



## Student Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

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<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	BSc	<b>Major(s)</b> Zoology
<b>Host University</b>	Florida International University	<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b> Semester 2 2017, Semester 1 2018

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
ZOO4513 Animal Behaviour	English	ZOO315	18 points
ZOO4513C Animal Behaviour Lab	English	ZOO315	(criteria for ZOO315)
ZOO4744 Neurobiology	English	ZOO314	18 points
EXP4604 Cognitive Processes	English	N/A (Psyc 300 level)	18 points
PSB4240 Neuropsychology	English	N/A (Psyc 300 level)	18 points
EXP3523 Memory and Memory improvement	English	N/A (Psyc 300 level)	18 points
CLP4146 Abnormal Psychology	English	N/A (Psyc 300 level)	18 points
MMC3303 Global Media and Society	English	N/A (Media 200 level)	18 points

### Any comments about these papers?

I ended up taking mostly challenging classes. Animal Behaviour was the toughest but was the most interesting. The Professor was the mayor of South Miami and set his standards very high. The Psychology courses had a reasonable workload but the lecture content was generally very slow paced.

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

The workload differed very much depending on the class and the professor. Some courses such as the Zoology courses I took had a very heavy workload, similar to Otago. Some such as EXP3523 were more manageable. Unlike at Otago, the teaching style (such as class participation activities) varied hugely. Each class had only one professor for the entire semester, which was also different. For all of my classes, there were several exams and assessments that occurred throughout the semester, rather than just one or two like it is at Otago.

The teaching style was very different too; students were more active in class and put up their hands and asked lots of questions and contributed answers in class – something that I wasn't used to. There were also differences in classroom etiquette which I found amusing, for example when someone sneezes many students yell out "bless you" quite loudly even if the Professor is talking or during an exam!

### **Accommodation**

I stayed in Everglades Residence Hall. I loved the way the student accommodation was set out. There were 7 halls of residence close to one another in one area of the campus, with a pool in the middle. It was really convenient to meet others from the different halls, and there were lots of tables and places to hang out outside. The apartment rooms in Everglades were small compared to Parkview Hall and Towers Hall, but they were reasonable. A con was that within each hall, there was little opportunity to socialise with others because of the way the rooms were spaced; in most halls such as Everglades there were small common rooms on each floor but these weren't usually used for anything other than studying. The student RAs organised small events but they were not popular. Parkview is huge, and has the best facilities such as large common areas and TVs, so that was a good place to go.

### **Money matters**

Accommodation was \$3,850 USD for each semester. The flights were expensive, but can vary a lot depending on the airline and the time that you booked.

Food in Miami is generally very unhealthy and fast food is extremely common and is the most accessible, and the cost is similar to in NZ. On campus the majority of the places available to eat were fast food places, and the healthy stuff was expensive. The closest grocery store to campus (Publix) was a decent walk away and was known for being particularly expensive too, so eating healthy was an effort. Meal plans were available to purchase through the university, which gave some discount on the price of the on-campus food places, but most exchange students didn't opt for this.

All exchange students were required to purchase Health Insurance through the university, and this cost \$2,141 USD for the year. I also chose to get comprehensive Travel Insurance in addition to this. The one thing that I wasn't expecting was the cost of transportation around Miami. As the FIU staff told us, "public transport in Miami doesn't exist". The only way to get around was by Uber, and in Miami it is expensive, especially because FIU isn't located in the most convenient place.

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

I was there for two semesters, so I opened a U.S. bank account with Wells Fargo, as that was the bank that was available on campus. I would recommend this because I never had problems using my card, but many of my friends struggled because some places didn't accept their foreign debit cards, and so they constantly drew cash from ATMs.

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

The U.S. is strict and there was lots of documentation needed for the Visa. The online instructions for the documentation required weren't clear for some parts and the phone line to call was very unhelpful.

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

FIU usually has lots of things going on, and the RAs put on different events throughout the semester randomly and although a lot of them are small, occasionally there will be a really good one! For example they managed to create a whole lot of snow in the middle of campus (it never snows in Miami) and a huge snowball fight took place for several hours.

The sporting culture at FIU is massive. Football and basketball games were huge, and the baseball games were a personal favourite. The atmosphere is amazing. Football season was great because of the (infamous) tailgates. They are a love/hate experience, but you have to go to at least one!

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

I didn't quite realise the extent of the Spanish-speaking community in Miami before I came, so I got a culture shock when I arrived. The majority (around 90%) of people in Miami can speak Spanish! It was not uncommon to go to a place such as hair salon or grocery store and find that no one spoke English. Another thing to be prepared for is that in Miami unlike the rest of the U.S., the cheek kiss is used to greet friends and often people you are meeting for the first time too.

FIU is really pretty. It is a huge campus and it was overwhelming when I first arrived. It took me a couple of weeks to find my classes without getting lost! Miami is a huge city and everything is spread out, and the traffic is crazy and dangerous, so this combined with the high temperatures and humidity, meant that seeing anyone walking on the street was not common. There is a huge gender difference in Miami, unlike in NZ. Cat-calling for example is frequent; one day my friend and I were walking for 15 minutes and we got honked at by 28 cars – we counted. (We were both wearing a tshirt and jeans!). Being a female in Miami however has huge advantages, and this is displayed primarily in the clubbing industry, which was a huge eye-opener for me.

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

South Beach is the best area in Miami, as expected. The nightlife is unreal. If you are a female, you may get approached by 'promoters' on the beach who invite you to big clubs, and give you a VIP table and endless free drinks all night! Some of them even invite you to certain high-profile restaurants and you'll get the food and wine complimentary (but that's a whole other story..!) So many big artists perform in the clubs which I loved. Coral Gables and Coconut Grove are nice areas, and have great places to eat too. Everglades national park is the place to see alligators. There is a very popular place in Brickell called Blackbird Ordinary, that is arguably the best bar in Miami, I would highly recommend it. Wynwood is known for having amazing street art and food, as well as a great nightlife scene too. SHOTS is one to check out.

### **Any tips for future students?**

Definitely stay for two semesters if you can. One semester is too short, and there's so much to do in Miami. In my first semester I travelled around the U.S. a lot (Los Angeles, New York, Vegas etc) along with finding my feet on campus and experiencing life in Miami for the first time. My second semester was an entirely different experience. I was more involved with campus life and I no longer felt like an exchange student but rather an FIU Panther! I made friends with lots of the student athletes (who throw lots of parties!) and got to know so many amazing people on campus and off, and got very comfortable with the city and knew how to get the best out of Miami. It was very hard to leave. So stay for two semesters.

I recommend going to the Football, Baseball and Basketball games, they are great. Although Miami is very hot most of the time, it's known for having ridiculously cold air conditioning temperatures inside most buildings! FIU classrooms are no exception. You will see most students bringing an extra jacket or hoodie to class even on really hot days, so do that. Make friends with students with cars! Ubers are expensive, and FIU is far away from all of the best areas of Miami. Learn some Spanish if you can to help you get around.



