



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	Dalina University of Foreign Languages
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	Semester 1, 2019 (March-July)
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	Bachelor of Laws, Bachelor of Arts
<b>Major(s)</b>	Arts major = Chinese

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>	<b>Otago credit value</b>
Intensive reading Speaking Listening Reading	Chinese	CHIN 300	= 54 points total
Hulusi Chinese pronunciation	Chinese	ARTS	= 18 points total

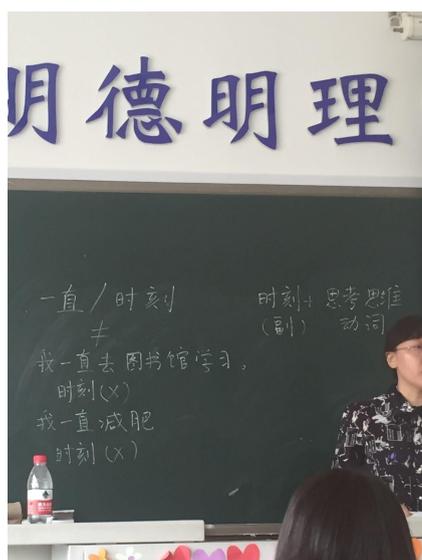
*Any comments about these papers?*

Note that the way courses are structured at DUFL are very different to what we're used to, so it's difficult to find what Otago's equivalents are and even know how many points you should receive. You will discuss this with the Head of Department when doing your Learning Agreement, so don't worry, but don't expect a perfect analogy to Otago's way of doing things!

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

In many ways, the study you do at DUFL feels a lot more like NZ school than university: you're in a regular classroom, not a lecture, with the same students for all your "core" subjects, attendance is compulsory, there's a high level of interactivity, etc. What I'll call your "core" language classes run Mon-Fri from 8:30am until 11:45am (2x 1.5 hour periods, with a 15 min break in between). Your elective classes are in the afternoons, and depending on the class, are either one 1.5 hours or 3. These are only once a week.

Your “core” class is the same group of people across all subject areas (e.g., listening, reading), and is determined according to the level you’re placed in by the entrance exam *or* that you swap into yourself, if you’re not happy with where the exam placed you. I decided to jump up two levels from where the exam placed me (you can spend the first week of class trying out different levels), and I think most of the people I know tended to move up at least one level from where the exam put them. Especially for us as Otago students where your grades are just a matter of pass/fail, I’d recommend erring on the side of too hard rather than too easy, in order to make the most of the immersion learning experience. Obviously, if it’s too difficult to keep up at all that’s not a good idea, but don’t be afraid to try out different levels. Frankly, a “higher” level might not actually feel harder to you in certain classes because of the teacher’s style/speed of speaking/teaching pace, etc., so try to choose based on your experience trying out the class rather than being obsessed with what you feel you “should” be. Also, some of the subject areas will probably feel easier to you than others-- I found the content of speaking and listening class *much* easier than reading/intensive reading, so the idea of a perfect level probably doesn’t exist anyway!



*A glimpse into my intensive reading class.*

If you want a point of reference, I had completed both 300-level Chinese language papers at Otago before I went on Exchange (I went in my fourth year) and I ended up in 中级B level (i.e., Intermediate B). This felt like the right level to me, but of course everyone is different so just try things out and see what feels right.

The elective classes available vary a bit each semester, but they’re generally cultural or language activities like Wushu (martial arts), paper cutting, Chinese to English translation, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese grammar etc. I chose to take *hulusi* 葫芦丝, which is a traditional Chinese wind instrument! Even though the class got a bit boring by halfway through the semester (the point when we’d learned the exam material and our teacher didn’t seem bothered to teach anything more) it was still one of the best decisions I made on exchange! It was such a unique opportunity and I will definitely be using it as an unexpected party trick in the future! I play the flute so found it pretty easy to pick up, so if you don’t have musical experience it may not be for you (especially as the teacher talks *very* fast), but if you do and you’re up for the challenge, go for it! It’s an unbelievably cool opportunity to get actual Otago University credits for learning a traditional Chinese instrument!

