CALS Exchange Student Participation Report

Personal information

- Name: Rebecca
- Major: Natural Resources
- Name of Host University: Massey University (Palmerston North campus)
- Period/Time of Exchange: Spring 2010

Practical information

Visa

Obtaining a visa was pretty easy. I would suggest getting the paperwork in early so that you don't have to worry about getting it back in time to leave.

Immigration upon arrival

When I arrived in New Zealand I had no problem getting through immigration. I didn't have much with me in terms of food and my shoes were clean of dirt, so I think that made it easy to get through.

Packing

There wasn't anything that I left at home that I wish I had, but I would definitely suggest bringing a raincoat. I purchased one right before I left for New Zealand and I used it multiple times.

I went to New Zealand during their summer (January) and left during their winter (June). In the fall I thought I wanted my winter jacket and had my mom bring it when she came to visit me, but I ended up not using it. I went to university on the North Island, which is warmer than the South Island. So I would recommend unless you plan on going skiing not to bring a winter jacket.

Resources

The host university

The only website that I looked at for information on Massey was the official Massey University website. The website was a little confusing to navigate at first, but once I had visited it a few times it had a lot of information about the school on it.

Social events

Massey had a student publication that had upcoming events in it. They also posted a lot of fliers around when there were big events going on.

Movies/shows/concerts

Shows and concerts were often published in the student publication and the local newspaper. Movie schedules can be found online.

Maps/tourist information

Campus maps were available in the registration office. When traveling though most towns had iCenters that are filled with maps and information about local activities. There are also people there that can help you book activities, transportation, lodging, and answer any questions you may have. The iSites were really big help and what I relied on the most in my travel.

International office at Host University

I arrived in New Zealand early because I wanted to travel first and ended up taking a bus from Wellington to Palmerston North where my university's campus is located. Before leaving the United States I had received an email saying that the university would pick me up from the airport, bus station, or train station upon arrival. All I had to do was fill out an online form with my arrival information. I arranged to be picked up at the bus station and it was very convenient. A staff member met me there and drove me to my dorm, gave me a welcome packet, including a map of campus and Palmerston North, and showed me where some important buildings and places where on campus and in town. It was a very nice reception.

Did you receive (or were you offered) a buddy?

I did not receive or get offered a buddy.

Orientation activities

There was a day or two of international orientation, and then a few more days of new student orientation. Some of the orientation activities were unnecessary to go to. For example, part of the international orientation was about renewing your visa, and was unnecessary for international students who were only staying for a semester, but we were still advised to go to it. Additionally, a lot of the new student orientation was like freshman orientation and things I had already heard before. But the school gave everyone an orientation schedule and most of the activities were not mandatory, so you could pick and choose what you believed would be helpful and what you wanted to go to.

International office staff
The international staff was pretty helpful. I went to see them about classes and financial issues and they were able to help me with both. They also periodically had pizza parties and other events for all the exchange students.

**Academics**

**The university**

Classes (or papers as they call them) usually had a midterm exam and a final, and one or two big assignments, and some had a few smaller homework assignments. One of the main differences between classes at Cornell and classes at Massey is that the final exams are worth 50-60% of your total grade. However, there is a week-long study period before final exams.

There is a centralized campus, composed of the dining hall, the library, a student center, pharmacy, the bookstore, and some lecture halls.

There was a student center and a student bar on campus that people could hang out in. Also, all of the dorms had common areas with a small kitchen, couches, and a TV.

Each dorm had access to a nearby computer lab, and there were also computers in the library. The library is accessible, but is not open as late as the libraries at Cornell, I believe it closes at 11pm. The library has wifi, as do some select buildings on campus, but not all of them. My dorm did not have wifi. I had to buy an Ethernet cable there, and buy Internet every month and it had a limit on bandwidth.

**Courses**

The course enrollment process was probably one of the most frustrating things I experienced while abroad. When filling out the application for Massey you have to pick papers that you are interested in taking, without knowing the time schedule, for pre-approval, based on whether or not they believe you have the necessary knowledge to take the class, especially if there were pre-requisites. I chose classes that I was interested in but once I actually got to Massey I found out that many of the classes I chose conflicted with each other and had to almost completely rearrange my schedule.

