



Student Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Otago degree(s) Bachelor of Arts	Major(s) Psychology (gender minor)
Host University University of Bristol	Semester & Year of Exchange Semester two, 2017

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
PSYC31052 Nutrition & Behaviour	English	NA	I was informed by Otago that three papers at Bristol was the equivalent to four papers at Otago
SOCI30091 Gender & Migration	English	NA	
PSYC30019 Human Factors Psychology	English	PSYC326 Cognitive Engineering	

Any comments about these papers?

They were all very, very interesting. I think I benefitted most by the first two, as they weren't offered at Otago, so it was a chance to try something new.

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

For me personally, I found the workload for all of the papers was a lot less compared to that expected at Otago (however, I am writing this before receiving my final grades back, so perhaps I am speaking too soon). It was very strange to have two papers internally assessed (gender and human factors), but I enjoyed this far more than exam-based work. However, in saying that, I strongly disliked that there was no internally-assessed work for any papers, and the entire grade relied on the work you submitted/exam at the very end of the semester. This was/is incredibly daunting for me, as if I fail a single paper, I cannot graduate. I also found the contact hours were a lot less than that at Otago, although the teaching style was very similar. Overall, it was a thoroughly enjoyable academic experience – the only difference I struggled with (or, at least took a little getting used to) was that you get no feedback on your understanding of the course before handing in your final work (and there is no chance for exchange students to resit/resubmit coursework here).

Accommodation

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

I stayed in the Courtrooms, which is a very modern student hall. It was different to the halls at Otago because it is not just first years who stayed here; there were students from age 18 up to mid 30s, who were postgraduate students. It was a recently built building, so the rooms were all very modern and high quality. I really enjoyed having a private bathroom but sharing a kitchen with five other flatmates, whom I became very close friends with. The Courtrooms was also in prime location, right smack bang in the middle of the city centre. It was a 10-15 minute uphill to the university, but I was happy to be in the middle of all the action rather than away from the city centre and around the other student halls. Something that I would have asked to change if I were re-applying for the Courtrooms, would be to flat with people my own age. I was put with a flat of first years, and although it was only a 2-3 year difference, I found the age gap very difficult to find activities we were all interested in. I wasn't really keen on going out and partying (especially because the price of that is phenomenally more expensive in England compared to New Zealand), but they weren't that keen on going out for coffee like I was. I think even a two year increase in age would have made a lot of difference. But other than that, the only thing that I wasn't happy about with the Courtrooms is that they didn't provide accommodation for me during my exam week. The date I had to be moved out by was three days before my exam, and I was very stressed during the entire semester as to what I was supposed to do. The international office nor the Courtrooms really helped me until the last minute, when they said I would have to pay for a week's accommodation somewhere else and pack up my stuff and move out. As an international student who only really knew my flatmates – and was looking for peer support during a really important week - this felt like quite a let down. I ended up moving cities to stay with my boyfriend, and spending a lot of money to travel back to Bristol for my exam. I understand that there was a new student moving into my flat, but I know for a fact that there were free rooms still in the Courtrooms, and communication from the beginning would have been much appreciated.

Money matters

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

The Courtrooms was one of the most expensive student accommodation options at Bristol, so that was definitely my main expense. I cannot remember the exact weekly cost because I had to pay upfront quite early. Regarding flights, I actually flew out of New Zealand 3.5 months early to travel around Europe and the Middle East during the gap between semesters, so I didn't pay for a direct flight to England. I flew to Spain first, which – from New Zealand (Auckland?) – was around \$1800 at least. I believe my visa didn't come with a cost because I was on a short-term study visa, but insurance was definitely a big one. I paid \$850 to have everything covered, which I don't regret at all, because before I even began my exchange, I had already received compensation for that much for a variety of claims during my traveling. For me, food was not a big expense at all – but this is because I was quite strict with my budget and didn't eat out often or buy alcohol (pretty much at all). I found that groceries in England were the same if not a tiny bit cheaper than in New Zealand, however eating out – even to buy a coffee – was horrendously more expensive. I couldn't believe it! So I tried to limit that and only did so on special occasions. But yes, food should not be a large expense if you aren't careless with your budget.

