



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Texas at Austin
Semester & Year of Exchange	2019 Semester 2
Otago degree(s)	LLB BCom
Major(s)	Finance

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
EUS 347 23-Dante	English	200-300 level Arts paper	
GOV 370R Money in US Politics	English	200-300 level Arts paper	
HIS 343M History of Russia since 1917	English	200-300 level Arts paper	
MES 343 1-Modern Egypt – A History	English	200-300 level Arts paper	
			54 points
			(3 papers)

Any comments about these papers?

Really interesting courses – it was great that I had left all my optional papers for the exchange semester because it meant I could get to try stuff completely different to the law and finance papers I had already done. The professor for the Dante paper was one of America's leading scholars on him, which was cool.

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

The experience was different in that American students pipe up a lot in classes, and student teacher interaction is expected. This is different to Otago, where no one wants to speak in a lecture. The workload is much easier, I have never had a semester where I got such high grades with so little work.

Accommodation

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

I was in an apartment in West Campus, which I found on Facebook from a student who wanted to sublease. The pros were that it was cheaper than the co-ops that exchange students mostly go into,

and it was a good way to meet local students and their friends. The cons were that there wasn't the sense of community that the co-ops had, and that it was still expensive for what you got.

Money matters

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

- **Accommodation: USD2200** - USD 550/month for four months
- **Flights: NZD2100** from Auckland to Austin return. I would recommend stumping up a little bit extra to go straight from Auckland to Houston on Air NZ, my flights were slightly cheaper but had me go through Melbourne and LA – in hindsight the more expensive direct flights are worth it.
- **Visa: probably about NZD1000 all up**, including flights to Auckland for the interview. Make sure to pay the SEVIS fee before you go to the interview – it's on a different website so easy to miss.
- **Insurance: NZD1400** for no excess travel insurance. Definitely worth the extra 300 for no excess – I had to replace a phone and spend an extra night in LA on my way home and the insurance covered everything at no cost to me. Texas also has compulsory insurance for **USD1000**.
- **Food:** Didn't really keep track but ate out a lot. Tipping is big too, so budget at least NZD3000. Since I lived in an apartment, I was responsible for my own meals, which drove the cost of food up. In the co-ops or a lot of other buildings you get meals included or can pay extra for a meal plan.

I had two months of travel before the semester started, and another month of travel once it ended. Most of my expenses were not really related to the exchange. I actually nearly ran out of money at one point but was able to get an on-campus job at the University for the semester (which is legal if you work <20 hours per week).

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

Foreign bank account (Chase Bank, which is accessible anywhere in the US). I used xe.com, an online foreign exchange broker, to transfer money from my NZ account to my US account at a better exchange rate with no currency transfer fee.

I would recommend this, as the cash passport offers really bad rates and NZ banks charge a lot to send money overseas. Using your NZ debit card is possible but they sting you with the exchange rate you get and an international fee every time you use it.

I would also recommend having a credit card on hand. I didn't have one and could have saved a lot of money if I did. For example, Epic Local ski passes stopped selling in November, and I was waiting for some money to come through in December. Since I had no credit card, I couldn't buy it in November and ended up paying twice as much for lift passes as I would have if I did have a credit card and got the Epic Local pass.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, had to get a DS-2019 from the University of Texas. Then applied for a J1 visa. This entailed a lot of online form filling out. Then had to go to an interview at the consulate in Auckland.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, the University of Texas at Austin requires all exchange students to buy their health insurance (USD1000) unless they have health insurance that satisfies Obamacare requirements. Travel insurance and discount student health insurance are not enough to allow an exemption. I tried to find cheaper alternative insurance, but Obamacare compliant insurance is really expensive, so the University of Texas insurance is the only real option.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There are a lot of events on through the international office, or groups like Planet Longhorn often put on parties etc. The co-ops also have a lot of parties and events on that people can go to. Texas has a massive extra-curricular scene so anyone can do pretty much anything they want.

What was the university/ city like?

It was great, UT is massive and has an impressive campus. There are around 60,000 students (I think) so there's really something for everyone. Austin is a very cool, fast-growing city of roughly 2.5 million. There's a lot of stuff going on and it's very liberal and artsy. The nightlife is great and the river and lakes around the city mean there's a lot to do outdoors.

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

- 6th Street is really fun on a night out
- Rainey Street is another street with bars and cubs, but they're all in suburban houses which is cool.
- Flights from Austin to Denver and back are really cheap on Google Flights, Denver is a fun city and you can head up into the Rockies.
- Depending on the semester, SXSW and Austin City Limits are good festivals.
- This isn't Texas related, but Nashville in Tennessee is awesome for anyone who loves music. Every bar on Broadway has at least one live band.
- Head to Cuba if you get the chance, you can fly from Houston and NZ citizens have no restrictions flying there from the US.
- Football! UT sells a student season pass to all UT sports events – football, basketball, soccer etc. Buy it. Football is nowhere near as good a game as rugby, but the tailgating is a lot of fun and the atmosphere at the 100,000+ seat University of Texas football stadium is incredible.

Any tips for future students?

Most of the tips I have are included above. Don't plan too much, because opportunities will arise to travel with people you meet or do something you didn't know about before leaving NZ. If you're flexible you won't miss out. Also, America is expensive – don't keep converting prices back to NZD or you'll just be miserable.

Overall Experience

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

I could not have had a better semester to finish five years of study with! I got to 16 States and Cuba, including a 3400km road trip from NYC to Austin. It was awesome to go out on my own and meet new people in a place I had never been. American college life is very different to Otago and it was fun to explore such a different culture to what we have in NZ. I have no regrets about doing an exchange or choosing Texas, and would highly recommend it as a way to finish a degree.