I took one paper that was just lecture, two papers with lecture and a lab, and one paper with lecture and a discussion section.

Most of the homework I received was weekly reading assignments. For one class I had two essay assignments, and for the other ones I had one or two projects that I had to work on outside of class. But other than that there was not much homework. Additionally for one of the classes I took with lab, every week we did a lab that had questions with it in a lab book, which was due at the end of the semester.

Most classes had a midterm and a final exam. Some classes had two exams and a final exam. In one of the classes that I took with lab there were 2 or 3 lab quizzes, plus a midterm and a final exam for the lecture. But in the other class I took with a lab there were no lab quizzes. The exams were similar to Cornell exams in that they were a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The main difference as mentioned before is that the final is worth a much larger proportion of your final grade.

I believe that most of the courses were graded based on a curve. Grades were based mainly on test and project grades, and some had mandatory attendance that factored into your grade.

**Life Abroad**

**Language**

English is one of the national languages in New Zealand, with Maori being the other, but not many people speak Maori, and everyone knows English. Though some of their jargon and slang words are different, it was easy to learn.

**Banking**

I did not open a local account, although some exchange students there did. I did not feel the need to though because one of their banks, Westpac, has some kind of agreement or deal with Bank of America, where you can use your Bank of America debit card at Westpac ATMs without being charged any additional fees. This was my preferred way of getting money; it was convenient because there was a Westpac ATM on Massey Campus. Additionally if needed my parents were able to put money in my account in the States, which I was then able to access in New Zealand. However if you used your debit or credit card at a store you were charged some kind of an international fee, which is a percentage of your purchase price, so the waiving of fees was only if you took money out of the ATM.

**Housing**

Along with the application to study at Massey University there was an application for housing that I filled out for campus housing. I gave my top 3 choices for University Halls. I was not placed in any of the halls that I picked, but was still happy in the hall that I lived in.

I would definitely recommend living in a dorm or hall. Usually only first years and exchange students live in the halls, and because I went abroad our second semester, it was their first semester so it was easier to make friends because all of the people in the halls were new university students. I made some really good New Zealand exchange student friends living in the hall. I had some exchange student friends who lived on campus apartments together, and it seemed like although they all became really close, they did not have as many New Zealand friends because they were secluded in the campus apartments.

**Dining on campus**

I ate at the campus-dining hall. The way that Massey housing and meal plans work is that there are certain halls that you live in which require you to have a meal plan, then there are some halls that are self catered, but if you want you can still buy a meal plan. Meal plan options are just dinner, dinner and breakfast, or dinner, a bagged lunch, and breakfast. I had the just dinner meal plan, I kept cereal and yogurt in my hall's
kitchen for breakfast, and either bought lunch or made it in the hall. To be honest the dining hall food was not very good, they had limited options and hours, especially for vegetarians. But it was convenient to not have to cook.

Transportation

Every Massey student in Palmerston North receives a free bus pass that is linked with his or her student ID, like Cornell. There are also taxis available that are about 12 New Zealand Dollars to get to town, and about 25 or 30 to get to the Palmerston North Airport.

The bus pass was free for students, but I believe that there was commuter passes.

Communication

A few times I called home using a calling card, but mostly I just used skype.

I did buy a cell phone, the provider was telecom and it was a prepay phone. Minutes are very expensive in New Zealand, most people text. I paid 12 NZD a month for unlimited texting, which worked out really well.

Mail

It took about a week to a week and a half to receive mail, and the same to send it. I really only sent postcards, and it was about a dollar to send one.

Social activities

I met students from the host country mostly through the dorm and classes. I was involved in the MUAC, which is Massey University Adventure Club; they do a lot of hiking and outdoor activities. They also had some club and intramural sports, and various other clubs.

Throughout the semester there were a few pizza parties, and potlucks arranged for the exchange students. They also did a few small trips to different places.