My other class was Chinese pronunciation 正音 which is basically just intense focus on getting your tones right-- definitely worthwhile if that’s an area you could improve in!

There are exams for all of your subjects (including your electives) but they're pretty low-pressure compared to what we think of as university exams here-- I'd compare them more to what you might do for an in-class test. Overall, the academic experience is quite a bit more relaxed than what you're used to at Otago-- there's not much homework or assessment, and the focus is more on your attention and participation in class. You get to know your "core" classmates very well, and fortunately our class got on really well, and had people from all over the world: Japan, Russia, Australia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Korea, Mongolia, Thailand, Kazakhstan...



*My class outside the main gate after our final exam.*

## Accommodation

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

When you arrive at DUFL, you have the option to choose between either a single room, a double room (shared with a roommate), or a double room (shared with a roommate) in a 3 room apartment. This means there are up to six people in this apartment, plus a living area with TV/couches, and two bathrooms and showers. I chose the apartment option, and would definitely recommend it-- you get to socialise with others more (which probably means more Chinese practice!), having the kitchen is more convenient (although how well equipped it is will vary depending on who your flatmates are and how long they've been around), the living area is really spacious and nice for hanging out in, and it's also the cheapest option. I would really suggest going for the apartment option unless you're certain that you couldn't handle having a roommate-- but just remember that sharing a room is such a normal part of university culture in most parts of the world, so give it a try! That being said, I got really lucky and my "roommate" actually stayed at her boyfriend's place off-campus 95% of the time, so I basically didn't have to share... You get the choice between a north-facing or south-facing apartment (so whether it's on the left or right side of the stairwell), and I didn't really think there was a difference between them, so I'd suggest going for the slightly cheaper one. It is possible to live off-campus, but I don't really see the advantages of it so I'd suggest just sticking with the main options given to you.

Some extra points to note:

- Chinese mattresses are *hard*. I didn't really mind and got used to it pretty much immediately (and it definitely took adjusting when I got back to NZ!) but some of my friends complained of being sore for the first couple of weeks. So if you think that'd be an issue for you, maybe just bear that in mind and plan a trip to Walmart ASAP to find some kind of mattress topper or other bedding to make it more comfortable.
- Maybe the most frustrating aspect of the shared apartment is that you have to be pretty intentional about when you have a shower, as the hot water runs out pretty quick and you have to wait for the thermostat to go back up. Some apartments make a schedule where you all agree to shower at a particular time every day, but in mine we just sort of went with the flow and learnt to take the opportunity when it's there. So that's another thing to consider, but the rooms are heated a lot better than a Dunedin flat so it probably won't feel as devastating as a not-so-hot shower would back here!
- Wifi was probably my main gripe with the accommodation or campus generally-- my laptop really struggled to connect with it most of my semester, and it was pretty dodgy on my phone as well, so I ended up basically just living on data from my SIM card. I don't think my other friends struggled as much with the internet situation so it was probably more to do with my devices than anything, but maybe just keep your expectations modest-- and this is before taking into account all the VPN stuff too! I won't go into that here, but Google 'Great Chinese Firewall' or 'how to use facebook in China' if you don't know what I'm referring to. I actually paid for a VPN (ExpressVPN) and while it wasn't perfect, it seemed more reliable than the free ones friends of mine had-- I'd say it's probably worth the money (about \$15 a month I think).

## Money matters

Before I say anything else, and you've probably heard this already if you're thinking of going to China/Asia generally, *make sure* you apply for the Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia! While the application takes a little bit of work, your chances of getting it are probably very high, and you'll probably never make that much money (\$6,000+) so easily in your life! If you'd like to chat more about PMSA with me, (even if you're not going to DUFL specifically) feel free to get in touch.