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

I organised a cash passport before I left, but hardly ever used it. I found it really time-consuming constantly logging in to check whether money had been transferred yet, and how much you had left, and then having to convert it from GBP back to NZD. I also didn't use cash, because I would have had to withdraw from my NZ visa debit, which incurred a large fee. So 99% of the time, I just used my ANZ visa debit card. If I incurred a fee every time I used it, it was much too small to ever notice. The only downside to relying on your card is that, unlike in New Zealand, a lot of places won't accept your card if what you are buying is less than £5 (\$10). So, for example, if you are at a bar and want to buy a beer, they likely will only accept cash. I got caught out a lot on that, but it wasn't too big a hassle. I tried to open a foreign bank account but couldn't because there is a policy that if you are on a student visa for six months or less, you are not eligible. Otherwise, I would have done so (however, I would have not bothered with the bank account anyway if weren't for the fact that I am staying on in England after my exchange – it's not worth it for such a short period of time).

Visas & Insurance

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

Because I was only studying for one semester, and I'm a New Zealand citizen, I was emailed a letter from Bristol which I just handed over to customs at Heathrow Airport, and they gave me my visa then and there. It didn't cost anything.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Not quite sure what is meant by this... I definitely needed to have insurance, but that might have been an Otago policy. I got comprehensive insurance from STA Travel well before my exchange because I was traveling for so long before the semester began.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There were lots and lots at Bristol available – almost everything imaginable, even Quidditch! I joined several clubs and societies. Some of my personal favourites were the philosophy society (which met weekly and had philosophical discussions in old English pubs) and the Spanish society (which held a lot of forums and debates about Catalonia independence, which was very topical during that semester).

What was the university/ city like?

Bristol is a very arty city. There are always gigs and exhibitions going on (free admission pretty much always). It also has a lot of gorgeous street art dotted around (and is home to Banksy), so it was a very beautiful place to be. Being coastal, the weather could get quite stormy, but the temperatures were never as cold as things could get inland. It is very hilly – a lot more so than Dunedin – and whilst I wouldn't call it a 'university city', I think it would be a very different place without the uni. As for the university itself, it is not like Dunedin, where everything is on campus. Rather, different departments are dotted all over the city, which makes for some breathlessness when trying to get from one class to the other, or from the library to the student health clinic on time for an appointment. One of the university's assets is definitely its clubs and societies, so I would strongly encourage exchange students to fully immerse themselves in that from day one.

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

Really embrace the culture of art. I think it's rare to find somewhere like that where such high-quality events are so regular. I would recommend watching movies at the Cube Microplex cinema, which is a little independent cinema showcasing independent films. The Arnolfini art gallery is absolutely amazing, and during my time there, they were showing an incredible Grayson Perry exhibit. I always enjoyed walking around the canals and waterfront on the warmer days (I was there during autumn/winter, so warm days were few and far between), and exploring the Christmas markets down at Broadmead. One of my best memories was drinking mulled wine whilst admiring the view of the iconic Bristol bridge from the observatory at midnight.

Any tips for future students?

Honestly, it's over before you know it. It's so cheesy, but make the most of it. But what's important about 'making the most of it' is doing so in your own way. For me, that wasn't going crazy and partying every night and traveling to different places in Europe every weekend. Rather, because it was my first experience flatting and having complete independence, I had a thoroughly rewarding experience from taking things slow and enjoying the little things like cooking new foods and learning to live with other people and focusing my time and energy on getting to know Bristol inside out. I suppose I also did that in the wake of 3.5 months traveling to different countries and getting that side to things out of my system, so perhaps I'm not the most conventional case. But, to summarise, my one piece of advice would be to cater your exchange to YOU, and not what everyone else expects your exchange to be. It's you who will remember the experience, so you're far better to

remember something other people might call boring than make a story out of the semester that you don't really connect with.

Overall Experience

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

I'm so sorry, I don't have any photos! Only of my flatmates and I at the winter formal, but not of Bristol or anything else to do with the exchange itself (I was a little sick of my camera after traveling prior to arriving in England). Photos aside... like every other exchange student, going on exchange was without a doubt the best part of my degree. University should be so much more than studying, and for students who don't have the chance to flat (for whatever reason), an exchange can mean so much more than just traveling overseas. I also matured in ways that never would have happened had I stayed in New Zealand. I also really appreciated that I got to cater my exchange to my wants and needs; for me, it was important that I could travel at some point (which I did before and after the exchange, not during), and that I had the flexibility to visit people I knew in England. You are given so much freedom on exchange, and whilst that can be both a blessing and a curse, for me it was really what made the experience so wonderful. You can do whatever you want with no one to hold you accountable (within reason), and so it's one of those rare times when you either sink or swim. Fortunately for me, I swam, and that was knowledge I didn't necessarily have before leaving New Zealand. In saying that, thank you very much for the opportunity to study in England and get the most out of my Otago degree!