A lot of local students were involved in sports, especially rugby, they were also into other outdoor activities such as hiking. On the weekends a lot of people went out to the bars and clubs.

Shopping

There were at least 3 big grocery stores in Palmerston North that were easy to get to with the bus system. There is also a mall that contained a lot of clothing stores, some department stores, and restaurants.

Things were a little more expensive but because the exchange rate was in favor of the U.S. dollar when I went I think it about evened out. I paid mostly with cash, because I could get it from the Westpac ATM without extra fees, however if I used a card there was an additional fee.

There was an outdoor farmer's market, which was pretty nice.

The grocery stores are open from about 7 or 8 am until about 12am. Clothing stores and convenient stores are open from about 9am to 6 or 7 pm.

The Warehouse, Farmers, and Kmart are all popular department stores.

Were there any items that were not available?

There were no major items that weren't available. Some food items that tasted a little different included ketchup, and peanut butter. Root beer, my favorite soda, was really hard to find.

Health and Safety

I felt very safe on campus, it was well lit at night, and I never heard of any kind of violence or robbery there. In town there was some crime, but I wouldn't say it was any more than what happens at Cornell, maybe even less.

I would say never to walk alone at night, especially in town. Make sure that you are with people who will take care of you if need be. Also just be aware of your surroundings.

Medical care

Massey has an on campus health center. While I was there I got sick and went there a few times, because of the student insurance that I bought through Massey the visits were free, but the prescriptions I filled I had to pay for. There is also a hospital in Palmerston North for more urgent medical care.

Travel

I spent 3 weeks traveling around the South Island before the semester started. I basically did a loop starting in Picton, went down the West Coast to Queenstown, stopping at several different towns and cities on the way, and up the East coast back to Picton. During my two-week break in the middle of the semester I traveled around the North Island. I stayed in New Zealand the whole time; I know some exchange students who traveled to Australia either before or after the semester, or during break. It would have been cool to go to Australia but I was content with traveling in New Zealand, even though I spent 5 weeks traveling, I still feel like there are some things that I missed, and would love to go back and travel some more.

There are student travel agencies in many of the cities in New Zealand, although I did not use their services I had friends who found them very helpful. Before traveling to New Zealand I bought a Magic Bus pass. Magic Bus is a bus, which has a certain route around the North or South
Island and you can hop off and then hop back on later at any place along that route, and then continue on to the next place you want to visit. The bus drivers are very helpful in planning your travel and activities. Magic Bus also offers some discounted prices for certain activities and will book them for you. They also did there best to answer questions about other activities that they did not offer. I bought my pass around Christmas time and got a deal where I bought a South Island pass, and received a North Island pass for free. There are a few other bus companies that are similar to Magic Bus, including Kiwi Express, and Stray. I have heard that Kiwi Express is more of a party bus, than either of the other two. All of them are very backpacker friendly. Also the iSites that were in most of the cities and towns are very helpful in planning your travel. Additionally most hostels had information about tourist attractions and activities, and many are willing to help you book activities.

I did not go on any of the trips organized my the host university but I know that there was one planned for the two week break, and I think one planned for the break between first and second semester.

Costs of traveling

My plane ticket to New Zealand was about $1800. The bus pass that I bought was about $500.

Overall exchange experience

I felt like I got a good picture of the country and the school culture. The local culture I was a little less exposed to, just because I was in a university setting and mostly interacted with younger people, so I was only exposed to certain cultural things. I think if I had done a home stay or some kind of similar experience I may have gotten a broader perspective of the local culture. I did spend some time with my friend's family at her home and that was a very good experience.

I really enjoyed my time in New Zealand and am even thinking about going back after graduation to work for 6 months to a year. It was a great experience to live in another country and be exposed to a different life style. I had some worries about being so far from home but in the end it wasn't a problem because there was so much to experience in New Zealand.

Overall I absolutely loved my time abroad in New Zealand and would do it again in a heartbeat. I loved the country, which I think was a big part of why I loved being there so much, but I also believe that going abroad in general is a wonderful experience.