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

**Flights:** Aprox. \$1600 NZD return. (Plus I paid another \$125 to reschedule when I realised I'd booked a week too early, whoops. Contact DUFL directly if you're not sure about dates, it can be a little unclear.) I booked everything through my local Flight Centre in Wellington and it was great-- I think a lot of younger people don't realise their services are 100% free? One of my return flights was cancelled and they handled the rescheduling all for me, and I can't imagine how I would have dealt with it if I'd done it all myself online.

**Accommodation** (electricity included): Aprox 7,000 RMB (~\$1500 NZD). I believe a single room is about 12,000 RMB!

**Insurance:** About \$300-\$350 NZD (NZ travel insurance plus mandatory at DUFL)

**Food:** A usual meal on campus is probably between 10-18 RMB (\$2-4 NZD!) Outside restaurants and cafes are more expensive, but in general food is a *lot* cheaper than you would pay in NZ. I'm usually a big stickler for cooking at home and trying not to eat out too much, but in China, especially if you're

eating on campus, given how cheap it is and how inconvenient cooking can be, there's frankly not much point.

All in all, the cost of living in China (and at DUFL especially, I think) is really low! Don't worry about packing too much (except maybe for clothes) because you can buy essentially anything way cheaper and very conveniently in China. Between this and being awarded the PMSA, I came back from China with more money than I would have had if I'd just had a regular semester in Dunedin, which is **crazy** for going on exchange!

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

I would recommend setting up a Chinese bank account as soon as you can, which will require a Chinese SIM card-- this is your first priority! I'd go to the China Mobile on the ground floor of 综合楼 (zonghelou, the main building on campus with restaurants/shops/supermarket etc.) as they know what they're doing with Exchange students, and will probably know what to set you up with even if your Chinese communication skills aren't great at that point! **NOTE:** If the university is organising a trip to go into town to help you set up bank accounts etc. and you don't have a SIM card yet, don't bother going! You absolutely need a Chinese phone number first to set up an account-- they send you verification passwords via text, etc. I opened an account with ICBC in Lushun, and then ended up having to open another account a month or so later with CCB (China Construction Bank) in Lushun, because I was getting payments from the university and they'd only do it into accounts from this bank. For that reason, I'd recommend going with CCB, just in case you run into this. Also, I generally found the CCB ATMs on campus to be more reliable, and I think you can deposit cash into them, whereas you need to go into Lushun (10 mins via taxi) to find an ICBC cash deposit ATM.

So once you have a Chinese bank account, you'll want to withdraw cash from your regular NZ account (many ATMs will take Visa/international cards, including one on the ground floor of Zonghelou) and deposit it via ATM into your new Chinese account. *Then* you can link up your Chinese bank account with WeChat and/or Alipay, which is the way 99% of Chinese people shop. You *can* use cash pretty much anywhere, and I had a couple of friends who were stubborn about not wanting a Chinese bank account/SIM card so stuck with cash the whole semester, but I would not recommend it at all-- it's super inconvenient! For some reason WeChat Pay wouldn't work on my phone, so I only used Alipay, but I would suggest having both, because sometimes you'll owe friends money/use a taxi etc who only has one or the other. Using a debit/EFTPOS etc is pretty much non-existent, except for the purpose of withdrawing from an ATM.

## Visas & Insurance

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

You will need a visa for your time in China. All the documents and instructions you need are online. It was pretty easy for me as I'm from Wellington and was able to head into the Chinese Embassy in person to sort everything out, but if you read the Exchange reports from other Otago students, it sounds like the process of mailing it in is also fairly straightforward. I think it cost somewhere around \$300?

You can book travel insurance through your travel agent, although I actually did it independently using an online search engine for the cheapest deal. Ended up paying just over \$250 for all the coverage I needed, and didn't end up claiming at all, but better safe than sorry!

