

Exchange Testimonial from Abraham O'Neill. Semester 2 2010. University of Nottingham

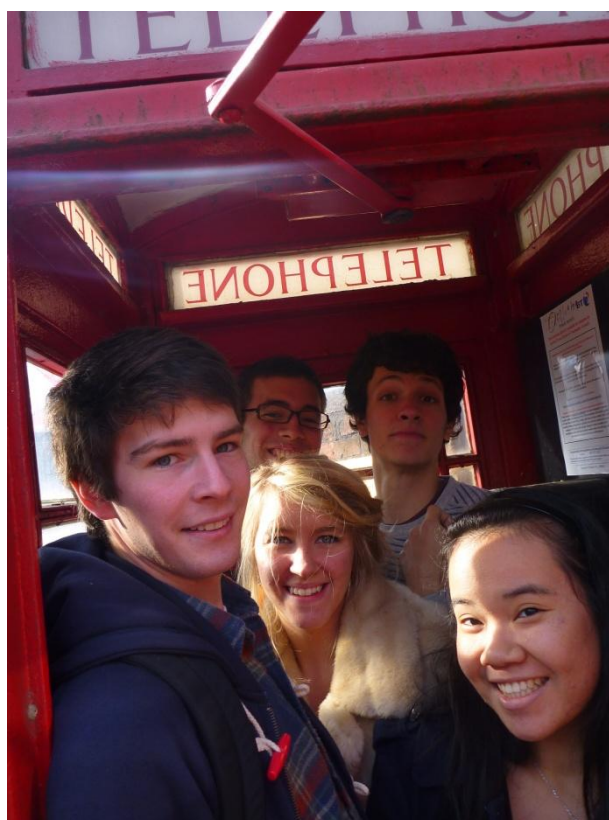
4<sup>th</sup> year BA (Political Science)/LLB.

It's a cliché to say that my semester on exchange at the University of Nottingham has been the best I've ever had: every semester is different and each is wonderful for different reasons, but one thing that I can promise you is that a semester abroad will be wonderful for unique and unexpected reasons. The experiences you'll have, the people you'll meet, the things you'll learn and oh, the places you'll go! (thanks, Dr Seus)



Me at the Trevi Fountain in Rome

Before the semester began – starting in July – I travelled around France, Italy and Germany. I spent two weeks of August hiking in Scotland in what then remained of the European summer. Those few months were expensive but absolutely worth every Euro. I was able to travel a little during semester as well – some friends and I flew to Dublin for the weekend and we managed to get to London, York and a few smaller towns on other weekends when we really should have been studying. I would recommend getting around Europe and the UK as much as you can because those trips enriched my experience and kept reminding me just how new and exciting being in a new country is.



Some of my awesome exchange student friends

The people I've met at Nottingham are easily the best part of my exchange. Living Nightingale Hall on campus put me in a close community of British and international students right from the start of term. My closest friends were exchange students like myself – we were all in the same situation and being a few years older (21) than most of the Brits (18) drew us together. We all became very close very quickly, and there are people here who will be lifelong friends (and on whose couch I will always be able to stay).

On the subject of living on campus... all on-campus accommodation is catered, with every meal provided from the fees paid at the beginning of the semester. The food in halls is likely something you'll spend a great deal of time moaning about. You'll eat potatoes in every form – roasted, boiled, fried, chipped, in their jackets, cooked in a pie. Hall food is admittedly not that great,

but it won't kill you and the shared cultural experience will lend extra zest to any meal you eat in the real world.



Autum leaves on campus

Nottingham is within striking distance of London, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham, being just about in the middle of the country. It has some awesome nightlife – there are two universities in town so there are heaps of students and multiple student nights every night of week. The campus is beautiful – as pretty as UQ but in an English way, especially in the autumn. Neighbouring Wollaton Park is also a great place to stroll and pretend to be in a Jane Austen novel.

When we were settling in during International Students Week we were told (much to my surprise – I hadn't done my homework) that Nottingham is a world renowned institution. It has been ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the UK and 73<sup>rd</sup> in the world by the Times Higher listing. The Law Faculty delivered on that promise.

My UK Human Rights Law class was the best law course I've ever taken and has given me a thorough understanding of the UK Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights, which have no equivalent in Australia. That course also taught me a great deal about what it is to practice law in a field where political reform and everyday life are as important as legal doctrine. I also took Foundations of International Criminal Law, which is taught delightfully by Olympia Bekou, who worked at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and attended the conference on the drafting of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. European Union Law A was a solid introduction to the byzantine but fascinating institutional and legal framework of the EU. International Human Rights Law was also a great course, and has set me up well to study more specific courses in the same field on my second exchange.



The Trent Building, University Park Campus

One of the most fascinating aspects of the experience was observing (and participating in) the political discussion around the controversial "cuts" to university funding and the resulting rise in tuition fees. The students at Nottingham staged a 'sit-in', occupying the Great Hall of the Trent Building for three

days, calling on the Vice Chancellor to publicly oppose the cuts. I joined them for a few hours while the university administration tried to kick them out of the Hall. The Vice Chancellor eventually agreed to some of their demands. From that sit-in and dozens like it around the UK,



The student occupiers hold a general meeting

a large and vibrant anti-cuts movement blossomed into life. The high profile student protests in London, some of which were unfortunately marred by violence, were just one aspect of a fascinating social movement. Being in the UK as the cuts were taking effect was a grim but interesting experience, especially for a student of political science.

I would absolutely recommend an exchange to anyone without a moment's hesitation. I've gained an insight into the British culture, seen much of Europe, made some awesome friends, established contacts across the world, made myself more employable but most importantly it has enriched my life and taken advantage of an opportunity I'll never have again.