

Two weeks since I've touched down in Wellington

It's early Sunday morning and as I wait for my flight to New Zealand my body is vibrating with a rush of different emotions. I feel excitement because for a little over four months I get to experience school in a place I've always dreamed of schooling in. I feel gratitude because of the opportunity I have been blessed with. I feel nervous thinking of all the obstacles I'm going to come face to face with throughout this semester away. As I board the plane these emotions all seem to disappear as the plane ascends into the clouds.

Fast forward a few hours later and I'm in Wellington, I cannot believe I am actually here. I have talked about being here, hoped and prayed to be granted the chance to be here and right now I can't even fathom the reality of being in such an incredible place! Staying in Tawa with my aunty the only way I can get to and from school is by making use of the train and bus systems. Being based at the Kelburn Campus which is situated on one of the high points in Wellington, walking there feels like a hike up a mountain. As I made my way through the doors of the Alan McDiarmid building for the Pasifika orientation on Monday my body was drenched in sweat! The Pacific community here is amazing and everyone is so welcoming and nice. I walked up to Kelburn again the following day for the international and exchange student orientation. The vibe during this orientation was much different than the Pasifika one, as I was a definite minority actually I was alone as the only exchange from the South Pacific. Orientation week consisted of tours on campus and around the city as well as making acquaintances with peers from all over the globe.

I have only been in Wellington for a little short of two weeks but every time I walk through the city it never ceases to captivate me. I am completely mesmerised by the buildings, the setting, the wind and even the hills. I feel like I fall in love with Wellington every time I roam its streets. And the university is incredible! The facilities, the different mechanisms of support that they offer students and the lecturers I have are all incredible. I cannot help but sense that although the future holds many obstacles for me, my experience at Victoria University of Wellington it is going to be an amazing semester.

Fast forward four months: I am done with the exchange!!

Wow, what an incredible experience that was! Just as I had expected, I learned so much from the exchange program. And as per usual, learning does not come without its challenges. Among the challenges I faced while attending Victoria University was the difference in classroom setting and students. At Victoria University my peers were more vocal in both tutorial and lectures when compared to my peers here in USP. This was a challenge for me because I'm not one to really talk during tutorials or lectures unless it is dead silent and the lecturer/teacher is waiting on an answer OR the teacher picks on me to answer. At Victoria, students are expected to talk and participate in class without having to be told. It had seemed that my peers at Victoria had already mastered the art of speaking up, I on the other hand being new to this environment found myself feeling a bit shy. However, with a bit of getting to know my peers and getting over the fear of being wrong or saying something invalid – not forgetting preparing for class – I spoke up more and made sure I was active in class.

Another challenge I faced while living in Wellington was living a 15 minute train ride from the city and I also lived a 20 minute walk from the train station. This was quite an adjustment from living on campus to having to make a 30-50minute commute to school (depending on whether I walked to school from the train station in the city or caught the bus). This was quite a struggle for me because I had been so used to catching cabs everywhere here in Suva, getting used to walking, training and bussing everywhere was definitely a challenge. This challenge did not go without a lesson well learnt. The lessons I learnt here was a) go to sleep early, as the famous saying goes “early to bed early to rise” – this saying was completely true and applicable to my situation in Wellington. I found that if I stayed up late I would either i) wake up late and then miss the train to school or ii) I would wake up early, but I would be completely drained of energy throughout the day. Lesson B I learned was how to prioritize and use my time wisely. Because I was on a crunch for time, I learned to manage my time properly so that I could get my studies in early so that I could get rest early and rejuvenate for the next day.

One of the more interesting things that I found interesting but was a tad irritated about was people's perceptions of us islanders. During introductions, something of which I went through quite a lot during my first few weeks, people would be thrown off by my accent and

“better than average” English proficiency. When they would ask me where I was from and told them the islands, some people, would say wow I wouldn’t think you were from the islands because of how well you speak English. I found this interesting and a bit saddening at the same time because people assume that just because you are from the islands your English speaking level should be what low? But, every time I would get this reaction from someone I felt a sense of pride because I surprised them by basically saying “yes hello I am from the islands but we are not as primitive as you have been misled to believe”.

On a different note, the number facilities and resources that were available to me at Victoria were vast and incredible! During my time here in USP I’ve never really done an all nighter in a computer lab, probably because I usually just stay in room, but at Victoria I’ve actually lost count of the times I did an all nighter in the computer labs. The 24hour student ID card access labs were very stimulating in the sense that the environment assisted a lot in helping students get into the groove of doing their studies and assessments. One of the really cool things which happened while at Vic was the stress free study week program that the Vic Student Life planned out. Every day of this week they had free breakfast and free lunch for everyone at the different campuses (everyone was welcome), also they had puppies from the shelter at the different campuses at certain times and kids were welcome to play with pups, and it didn’t end there the classes at the gym were free for the week and to use the gym went from being \$5 to \$1. This program was created to help relieve the students of the stress they were facing in preparation for exams. I found that this was really cool and helpful because it did somewhat take the worries off of the students shoulders, I know the playing with pups took my worries away (I love puppies and dogs). The library also had such an incredible atmosphere. I did not visit all the floors of the library (there are 6 to my knowledge) but the atmosphere just like the labs was very stimulating. The library rules were also pretty simple and easy to abide by. The view from the library was incredible, every time I’m in the library the view never ceases to take my breath away. The library space was very student friendly and I had the pleasure of doing group work and study groups there which was a breeze because of the LCD screens that were available to use.

Last but not least, and probably my favourite part about the exchange, the social life was great and so good to me! I made so many new friends on the exchange and was able to learn so much about a variety of cultures. I made friends from all over the States and Europe. I was also able to taste a variety of different foods and experience the night life

which was pretty incredible too. I made friends that I know will go on to do great in life and I will be able to use them as contacts when I enter my chosen professional field.

All in all, the student exchange definitely taught me so much and if I could I would do it all over again. I feel like I gained a more global perspective on learning because I was able to experience uni life outside of the Pacific. I know that this global perspective will help me in my remaining classes here in USP as I will be able to analyse situations from different angles.

Thank You USP for the chance to experience and learn so many great and marvellous things.

PICTURES



Super rugby final between the Hurricanes and the Highlanders



Doing the Wellington NZ Color Run (Before Photo)



Color Run (After photo)



Night out with friends



View of Wellington from my flat