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Yes, were also required to pay mandatory insurance at the university on arrival of, I think, 300 RMB. Bring all the cash you will need for your accommodation of choice, insurance, and room deposit (also around 300 RMB) for when you arrive, before you have a chance to set up a bank account and everything. I was a bit hesitant to bring such a huge amount of cash in my luggage (it *feels* like a lot, as it's probably all in 100 RMB notes, but it's actually not that much) so I brought just the amount I thought I needed, but in retrospect I should have brought 500 RMB or so extra just in case-- there can be unexpected costs! Don't stress too much though, you can withdraw RMB from an ATM on campus with a Visa bank card if needed.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

You'll probably have a lot of free time on your hands while you're at DUFL (most afternoons and evenings!) so definitely get involved with activities wherever you can. I had friends who were in the basketball and football teams (there are guys and girls teams which have a competition between all the different departments of the university-- us being 汉学院 the School of Chinese Studies. Even if you're not playing, the games are really fun to watch and a great way to feel some cool team spirit and get to know other students-- international and local. There's also a gymnasium on campus where you can play badminton, volleyball, basketball, etc. There were also some one-off athletics/fun class sports type events too.

The main extra-curricular event I was involved with was 文化节 the International Cultural Festival. Basically all the international students have the opportunity to have a stall from their home country and sell national cuisine/souvenirs, and generally showcase your country. It's a HUGE event the university pumps a lot of money into (they basically use it as a massive marketing scheme for the university), so there's a lot of pressure to do things right (especially when it's just two people, like me and my Australian friend who teamed up as the only ones from this part of the world!) but in the end it was a great experience.

There aren't a whole lot of extra-curricular things available (the concept of clubs etc. being a big part of university life really isn't the same in China!) so take whatever opportunities come, but mostly just enjoy meeting lots of people from all over the world! Do fun things with your friends, and I'd recommend getting comfortable with public transport and navigating your way outside of campus into the main city as soon as you can if you want to make the most of your time there. DUFL is pretty removed from Dalian city itself, so you need to take initiative and be a little brave to get out there, but it is so worth it!

Get to know other international students who've been at DUFL longer than you and pick their brains in terms of how to use the school bus/public transport/where to go/what to do. Everyone is incredibly friendly and it's a very fun and welcoming community of people. Also many, if not most of the international students tend to speak English really well, so if you're not confident with your Chinese yet, don't let that stop you.

I won't go into much detail with specific recommendations of what to do in the city or what the city's like, as you can find these in other students' reports from previous semesters and I'd just be repeating them. I didn't really do anything tourist-y except for when my parents visited me for a weekend (obviously they stopped over on the way somewhere else, they didn't come all the way to China for a weekend!) and these you can hear about from others/from searching on Trip Advisor, etc. One tip: If you're feeling homesick and like you want to feel not-in-China for a couple of hours, going to the movies is a great idea! There's usually going to be an American blockbuster (think Marvel/Disney/Pixar) playing in English at any given time. You can access all cinema information/movie times and buy tickets through WeChat or Alipay. This is a good example of one of those areas where you should ask the international students who've been around longer than you for help, rather than struggling on your own!

I would really recommend you plan some travel or something special for the mid-semester break, as this may be the only opportunity you get, depending on which time of year you come to DUFL. I was doing summer school and working in NZ pretty much right until I left for DUFL at the beginning of March, and then semester 2 of Otago had already started by the time our semester over there finished in mid-July. I went to Shanghai with 4 friends for the week of break at the end of April/beginning of May, and it was a definite highlight of our time there. This was almost entirely because we wanted to go to Disneyland (Shanghai Disney is the most recent Disney park, only built in 2016) and our two days there were amazing! If you've always wanted the chance to go to a Disney park, this could be a great chance for it! Otherwise, going to Beijing or Xi'an are probably the most popular destinations for domestic travel. Also don't forget that Seoul is a closer plane ride from Dalian (only about an hour!) than all these Chinese cities! Of course, make sure you know your visa is ok for re-entry to China if you decide to do something like this.



