



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Biotechnology
Study period exchange	20/08/2019 until 20/12/2019
Country (exchange)	United States of America
City (exchange)	Berkeley, CA
University (exchange)	University of California, Berkeley
Faculty (exchange)	Integrative Biology

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I have always been curious about other countries and cultures. Traveling and living in foreign countries with my family showed me new worlds. Thus I decided at age 15 I would go abroad if the opportunity presented itself.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

The States are, to me, a very interesting country with an intriguing culture (and politics). California is a great state if you like traveling as there is a little bit of everything within a few hours of driving: the grand Pacific Ocean, beaches, mountains . . . Next to that, UC Berkeley is a very reputable university when it comes to academics, especially in biology (#6 worldwide). I wanted to be challenged and see if it lived up to its name.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination? (E.g. bus, train, etc.)

I took a direct flight from Schiphol to San Francisco (11 hours) but it might be cheaper from other airports or with an overlay. From San Francisco, you can take the BART for about \$11 to Berkeley.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	INTEGBI 160 Evolution	8	Covers everything evolutionary from (population) genetics to morphology and paleontology.	4	Probably one of the most integrative biology courses Cal has to offer. Very interesting course if you have no/little knowledge of evolution. Easy course.
2	INTEGBI 156 Principles of Conservation Biology	8	The first half of the course goes into what causes extinction and the need for conservation, etc. The second half discusses conservation approaches and what works/does not work.	4	Interesting course, very little background knowledge needed. The highlight was a guest lecture by Jon Jarvis, former director of the National Park Service. Easy course.
3	INTEGBI 137 Human Endocrinology	8	General endocrinology, from the molecular processes to the effects in pregnancy, puberty and menopause.	5	Best professor I have ever had. Though this is the most difficult course I am taking here, the lectures are always very fun.
4	HISTORY C184D Human Contexts and Ethics of Data	8	Goes into the ethics of big data and the impact of science, technology and data on society and policymaking.	3.5	Interesting course even though I have no particular interest in algorithms/computers. The lectures are dull but the discussions are very interesting.

How is the study formalized? (E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material)

Usually 3 hours of lecture and 1/1.5 hours of discussion per week for each course. The workload/academic level is easier than in Wageningen and background knowledge on the level of 6 vwo is sufficient to follow the course material. Getting into courses depends on the popularity of the course and exchange students can only enroll after the other students (so courses might be full). Exams are straightforward, a lot of memorization. The only course on par with the level in Wageningen I took is INTEGBI 137. Lesson material can be purchased but is usually not necessary to pass the course. This is all course-dependent of course. There are a lot of readings and essays.

What is the culture of the university? (E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?)

Professors and GSIs (graduate student instructors) are very approachable and have office hours every week where you can go to if you have questions. They are quick to reply to emails. Engagement with local students is not difficult as everyone speaks English.

The biggest difference with Wageningen is the work culture. A lot of (local) students feel the pressure to be the best, hold the perfect 4.0 GPA and be excellent. Consequently, they work very hard but that is the only thing they do (when I asked what people do for fun in their free time, a shocking amount answered they do not have any free time because they are always studying). The *zesjescultuur* is almost non-existent and mostly frowned upon.

What does the university offer the student additionally? (E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?)

A sports center much like the Bongerd is free. Additionally, there are a lot of resources such as free study help, a career center, etc. Catering and laundry facilities depend on your housing situation.

5.Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing? (E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?)

Housing possibilities are dorms, the Coops, International House or an apartment. If you start looking early, finding housing should not be a problem. Private rooms are available but very expensive so most rooms are doubles (the norm here). Food provided by the dorms is decent but not something I would like to eat every day.

What is the culture of the country like? (E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?)

The people in California are nicer and more open to strangers than in the Netherlands. They are generally interested in exchange students. Something I miss about home is the Dutch directness and efficiency. Going to someone's place to cook is uncommon as most people prefer to eat out.

Could you give a general price indication of the place of residence compared to living in Wageningen?

The San Francisco Bay is currently one of the most expensive places on Earth to live. Groceries are about 2-3 times as expensive in Wageningen, especially dairy and produce. Rent has skyrocketed the past years. A double room is approx. \$850/month, private \$1500/month. Dorms start around \$7000-8000/semester for a triple with 12 meals per week/semester. The Coops are cheaper at \$4000/semester but very difficult to get into. International House has better food than the dorms but is more expensive at \$8000-9000/semester.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure? (E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

Berkeley is small so almost everything is within a 20 min walk. There are free buses in Berkeley and Oakland, and a free line to San Francisco. Most people use Uber/Lyft instead of taking a taxi. There is also the BART, a train/metro to San Francisco/Oakland and the airports. If you want to go far away, rent a car or find someone with a car.

6. Free time

What are must-sees in the area? (E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?)

California is a great state for traveling. There are a lot of things to see in the Bay such as San Francisco and Point Reyes. Outside of the Bay, destinations for weekend trips could be Santa Cruz, Big Sur or various National Parks such as Yosemite and Sequoia and Kings Canyon.

Renting a car is usually the easiest option. Not a lot of people have cars since parking is very expensive in Berkeley and you do not need a car in the town itself.

What does not appear in the travel guide, but is worth a visit?

Pinnacles NP is very nice and good for a day trip. It is also one of the few places to see the endangered California Condor. Lassen NP is further away but quieter and very beautiful. A lot of regional and state parks are not known in the Netherlands but definitely worth a visit. You really cannot go wrong.

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time (E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?)

Weekends are great for traveling, especially if you schedule your classes smartly (e.g. Fridays/Mondays off). If you do not have a lot of time, a 30 min bus ride will get you into San Francisco or to regional parks for free.

Berkeley is generally not very lively during the weekends but if you know where to look, there is always something going on. Friday and Saturday nights are popular party nights. Going out is better if you are 21 since that is the age to get into bars. Frat parties are all right but not as fun as the movies make them out to be.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

Adjusting to the culture of excellence. It is easy to get swept into but remember you are also there to have fun.

What was your best memory abroad?

Sunsets and stars in the Sierras; beaches in Big Sur; going to Stanford and winning the Big Game, the American football rivalry match between Cal and Stanford.

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	<u>yes</u>	
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