

University of Sydney, Fall Semester 2019

1. STUDY PROGRAM

The University, being the oldest and one of the most prestigious in Australia, provides a whole range of courses that you can choose. Whilst big courses like Criminal law or Torts have lectures, the more advanced year 5 courses are set up in seminars that are mostly lectures with fewer people, although with occasional participation from the class. What you definitely have to avoid are Australian Law courses. One of the courses I took was Migration, Refugees and Forced Migration, thinking that it was about humanitarian and international refugee law. But in fact it covered purely Australian Migration and Refugee Law and Administrative Law. Even though Mary Crock, the lecturer, is a sweetheart and has a lot of experience in Migration law the course was difficult to follow with a lot of cases and technical legislation to read. The Australian Common Law system is very different from what we are used in Groningen and it takes some time to be able to understand judicial decisions of over 100 pages with dissenting opinions. Although it's interesting to see how Australia sets up its immigration rules, I highly discommend this course, unless you want to know the criteria of a "distinguished talent" visa or have the intention to migrate to Australia permanently in the future. On the other hand, Islamic Law was a very unique course that you can hardly find in any western university. It involves a lot of history and Arabic terminology, so that sometimes it seems you're studying Arabic rather than law. The course was very interesting but often hard to follow especially because of the large amounts of prescribed reading and the sheer amount of Arabic words. Luckily, the main piece of assessment was a 3000-4000 word essay with a topic of your choice.

As for my other courses, Citizenship and Nationality was the most intense one, as it was taught on Fridays for six hours straight for 7 weeks. This was however manageable with several breaks. I liked the course because it was very interactive and less content oriented, it felt more like a discussion. Here you also only had an essay for which you had plenty of time. Lastly, China and International Law was the easiest unit. It has a good lecturer, who is easy to follow and it gives an interesting Chinese perspective on Public International Law.

Regarding exams I was lucky to only have 2 exams with a couple of days in between. It is nevertheless very stressful, as you have to revise 10 weeks of materials in a short amount of time. Most courses have a mixed assessment with an essay and an exam so that you will be busy before the end of the semester. Both of my exams were open book, which means you could bring all your notes, slides, readings etc. In Migration Law this was not helpful since you ended up with mountains of paper that were in the end useless. Overall, they were doable, despite having only 2 hours with 30 minutes extra of reading time.

2. Language

I love the Aussie accent. Since it was not my first time in Australia I was already used to. They use different words and pronunciations. There were no problems at everyone is very helpful and friendly.

3. FINANCES AND OTHER CONDITIONS

For accommodation I choose the Queen Mary Building (QMB) one of the big student houses. The rent was about 930 per month, which is quite expensive. Despite the good amount of facilities, and the fact that you can easily meet people I don't think it was worth the money. I had friends that were paying half the price for rooms outside the university premises. Also the internet in Australia is expensive and very slow, which means that you will have to top up for more data. Food is however way cheaper than in the Netherlands. There are plenty of options on the campus that cost you only 8-10\$. Many restaurants also have special Lunch deals around that same price. Lastly, Sydney has the best public transport in Oceania. There're buses, trains and ferries and as an exchange student you can get concessions on your opal card, which reduces the price. However, since all the University buildings and facilities are concentrated on the main campus you hardly leave that area during weekdays. Whilst your student visa allows you to work for about 40 hours per fortnight (2 weeks) it's hardly manageable for one semester given the amount of uni work you can have.

4. PREPARATION AND CONTACTS WITH THE FACULTY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER YOUR STAY

Generally, the exchange office always replied quickly and was helpful in answering questions and returning forms before my departure, which is remarkable given the amount of exchange students that are assigned to each contact person. However, the person assigned to me left the staff in September and I'm not sure who has taken over her position. I also missed any further information provided during our stay, especially relating to our exams and departure. The introduction day was a bit chaotic given that there were hundreds of students sitting in one room.

5. CULTURE, FREE TIME

You'll never get bored in Sydney, there are just so many things to do. From the well known Sydney Opera and Harbour Bridge to the famous beaches in Bondi and Manly. The University is located next to Newtown, where you can find lots of bars and restaurants. You can also take a trip to the Blue Mountains, which is 2 hours away by train. As to the University, there are many clubs and societies that you can join depending on your interest. They are ideal to make new friends and organise different events.

6. TRAVELING

Australia is an immense and beautiful country like no other. Distances are vast, which means that flying is the best option. I had already been to the east coast three years ago so I went to Melbourne, travelled the entire Stuart Highway from Darwin to Adelaide (Over 3000 Kms!!) passing by Uluru and visited my old host-family in Cairns. Apart mid-semester break you have reading weeks that are meant officially to be used for studying, but obviously nobody does so. They also differ depending on the course. Furthermore, I visited some nice destinations in the vicinity that I would otherwise never be able to see if I wasn't in Australia, such as Bali, Vanuatu and New Zealand. There is also a free week before the exams in mid-November. You should however not venture too far out during that time, as it's very close to your exams.