



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

Host University	University of Oregon
Semester & Year of Exchange	Fall Term 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Neuroscience

### Academics/ course load

*Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?*

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
BI360 Neurobiology	English	Unspecified	18
BI353 Sensory Physiology	English	PSYC323	18
PSY304 Biopsychology	English	Unspecified	18

*Any comments about these papers?*

While these papers were all 300 level papers they were considerably less content heavy compared to 300 level papers here at Otago. This could be due to the degree at Oregon being spread over four years. Each paper consisted of 2-3 1 hour lectures per week and a 1 hour discussion per week. There was no hands on lab session in any of these papers.

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

Compared to 300 level neuroscience papers at Otago these papers were teaching introductory neuroscience concepts. The lectures themselves were quite different as it is very common for people to ask questions and interrupt the lecturer. The lectures themselves are not recorded and lecturers do not have to post their slides on Canvas (UO's version of Blackboard)

### Accommodation

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

I found a room in an apartment with three others available for only fall term in Eugene, which is quite uncommon, as the person who moved out was also going on exchange. I found the apartment through an off campus housing website run by the university ([offcampushousing.uoregon.edu](http://offcampushousing.uoregon.edu)) but there is also a Facebook page called UO Housing that people post room vacancies. The advantage of living off campus is that you don't have to share a room with a dorm mate. However, it was a 10-15

minute walk to campus which can be a pain in fall/winter as it rains quite often in Eugene. Furthermore by living on campus you have to purchase a meal plan so if you prefer cooking for yourself off campus may be preferable. There are some apartment complexes that allow month-month renting but most make you sign a year-long lease. If you are going for semester 1 (winter/spring term) a lot of people are trying to get out of their lease and there are many rooms available on the UO Housing page.

## **Money matters**

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

Rent is paid per month, I paid \$650 per month which is quite expensive, but this was the only apartment I could find for only fall term. Water, power and internet were an extra \$40 ish extra per month. Food per week was around \$50 depending on if you had a meal plan or decided to cook for yourself.

I booked my flights a few months before I left, however by having family members working for Air New Zealand I was able to get a flight for considerably cheaper than the going rate. I flew into LA and out of Houston after travelling following the end of my exchange.

To apply for a J1 student visa you need to pay two separate fees (SEVIS \$180 US & MRV \$240 NZ)

I took out a travel insurance plan through ANZ and Allianz Global Assistance, it cost \$729 NZ with no excess and covered me for my 120 days in the United States (but also included cover for travel to Canada, Central and South America)

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

I got a Multi-Currency cash passport through ANZ (although I think they're available at most major banks) and loaded it with US currency before I left. This was a really handy way to lock in the US dollar at a good exchange rate and it worked like a normal credit card at most places, although I was unable to make purchases online with this card. Note that the cash passport charges a \$3 US fee for every ATM use and a \$3.50 NZ fee so when taking money out it might pay to take out larger sums.

I also opened a US bank account with Bank of America so that I could pay my rent through an online portal and make other online purchases. A bank account is also really handy so that you can electronically transfer people money using something like Venmo instead of having to pay cash the whole time. To open a US bank account you'll need your passport (and preferably another form of ID) and your DS2019.

## **Visas & Insurance**

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

To study in the United States you need to apply for a J-1 student visa. As mentioned above you have to pay two lots of fees which came to near \$500 NZ. You also are required to have an interview at the US consulate in Auckland so additional travel and accommodation costs may apply. Before the interview you also need to fill out the DS-160 form online beforehand and have your DS2019 sent to you from your host university.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

UO did require mandatory health insurance which was kind of annoying as my insurance plan had comprehensive health cover (a requirement by Otago themselves). Without purchasing this health insurance plan you may not be able to get your ID card and you will be blocked from using UO

services such as canvas. In total it cost \$854 US which was very steep considering it was never used. You can apply for a waiver by submitting you own health insurance policy but it will most likely be declined as you policy must be taken out in the United States. However it was better safe than sorry to have this insurance policy as healthcare in the US can be very expensive.

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

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

Like Otago, there are multiple free student clubs available to join as well as the infamous fraternities and sororities. However, they are rather costly to join and in my experience weren't too keen to take on someone for only one term.

UO has multiple college sport teams, including football, mens and womens basketball, womens volleyball and soccer, playing during fall term. Students are able to get free tickets via the Go Ducks Gameday App, however tickets for the popular events like football run out quickly. Tickets are dispersed by you year group at a certain time so make sure to pay attention to that.

