Bennett house early. This was the Friday before class started, and returning students wouldn't be back until the Sunday. We had an orientation dinner, where I met the people that would become my best friends for the next couple of months – the other international students, including people from Australia, Estonia, Jamaica, Venezuela, Scotland, England, and another dude from Otago that I had somehow not realised was coming. The winter orientation team handled us really well, getting us accustomed to the town. When the returning students got in, I was completely blown away by how inviting they were. I would be walking through the hall intimidated by all these new faces, and people would just jump out and introduce themselves, all excited by this new guy with a cool accent.

As the semester went on, I had an amazing time in this little town. I found out that it wasn't as quiet as I would have expected of a small town, with people running around throwing house parties and pub crawls. The pub culture here is great – amazing local beers that are easy on the wallet.



I got involved my some co-curricular stuff, in particular a volunteer group that took my down to Florida during the mid-semester break, or reading week. That was probably one of the highlights of the whole exchange, in addition to heading to Halifax with my Kiwi mate for my favourite bands show, and heading to the Joggins Fossil Fields, an easy half hour drive away.

I finished up there towards the end of April, and parted ways with all these great friends. The travel options are really endless from Sackville as there's a couple months before Otago starts up for the next semester. I decided to go for a chill month or two in New York city (three hours, two flights, easy done), while others are adventuring around the Maritimes, some heading to the west coast, and others dropping down to Florida.

All in all – MTA rocked, Sackville rocked, Canada rocked. The best experience of my life, and the coolest people to share it with.