*Disneyland!*

## Overall Experience and other tips

- I can't really speak to the weather if you go on a semester two exchange (Sept-Jan), but for semester one, I'd say when you arrive it's pretty similar to a mild Dunedin winter-- cold, but not ridiculously so. Whatever clothes you wear for life at Otago in July will be fine for Dalian in March, I'd say. And your room will always be warm! I think most people's difficulty comes from the wind, which is really strong in Dalian, but to be honest this didn't bother me much as I'm from Wellington! The weather is at pretty pleasant temperatures April-June, and doesn't really start getting that hot until July when it's about time to leave. So if having comfortable weather is an important factor for deciding when to go, I'd suggest semester one. For semester two, you'll begin with extreme hot and end with extreme cold, whereas

semester one is overall more mild. A lot of the activities I mentioned above will also only be running in the first half of the year as well!

- I had the opportunity to teach English to a couple of classes at DUFL while I was there (they wanted native speakers to help with their oral classes), and that was a really great experience, though sometimes frustrating due to the lack of communication and guidance (see my next point). But I made pretty good money from it, and overall really enjoyed it, so if you get that kind of opportunity (and there aren't many native English speakers at DUFL, so it could be pretty likely) and English teaching appeals to you, I'd say go for it.
- Chinese administration is often frustrating and inefficient by our standards (all of course made worse by any language barrier). Be patient, try not to stress, ask for help from others. I waited a long time to get my official acceptance from DUFL (which I needed before I could apply for my visa or claim my PMSA money) but it came eventually, so try your best not to worry about it, it'll happen!
- Even though I like Chinese food, and there were certainly a lot of meals on campus I enjoyed eating, there will probably be moments when you are sick of it and want some food that feels more like home. One strategy of mine for these moments was buying pasta and pasta sauce from the international import section at Walmart, and preparing that in our apartment kitchen when I wanted something that felt a bit more 'Western'. It sounds silly, but you really take the simple things for granted! Try not to make a habit of it because it can get expensive, but if you're feeling homesick or just really sick of Chinese food, head to the international imports section of Walmart and see what you can come up with! If you're really looking to splash out in the city, I highly recommend Moochoo's, a burger place in 和平广场 (Peace Plaza-- a big mall). I also found out about a restaurant near campus literally in my last few days in China which had really good Western food-- it's called Philip's and you can order it through 外卖 (food delivery service) although my friends and I actually weren't able to figure out where the physical place was. Again, this is the sort of things where you shouldn't be shy and you should ask those around you for help!
- If you want to join a gym, there are a couple on the street opposite campus you can get one-semester memberships for. The facilities aren't as good as Unipol or your average NZ gym, but if exercise is important to you I'd recommend joining one. I did very little walking in China compared to what I'd do in Dunedin, and the one time I attempted to go on a run outside of campus it made me realise China is really not an ideal place for that-- the footpaths are often non-existent and the driving pretty scary!
- Apps to download: **Pleco** is the dictionary app everyone uses, and is essential! **WeChat** is used for essentially all communication: with your peers and even your teachers/authority figures. **Baidu maps** is a great Google Maps equivalent for China, and I found it really helpful whenever I was navigating the city. Just like Google Maps, it will also give you public transport options for particular routes.

It's cheesy advice, but the main thing to know is that the time will fly by so make the most of it! If you're really keen on improving your Chinese, going for two semesters would be great, but this wasn't really an option for me as I was unable to do papers towards my other degree (Law) while in China. Even if you're not a naturally extraverted person, do your best to be as sociable as you can, because the people make the experience. You become incredibly close to people quickly, and then it's super sad to say goodbye to these friends who live all over the world you may never see again! If

you're heading to Dalian or anywhere in China (or considering it) please don't hesitate to get in touch! I'd love to share more of my experience (I think I'd be able to recall more in conversation rather than just writing off the top of my head) and give any advice or guidance you're looking for. I'd also just love the chance to reminisce-- I've been back in NZ only 6 weeks and it already feels like my time in China was a lifetime ago. :( You can find me on Facebook (Lucy Prestidge).