

## UNC Kenan-Flagler (MBA) Exchange

**Term: Semester One – 2016 (Spring)**

**Program: MBA – Finance**

I applied for the exchange program in late 2015 and went to the USA in January 2016, a few weeks after completing the 12 core papers for the University of Otago MBA program. After a brief summer break in NZ, I was faced with winter once more in the USA.

The exchange experience in the USA was a surreal experience; for one part, North Carolina – in particular Chapel Hill is very similar in terms of its feelings and surroundings to NZ in general and Dunedin in particular. Chapel Hill shared most of Dunedin's characters, being a student town with the majority of the town's population is linked both directly and indirectly to the university.

I felt that the MBA exchange program itself is a top notch program, with well accomplished professors, highly selective intake for the cohort, and excellent supporting infrastructure such as the availability of Bloomberg Terminals for those of you who are interested in trading. The number of students in the cohort and their calibre can be overwhelming at times. During my stay I also found out that UNC has a strong college basketball team – the 'Tar Heel' and Michael Jordan is an UNC alum.

Furthermore, some of my personal observations/experiences during the exchange can be summarised in the following paragraphs:

### **Accommodation**

I applied and was accepted into the 1101 Mason Farm Road apartment. I was thankful for that as it was superior to off-campus housing and some other on-campus housing (Odum Village). It is a 5-10 minutes walk to the business school and 25 minutes walk to Franklin Street (the main street in Chapel Hill). The apartment and room is very spacious – furnished with beds, sofa, fridge, oven/stove, and a dishwasher.

### **Money Matters**

I opened a Wells Fargo bank account to facilitate transfers of money from New Zealand. As the interest rate in US bank account is really low, it may be better to leave savings in New Zealand until it is needed in the US. I also used my NZ credit card for large purchases. The accommodation at Mason Farm Road costed US\$3772 for the semester, while my overall spending – including the spring break trip was in the order of US\$13,000 – US\$15,000. Food costs in the US is very similar to NZ (but in US dollar – i.e. a \$10 food in NZ is equivalent to US\$10 food in the US) plus the tax and tip (if you are eating out in a restaurant).

### **Academics/course load**

The student visa condition states that each student needs to enrol to 3 subjects (or 4.5 points equivalent subject) per module to stay in-status. From the Otago MBA program office, I was required to complete 6-7 subjects in the semester (or 3-4 subjects per module) to satisfy the program requirement. However, as I found that there are more subjects that I loved to do than I was required to, I ended up taking 9 subjects – with one double module subject – resulting in 5 subjects per module. It was as busy as my schedule back in Otago – if not even more busy.

## **Transportation**

Transportation around town is mostly done in a Chapel Hill Transit (CHT – Blue) free bus, supplemented by a P2P bus between the UNC campus and Franklin Street from 7 pm onwards. The Go Triangle (green) bus with a fare of \$2.25 one way or \$4.50 for a day pass will get you to Durham and Raleigh (other town in the triangle) and the airport.

You can also rent a Zipcar at a cost of \$8.50-\$10 per hour or \$69 per day with everything (including fuel) included. The zipcar park is 2 minutes walk from the Mason Farm Road apartment. Membership is heavily subsidised when you are enrolled at UNC.

## **Weather**

The weather is very similar to Dunedin (mostly cold). I experienced two snow days while at UNC and a few tornadoes warning. One of the tornado actually took out a power pole in front of the apartment building. During the second week of January, it was -8 °C for the whole week. A lot of layers were required to stay warm in January/February.

## **Eating**

There are several nice places to eat in Franklin Street, with prices varying between \$9-\$20. Lunch is generally cheaper than dinner. The on-campus café (in the McColl building) also offers reasonably priced lunch with convenience of being on-site. If you wished to cook, the ingredients can be bought at the supermarket (WalMart, Harris Teeter, and Trader Joe's). All supermarket mentioned above is on the free bus (CH Transport) route. However, you can coordinate with other exchange student to shop at the same day to share the Uber ride home when necessary. For non-fresh items (frozen meal, fizzy drinks, and medicines), there are CVS and Walgreens on Franklin Street to shop from. UNC also offers meal at its dining hall – varying in prices between \$9-\$13 for a buffet meal. Students can also buy a meal plan for the semester to get a discount off the casual rate.

## **Things to do**

There are a lot to do within the campus. It has multiple gyms, pool, and football fields. There are several social clubs that you can also join to fill your spare time. The Carolina Casual is a great way to meet the local peer and enjoy the day with free food and alcohol. There is also a blue cup event, which are fought between Duke and UNC that exchange student may also participate in. The sport varies from Frisbee, kickball, volleyball, basketball, etc. Home Basketball game is typically free for students.

## **Places to visit**

While I was there I visited Durham's American tobacco campus, Raleigh's museums and state capitol, and participated in several food truck events during my stay. There is a free botanical garden at both Duke's and UNC's campus to take a walk in during a nice day.

I went to Florida (Disneyland and Universal Studios) during the spring break and I had a great time. I also visited other East Coast cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Richmond. It is possible to take an overnight bus from Durham to New York – saving a night of accommodation cost.

## **Tips for future students**

My only tip for future students is to befriend everyone that you get in contact with – both exchange and local students and live every day as if it is your last day to minimise regrets. UNC is very similar to Otago even though it has twice as many students. Join all clubs that you are able to join, even though you are only remotely interested in that particular club; so you can meet new friends through the club.



**UNC Old Well**



**UNC Basketball Museum**



**Carolina Casual with other Exchange Students**



**Basketball Game On-Campus**