



Student Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts	Major(s)	Communications & Gender Studies
Host University	University of Essex	Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 2017 (UK Autumn Term)

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Mass Media & Modern Life	English	300 Level Arts	18 points
Crime, Media & Culture	English	300 Level Arts	18 points
Cultural Ideology & Film	English	300 Level Arts	18 points
Foundations of Human Rights	English	100 Level Arts	18 points

Any comments about these papers?

They were very similar in content to Otago papers I had already taken, I would have preferred to have taken papers in Politics, or a different Arts major, but Essex wouldn't allow that. However, although the papers I took were similar, they mostly focused on British case studies, which was interesting.

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

There was a much higher expectation that you would do the readings for tutorials, I found at Otago you could get away with this, but not at Essex. The pass rate is lower, 40%, and I found that the marking was more lenient than at Otago. The style of teaching is similar, except at Essex all of my tutorials were taught by the lecturers. I found this interesting because I think the benefit of having a tutor different from your lecturer (as is common at Otago) you get a different point of view and teaching style, which is really beneficial in an arts degree which is so theory based.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in the South Towers, a huge block of 16-bedroom flats. I was with all international students studying for one term only (same as me) which made a big difference because we all had similar deadlines and were interested in travelling on weekends together etc. It was basic accommodation, shared bathrooms, kitchen etc, but I found this fine because we all showered/cooked at different times, because there was such a mix of cultures (e.g. European flatmates cooked very late, e.g. 9-10pm because this was normal in their culture, as opposed to Kiwi's who tend to cook and eat around 6:30-7:30).

Money matters

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

Accommodation: Very affordable, about the same as a standard NZ flat, except in the case of Essex, all amenities are included! I paid using my living costs, so I didn't have to worry about it, although it was an upfront payment. Worked out at about \$140NZD per week.

Visa: My visa was free, because I was only away six months, I just got a short-term student visa.

Flights: I think I paid \$3000 return, it would have been cheaper, but I returned to NZ at peak time in early Jan, book EARLY as there is always good deals with decent airlines (I can't stress enough paying a little extra and going with a decent, reputable airline, especially if you're on your own).

Food: Groceries in the UK are cheap. There is way more selection, and produce isn't seasonal, you can buy pretty much any fruit and veg at any time of the year. However, eating out adds up, and after tips (slowly becoming more common in the UK) it can end up being quite expensive.

Insurance: I got my travel insurance through BNZ, and it covered me for everything, contents etc (the only contents you would really be worried about is maybe a laptop or phone in most cases). It was reasonably priced, and I got a load of Flyboys points so it's worth looking for a deal like that. Getting insurance is so important- It allowed me peace of mind the whole time I was away that I was covered if anything happened. Make sure your insurance will cover you wherever you decide to travel during your exchange (e.g. I went to Morocco one weekend and was covered for that).

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

Cash Passport is great- If you stay on top of transferring money over and allow for the time it takes to transfer. I also recommend having cash, for tipping, and so many places don't take card payments (not like NZ). I also got a credit card with a small limit, this was a life saver as a lot of unit-based payments were online only (e.g. tickets to events) so it was handy to have something I could use online, it also helped when I ran out of cash on my cash passport and was waiting for money to transfer over.

Visas & Insurance

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

I had a short-term student visa, there was no application, which meant every time I travelled out of the UK, I had to make sure I took all my documentation with me, as you effectively must 're-apply' at the border every time you leave and come back into the UK. I was unable to work on this visa.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

I think travel insurance was mandatory for any exchange student.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Joining a club is key in a British university; EVERYONE is in at least one. I joined hockey, and it was fantastic, I got to travel all round London playing games, I made lots of local friends (would be very hard to do this without a club) and it meant I was out socialising or exercising at least 5 times a week. Every Wednesday is 'FED' night, all the sports clubs, all over the UK have played their matches that day, and then at night you all get together for a themed night as a club and drink (if you want) and go to the University club. It's awesome. You don't have to play sports to be in a club, there is literally something for everyone, music genre fan clubs, cultural groups etc.

What was the university/ city like?

I was based in Colchester, which is a small town, but only 45 minutes from London by train. It was easy to get around, and very student oriented, like Otago. The campus had everything you could possibly need, several shops, cafes, restaurants, bars, clubs, libraries etc, and always loads of events. There's much more of a community culture at UK universities than I found at Otago.

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

Most universities will have a company that offer cheap day-trips to surround towns, I got to go to Bristol, Cambridge & Oxford for much cheaper than I would have organising it myself.

Winter wonderland in London is AMAZING (if you're there over winter)

London in general is just the coolest place, try to find little cafes and bars that aren't on the main street, these are the best.

Look for flights around Europe in advance, we got super cheap flights to Spain etc on cheap airlines like EasyJet (JetStar equivalent) just allow yourself time to get back just in case you're delayed, which is common with the cheaper airlines.

Any tips for future students?

Get an 18-25 railcard, it costs about \$40NZD and you get 30% off all your train trips around UK on the national rail system. I used this all the time and would have saved hundreds.

Live in a hall- you're with like-minded people, and it's cheap. It's not super fancy but it's about ten weeks of your life, and it won't kill you.

Say yes to everything- Don't pass up on an opportunity you aren't sure about (uni events etc), some of the best things I did were last minute decisions I wasn't sure about. You don't want to come home thinking 'what if'.

Overall Experience

I would wholeheartedly recommend studying in the UK to anyone, especially those who want to get out of their comfort zones without having to juggle a new language. I have made friends all over the world (one of my closest friends from exchange is coming to stay with me this Christmas, all the way from the USA). It's so cliché but going on exchange will open your eyes to so much and helps put your life in perspective, my goals are so much clearer now. Most people I encountered LOVE Kiwis, they will absolutely take the piss out of your accent, but everyone is curious and excited to meet someone from NZ. Exchange is doable, and it is affordable if you work hard and prepare well. You

will arrive terrified (and maybe a bit lonely) but by the time you leave you will be devastated to be leaving your new home and friends. University of Essex will always be a home away from home for me, even though I was only there such a short time.



Weekend Trip to Bath & Stonehenge with my flatmates.



Supporting the All Blacks at Twickenham, showing my American friend the right team to back.



Camel riding on an amazing 4-day trip to Morocco & Spain, with a student travel company.



One of many dinners with my flat, we had lots of cultural themed nights from everyone's home countries (E.g. Thanksgiving, Chinese Hot Pot, Mexican Night etc)



My favourite part of beautiful University Essex Campus, with the library over looking one of three lakes, and the double decker bus where you could buy pie, mash & gravy.



University of Essex Women's 1st Hockey Team at our last game together.