



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	University of Texas at Austin
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	S1 2024
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>Major(s)</b>	Anthropology and Religious Studies

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>
Native Peoples of the Southwest	English	300 level ANTH/RELS
Sensing: Elemental Media	English	300 level ANTH
Nature, Society, and Adaptation	English	300 level ANTH
Unbelief in American Culture	English	300 level RELS

Total Otago credits gained:  54 points  72 points  108 points  \_\_\_\_\_

Any comments about these papers?

Loved them all!

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

Overall, my courses were taught in a similar way to my courses at Otago. For each course we had two classes per week, 1.5hrs each, and I had a mix of lecture + tutorial and seminar style courses. Assignments were usually discussion posts, shorter essays, book reviews, but also a lot of group projects... That was the biggest difference and sometimes a challenging one!

I also didn't have any exams. Most classes in other subjects had mid-terms and finals. General consensus among exchange students was that the course content was easier than our home universities, but workload was still full on due to lots of readings and small assignments and dealing with groups.

Expect to be the only exchange student in your classes! There are 50,000 students and not many are international students (or even from outside of Texas).

## Accommodation

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

I found a standalone house to live in, flatting with three American PhD students in North Campus (Hancock area). I found my place on the UT Austin Exchange Students Facebook page and I loved it! I'm a little bit older and didn't want to be in the student party area (West Campus) and needed accom under US\$1000/month that was ideally also walking distance to campus and with people I could hang out with. Was lucky to find this one!

Both North Campus and Hyde Park are a mix of students and families and has a chill, artsy vibe with lots of colourful villas and a massive HEB supermarket and nice cafes to study from.

There's no accommodation on offer through the university. All the rooms available are official sublets (so really, it's a full lease transfer) and some have application fees and are a bit tricky to get approval without a credit score, local income or guarantor etc. I went through a private landlord which was easier. A lot of other exchange students stayed in co-ops in West Campus that were easier to get a spot in and are cheaper than the shared apartments in that area (that usually go for US\$1200+/month!) and they had a lot of fun living there.

## Money matters

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

**Rent:** US\$900/month

**House bills:** around US\$90/month

**Phone:** US\$18/month (US Mobile)

**Visa:** US\$185 (visa) + US\$220 (SEVIS Fee) + NZ\$41 (delivery fee)

**Food:** I found most food prices (supermarket/takeout/restaurants) were the same as in NZ but in USD so actually much more pricey. Fresh produce was cheaper than NZ though.

**Travel Insurance:** NZ\$1200 (Studentsafe 12 months)

**Health Insurance:** US\$1388 (through UT Austin 5 months – mandatory for exchange students)

**Transport:** The campus and student areas are very walkable and cyclable and the bus network throughout the city is free for students (just swipe your ID). Uber and Lyft are pretty cheap (nowhere is further than 20 minutes away and most Ubers I got were under US\$10).

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

I used a Wise card which was really easy because I could receive NZD and just switch it to USD when the exchange rate was good. I didn't need cash ever and most people use the Venmo app to transfer money to each other or at market stalls that don't take card (no one does a normal bank transfer).

## Visas & Insurance

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

I applied for my J-1 student visa online once I had my official acceptance from UT. There was a bunch of paperwork to fill out and several fees to pay and then I sent the paperwork and my passport to the embassy in Auckland in late November. Less than a week later it had been approved and returned by post! No interview needed!

You can get a job on campus with this visa (and nowhere else), but it's a massive campus so there's different kinds of work (academic, museums, events) though a lot of people got F&B jobs since they were pretty flexible.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Yes! The cost is horrific, so my only advice is to use their services to the max. I went to the University Health Services on campus and insurance covered all my doctor/sports medicine/gynaecology

appointments, xrays, other imaging, lab work, etc and always got an appt within a few days. Prescriptions are decently subsidised with it too.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There are more activities than I could keep track of! Check out the hiking and outdoor trips through RecSports (they also have a great fitness class programme and the leisure pool in Greg Gym is the absolute best spot on campus).

The TexasGlobal team will email you about their events and the local student-led exchange groups – join them all! They organised bouldering, kayaking, ranch campfire night, sports matches, two step dancing, rodeo, and all sorts of fun stuff.

There's often free concerts and festivals on campus, some you can find out through the UT E+E page and others I just stumbled across or word of mouth. And then there's all the clubs and societies!

*What was the university/ city like?*

The university is big with lots of great study and hang out spots - the Life Sciences Library in the Tower is very grand and PCL library has lots of shared study spaces and cosy spots. Food options aren't that fab but all the food trucks are good. The Union building has a cinema with free film screenings, a bowling alley, its own music venue... There's a lot of energy on the campus and it's very infectious.

Austin is such a cool city! There's (really good) free music everywhere, cool cafes that are all set up to have students work there all day, and heaps of green spaces to enjoy when it's not super hot (which it is from late April to October...). Austin is both a student city and tech hub so a lot of people are moving there and that makes it pricey but gives it such a great energy.

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

Eat lots of queso (Torchy's is my fave) and all the other Tex-Mex food. Don't just stay around campus and downtown – East Austin and South Congress/South 1st are both cool areas with good food and shops, and Mueller Farmers Market on Sundays. For live music there are bars everywhere but there's also Central Market in the evening (it's the best supermarket and has a café and free music several days a week), Mozarts Café on sunny weekends, Whitehorse for country music and two step dancing, Austin City Limits (festival in Oct as well as concerts filmed a few times a week in a theatre downtown), and lots of free music during the SXSW festival in March. Blanton Museum on campus is really good and free! The Performing Arts centre always has something cool on, usually discounted for students, plus hosts Broadway shows.

*Any tips for future students?*

On tips... You don't need to tip for take-out or self-service! Many people (especially in student areas) won't tip at a café, food truck, fast food, and anywhere else that you're paying first and they're just handing you food and you're clearing up after yourself. If you want to tip in those settings, then 10-15% (or \$1 per drink) is fine. In any sit-down situation with a server then 18-20% on the **pre-tax** total is normal (don't let the "suggested tips" prompt make you think it should be higher!).

## Overall Experience

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

I had a great time in Austin! The campus is beautiful and has a leisure pool (among many other things like hot pool, cinema, bowling alley - this just happened to be my absolute fave!) It was the best place to cool off between classes when it started to get super hot in spring. There were so many sunny days to go hiking or exploring the city with friends. Austin's riverfront and green belt are beautiful, and there's lots of art and music and dancing around. My weeks were jam packed with study and social activities – there are SO many things happening on campus and around the city, the semester went by real fast! It's not the cheapest place to live but there are so many free activities and student deals and, luckily, tacos don't cost much.

Photos: Holi Festival; UT Tower when the bluebonnets were in bloom; UT Longhorns baseball match; Greg Gym leisure pool.

