



## Student Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	<b>LLB, BA</b>	<b>Major(s)</b>
		<b>Law and Political Science</b>
<b>Host University</b>		<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>
<b>Western University</b>		<b>Second semester 2017</b>

### Academics/ course load

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>	<b>Otago credit value</b>
<b>Geography of Canada</b>	English	200 level ARTS	18 points
<b>Presidency in American History</b>	English	200 level ARTS	18 points
<b>Nazi Germany</b>	English	200 level ARTS	18 points
<b>Intro to History of the Middle East</b>	English	200 level ARTS	18 points
<b>Canada Abroad</b>	English	200 level ARTS	18 points

These papers were very interesting. The lecturers themselves were extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their respective topics. The classes differed from Otago as they had a strong focus on participation. You would get marks for turning up to lectures, participating in simulations and completing work sheets in class. All of the papers had mid-term exams which was new to me. I found the workload relatively easy and most of my papers only had one two hour lecture a week with no tutorials. Tests, exams and essays are essentially the exact same as they are at Otago.

### Accommodation

I stayed at London Hall which is hall of residence for upper year students. The pros of staying in a hall was that I was guaranteed a room whereas if I went flatting, it would have been more difficult to find flats that offered four month leases (although not impossible). There is a Facebook page where Western students who are going on exchange are looking to sublet while they are away. It was always warm in the hall and I had the option of opting for a meal plan where I would not have to cook for myself. However, I decided not to go with the meal plan as I felt confident in making cheaper meals

for myself. My hall did not have a communal dining room so I would have had to walk to another hall to get my food.

Another pro was that I was put into an apartment styled room with three other flat mates who I got along with. The hall also planned events throughout the semester which I had the option of going to and meeting new people. I was super close to the football field, campus and the university gym which was also a bonus.

The cons of staying at my hall in particular is that it maybe was not the right place for someone hoping to get out and socialise with other international students or other people in general. Most residents were mature and just did their own thing. I was fortunate to know another person at Alumni House which is also another option for exchange/international students. Through them I was able to meet a wider group of people who were also eager to socialise and explore Canada a bit more.

Another con of being in the hall was the cost. It is definitely not as cheap as flatting and I did not realise I had to buy everything for my room and apartment such as utensils, pots, pans, plates and linen. It would have been better to plan getting these things before I arrived. Nonetheless my flatmate had a rental car and we went to Walmart and we went halves on kitchenware.

Overall staying in a hall, although expensive, was worth it to me. The hall itself was modern and had a gym inside. If I were to choose my hall again, I might have chosen Alumni House as it was cheaper and provided everything that London Hall did. Although it was not as flashy, when you are only there for four months, I do not think this matters as much.

### **Money matters**

For accommodation, flights and insurance I spent around \$6,500 NZD. The amount of money I would spend on food every week would vary anywhere between \$40 and \$60 CAD. I had a cash passport and I opened a bank account while I was over there. I also just used my ANZ visa card which I do not really recommend but having it as an option when I had forgotten to transfer money over was handy. When I would visit the US, it was easy to transfer my Canadian dollars to US dollars on my cash passport. I would recommend transferring most of the money you plan to spend on exchange to a cash passport or Canadian bank account so you are not constantly transferring funds and waiting for them to go through.

I also had to pay \$460 for a compulsory health insurance plan, bus pass and ID card.

Note: you would need to save a lot more money if you wish to travel throughout the exchange.

### **Visas & Insurance**

I did not need a visa. I applied for an ETA online. If you are studying in Canada for only 4 months and do not wish to work, you only need an ETA (electronic travel authorisation). This can easily be applied for online and costs only \$7 CAD.

My university did have a mandatory insurance health plan which cost me around \$200 CAD. I paid for my travel insurance through STA travel when I booked my flights.

### **Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

Western University had a lot of activities open to international students. There were many clubs that you could join and all were organised and attracted a large group of people.