The international office runs a program called Exploregon where they run day trips to many of the sights around the state. I definitely recommend trying one of these out if you can fit it into your schedule.

*What was the university/ city like?*

Eugene has a similar feeling to Dunedin, it's a small college city of about 160,000. However unlike Dunedin downtown is more spread out. The campus itself is really nice and filled with trees and greenery. There is a full gym available at the rec center along with multiple libraries and places to study.

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

The state of Oregon has lots of amazing scenery that I definitely recommend going out and seeing. We did day trips to the coast and to Crater Lake as well as weekends away to the coast for Thanksgiving and to Portland which is only 2 hours up the road. While there are busses and trains running between Eugene and Portland we hired cars and drove to the other places as it was more convenient for our time schedules.

*Any tips for future students?*

Apply for you visa as soon as possible, as this process can be long and stressful, the sooner you finish the application the sooner you can book your appointment. The slots fill up very quickly.

Make sure you have all your required vaccinations (MMR, Meningitis ACYW, chickenpox and tetanus) as you will not be able to register for classes.

Register for classes ASAP as each class only has limited seats that may fill up quick. If your desired class does fill up email the lecturer and ask them if they can squeeze you in, make sure you say you're an exchange student.

When booking your flights, note that the J-1 visa allows you to enter the country only 30 days before your start date at UO (and leave no later than 30 days after your end date). Make sure you take note of your dates.

Your UO student ID gives you free bus rides throughout the city and discounts at certain places, make the most of it.

If you're living off campus out of walking distance you can rent a bike from the university which makes getting around the city easier.

It rains in Oregon, like a lot. Be prepared and have a good raincoat and maybe a pair of shoes that are at least slightly water proof so that you're not completely drenched while you're in the class/library.

In the US the drinking age is 21. While some states accept a NZ drivers license as a form of ID the state of Oregon doesn't, that means you'll need your passport to get into bars/buy alcohol if you're 21 or over. However you can also apply for a state ID card/drivers license. I tried to apply for a state ID but in the end chose not to as you must hand in your NZ license for destruction (or sit the driving test for the Oregon license).

## **Overall Experience**

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

Being a huge fan of college sports and the Oregon Ducks I was super excited to be given the chance to study in Eugene at the University of Oregon. After a quick pitstop in Vegas I arrived in Eugene about 10 days before the start of classes and met my roommates who briefly showed me around campus and the city before starting international student orientation.

Organised by the international office all exchange and degree seeking students had to attend a week long 'compulsory' orientation. During the first day of orientation we were paired with a UO peer mentor student who had previously studied overseas or who was currently an international student at UO. However, these seminars were more targeted at the degree seeking students who were coming to UO for 4 years. For exchange students there was only one mandatory meeting with the exchange coordinator Paolo. To be completely honest orientation seemed like a waste of time, we were forced to sit through presentations on topics such as 'how to study' and 'how uni is different to high school'. I assume these were useful for the degree seeking students who were new to university life but to a third year they seemed pointless. Instead of attending the rest of these sessions or playing duck duck goose, myself and my newfound international friends attended the fine Oregon student establishment of Taylor's Bar (home of the infamous Dollar Beers, every Wednesday 9-10:30 pm).

Although the initial orientation was disappointing the team in the international office are incredibly helpful with any questions you may have and are only a quick visit or email away. Furthermore, without the orientation I wouldn't have met all the amazing exchange students from all over the globe that I now call close friends.

My time at UO was greeted with unusually warm and dry weather for fall term. In Eugene it was expected to rain a lot more than it did so I took this to my advantage. Any weekend that didn't have a home football game we travelled and explored the state. Highlights included Crater Lake and the Oregon Coast around Newport.

After finishing at Oregon I met up with my dad and travelled to the East Coast for three weeks before leaving from Houston. Highlights of that trip included an NFL game in Pittsburgh and NBA on Christmas day in Boston. Travelling from Eugene can be tough, especially if you want to go far. The Eugene airport is quite small and doesn't have many direct flights outside of Seattle, San Fran and

LA. Your best bet would be to travel up to Portland where there is a bigger airport that has more destination options (albeit still limited and quite pricy).

I hope this review has been helpful and outlined a few of the many things that make Oregon a great choice for your exchange. No matter where your exchange takes you I hope that you have a great time but I do encourage you to chose UO, you won't regret it. Go Ducks!!