Study Abroad Report

Summer 2018

University of California, Berkeley

USA

Health Sciences & Business

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Preparation for a Semester Studying Abroad

During the Summer 2018 semester I had the opportunity to take part in a study abroad program at University of California, Berkeley. The experience in itself was incredibly wild, wonderful, and more fun than anything I could have ever imagined. Looking back on the experience now, I am surprised at the amount of preparation that I did for my term studying abroad. My journey to UC Berkeley began with the desire to temporarily escape the concrete walls of SFU (which I have grown to love) and to experience undergraduate university life elsewhere for a short time. Although I believe that university is what you make of it – it is up to you as the student to choose how involved and engaged you want to be on your campus – I was surprised when my university experience was not what is seen in movies that usually portray university life. The curiosity that one's university experiences could be different elsewhere, along with my goal to be an engaged student and take on as many opportunities I could before my undergrad was over (such as running for office, taking part in co-operative education program, and working & volunteering on campus), taking part in the study abroad program was a must on my list.
I looked at my term abroad as an investment to my future self – so that post-study abroad Yasmin would be hopefully more understanding of the world around her than pre-study abroad Yasmin was. I spent many hours planning my courses, my housing arrangement, breaking down costs, deciding what to pack, planning places to visit, and defining the logistics of the trip. Looking back at the pages of my handwritten notes as I planned this endeavour gives me a ping of nostalgia. The planning part was itself a thrilling experience for me – it would be my first time away from home alone for an extended period of time, and the first international trip I had ever planned for myself.

I found discussing my plans with the Study Abroad advisors very helpful, in addition to giving myself lots of time to prepare everything else such a picking courses. I spent a lot of time reading about all the courses offered during the summer and picking courses that excited me to be a part of, would transfer back, complimented one another, and would aid in my academic growth. Doing some research on the weather I was able to pack appropriately and to not overpack to give myself enough space to bring Berkeley memorabilia back.
During Exchange

I arrived 1 week prior to the start of my term abroad to explore San Francisco and to allow myself time to get well situated into my new environment and campus. The UC Berkeley campus is expansive, stunning, and rich with history. My classes were on complete opposite sides of campus (one at the Hass School of Business and the other at the Berkeley School of Public Health) but I always enjoyed the sun lit walk under the cool bay area breeze across campus.

During my first day as a student I signed up for a campus tour – both to get to explore the main areas of campus and to see how Berkeley did tours different from SFU as I used to be a Tour Guide here! The group on tour was huge and composed mostly of high school seniors looking for their best university fit. I was just as ecstatic and wide-eyed as the 18 years olds on the tour.
During my time there I lived in a bright yellow co-ed former fraternity house on Frat Row a 3-minute walk from campus called "Wolf Haus" with 29 other students. This was a part of the Berkeley Student Cooperative – a non-profit organization with the goal of providing affordable housing for students. The living situation was exciting and vibrant, with many different people living under one roof. In the house everyone cooked their own daily meals, but we usually had dinner together and hosted weekly events. I was elected as the management position of Health Worker and lead meetings with the other elected managers in the house to plan and discuss how to keep the house running smoothly.

My classes were incredible with great instructors and professors – all of which were funny, engaging, and obviously passionate about the work that they did. Although the format of the classes was not too much different to that of upper division courses at SFU, I did feel like the overall grading scheme was much easier than what we are used to here. I took courses at the Haas School of Business and worked with the Berkeley School of Public Health on implementing a solution to the rising issue of student and resident homelessness faced in the area. The city itself while beautiful, historical, and extremely left winged, deals with a large homeless population very close to the university, and one that is growing due to the high costs of living. My project focused on finding ways of increasing affordable housing for students by expanding the Berkeley Student Cooperative program. We also looked at the issue of building on a small, yet controversial plot of land known as "People's Park": once a highlight in the free speech movement, which has now become a gathering place for homeless people in Berkeley. A problem as multi-dimensional as any!
The overall climate in the city of Berkeley was cooler than Vancouver was over the summer, although the air was drier. We did have a couple of very hot days but no rain during my time there.

As I lived very close to the university there was always many university events going on that I took part in whenever I could! One of my favorite experiences was attending Yoga to the People – a donation-based yoga studio a 15-minute walk from the house I lived in right in Downtown Berkeley. Nearby the campus there were many beautiful hikes, an outdoor pool, the Berkeley Botanical Gardens, and the Berkeley Rose Gardens which I frequented often with friends.
Reflection After Studying Abroad

Overall my experience studying abroad was a time in my life which I will never forget, and I am eternally grateful that it was something that I was able to take part in during my time as an undergraduate student! I would recommend taking part in a study abroad, exchange, or field school program to any student on the fence about it; it could quite possibly change your life.
Your prize after enduring a short but steep hike through a hidden path behind the university is a view that is both stunning and saddening. A clear blue sky allows you to overlook the city of Berkeley and Oakland. On a clear day you can see as far as San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. But, below your feet the ground is littered with beer cans and cigarettes. A stark juxtaposition.

-Image taken on top of the Big “C” hike, a 15-minute walk from campus
Soft browns make up most of the seemingly endless land ahead. So different from the lush and vibrant greens present on hikes in British Columbia. I wonder if there are bears here too…

- Image of Tilden Regional Park, a hike a short drive away from the UC Berkeley campus

One elevator takes you right to the top where you can see the Bay Bridge, San Francisco, Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge, Oakland, and the city of Berkeley. Built in 1914 and the largest of its kind in California. After its establishment, Stanford University asked UC Berkeley for the blueprints of the tower so that they could build their own. Berkeley gave Stanford the blueprints, only modified to be 30 feet shorter. Stanford built their tower 20 feet taller than the blueprints and found out only after the completion of their tower what Berkeley had done.

- Image of the Berkeley Bell Tower (Sather Tower).