The Western International Exchange Student Centre (IESC) held a few welcome events during the first week which was a nice way to meet other international students. My hall of residence also organised an international student day during the first week. The IESC held a global café every week where students would come to the international building and just chat over tea and biscuits. There was also a mentoring programme where students were paired up with a Western Student. Through this I made some really good friends.

I joined the Outdoors Club which was extremely organised and popular amongst all students. This was a good way to meet people and also get to see more of Canada. The events usually consisted of tramps, hikes, camping and canoe trips. I was also a part of Western Foodies where the group would meet up every now and then and go eat food. I joined the Make Up club where you could get your make up done for free, go to retirement homes and give make overs to the elderly and you could also win make up. There were so many clubs to choose from and I wish I had chosen more.

### **What was the university/ city like?**

Western University itself is a really cool campus. The buildings and overall architecture are beautiful and have a traditional feel to them. It has everything all in one area (although it is a big area). There is a lot of school spirit which shows at sporting events such as football. The gym was also included in my fees. It was an impressive facility and I would highly recommend checking it out. They have a range of equipment, different courts for different sports, a swimming pool and gym classes. There is also an indoor track, an outdoor track, and ice hockey rink and a football field. There is main food court and a lot of little shops and small restaurants throughout different buildings. The bar on campus is also a nice place to meet with friends over food and watch live bands and sport.

London, Ontario is small in comparison to places like Toronto but I found the city to feel bigger than what it was. It is a student city and has everything you need. Everything is spread out but buses tend to travel all over. Uber and yellow taxi is also a cheap way to travel around London. There is a decent food scene and the social life is also decent due to the amount of students in the area. Because the city is super close to Toronto, a lot of people would car pool or catch the greyhound there for a day or a weekend. London is also ideal for those wishing to travel to the US as it is near the border and greyhound can be cheap enough to use.

I would recommend

- Going ice skating at the Victoria Park Ice Skating Rink. They light up the trees around the park throughout the Christmas period.
- Going to a university football game to get amongst the school spirit
- Joining the outdoors club to go on amazing day/weekend trips to really see Canada
- Watching an ice hockey game, whether it be on the university rink or the one in the city.
- Catching the bus/a carpool to Toronto for the weekend.
- Eating at El Furniture Warehouse. A decent meal is \$5. You can order two and it is more than enough.
- Go to an all you can eat sushi restaurant.
- If you're there in winter, go skiing.
- Go to Niagara Falls
- Visit Montreal and Quebec City if you can. Seeing French Canada is worth it.

- Cross the border into the US. I was very close to NYC, Chicago and Detroit
- Visit local London Bars.
- Try real maple syrup
- Get a pizza from King Richies.
- Drink a coffee from Tim Hortons
- Eat poutine!!!
- Make a group of friends who have the same interests as you while you are there. A lot of international students are keen on travelling.

### **Overall Experience**

I genuinely had the best time of my life on exchange. I flew straight to Vancouver and spent 5 days there before I flew to Toronto and then eventually, London. My first month was difficult as my hall was relatively quiet and not as social as I thought it would be but I did make a hand full of friends at the time. I grew even more home sick when my grandad had passed away in that first month. Even though I had travel insurance that would cover me to fly back to New Zealand, it would not cover me to fly back to Canada. I ended up making the decision not to fly back home which was a hard one to make. On the up side it forced me to get of my comfort zone and I ended up meeting a whole group of friends who I spent the rest of my exchange with. We all did a massive road trip to Quebec City and Montreal where we spent our reading week. Throughout the semester I went to Toronto a few times, went on a day trip to Niagara Falls and a weekend trip to Chicago. I went camping and visited Grand Bend which is a 'beach' on Lake Huron. I also had a weekend away with other international students at a cottage in Muskoka. In terms of the university itself, I really enjoyed the classes. Western is a really awesome campus that caters to everything that students want or need. Canada was amazing and if you are able to, definitely travel as much as you can while over there. After the semester I slowly made my way back to New Zealand by stopping in at NYC, Boston, New Orleans and LA. Overall, going on exchange was one of the best decisions I have ever made.