WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Environmental sciences
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	16/08/21 until 17/12/21
Country (exchange)	United States
City (exchange)	Berkeley
University (exchange)	University of California, Berkeley
Faculty (exchange)	College of Natural Resources

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?
I wanted to see a new part of the world. I was tired of being confined in the Netherlands during Covid-19. I also wanted to use this opportunity to broaden my network, find possibilities for future collaborations.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?
I chose to go to UC Berkeley because it has a good reputation. It's university with many disciplines and I wanted to get out of the closed science environment. I wanted to meet people with more diverse passions and majors. San Francisco also really interested me because it's a very multicultural city in the US. I mainly chose the US because I wanted to go to an Anglophone country, and I wanted to make use of the fact that WUR paid for my tuition for my exchange in an American university.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination? (E.g. bus, train, etc.)
To reach Berkeley from SFO airport, I would recommend taking a taxi, as this is probably the least tiring option. Otherwise, there is the BART (metro) that takes you from the airport into downtown Berkeley, although it can feel a little unsafe at certain times of the night.

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	Principles of Conservation Biology	8	A course on conservation practices and management of protected area. It mixes certain basics of biology with the reason and the need for conservation. Goes into detail on how to properly manage an area. Comes with many illustrations of the concepts introduced.	4	I found it to be a very interesting course. There were some similarities with the ecology course given at WUR. However, it went further by focusing more on the practicality of conservation management. The professor was really passionate (especially about dolphin conservation).
2	Grassland and Woodland Ecology	8	This course focused on the different types of grassland ecosystems in the US, from deserts to prairies. There's a focus on the changes of these ecosystems due to climate change and human activity.	4	This course really gave a thorough overview of the many ecosystems of grasslands that are often overlooked in general ecology courses (overshadowed by classes on the rainforest). I feel that I learned more concrete knowledge on these types of environment and the complexity of managing them.
3	Remote Sensing of the Environment	8	This course provides an introduction in GIS, with more focus on the many types of satellite remote sensing and their real life applications. We also learn to code in Matlab and Google Earth Engine.	5	This course was my favorite. It taught me to use many different softwares for analyzing data. I also learned the different steps to retrieving, processing, and interpreting remotely sensed data. I learned to identify which satellite and parameters were most appropriate for different scenarios. The professor was very nice and gave us access to NASA's database.
4	Applied Time Series Analysis for Ecology and Environmental Sciences	6	This course goes over the application of interpreting time series using R. We learn to code in R. We learn to run models like ARIMA	4	This course was very challenging for me as I was missing some of the background in time series analysis. Most students in this class were graduate students. However, the

		and MARSS to test modelling of populations and different ecological processes.		professor made sure to provide support for those in need. I learned a lot in this course about how to analyse time series, which I think will be useful in my future studies and research.
5				
6				

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

The courses are divided with quite a lot of work to do at home as well as on-campus classes 2-3 times a week. There are lectures and labs or discussions. Throughout the semester, each class has some readings and homework assignments to be done. Additionally, there are midterms and a final exam or project at the end of the semester. The grading varies per class. I would say that the workload is more important than the one in Wageningen. However, I found that the level was generally not as challenging in term of academic level as WUR. There is however more of a pressure to get high marks, mainly stemming from other students.

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 are very approachable and offer office hours about twice a week for any questions or help on assignments. They are also always looking to work with students on research projects and therefore entertain a good relationship with their students. They are all very passionate about the content of their course. There is more of a competitive nature at Berkeley, which comes from the students. Also, the grading system is very different (as it is a letter grade), therefore, there is more pressure to keep grades at an A.

What does the university offer the student additionally? (E.g. Catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?)
The university offers many activities and events outside of classes. There are football games and other sports events that bring people together. There are cafes on campus and there is a sports center for all students. Additionally, the university has its own health center. There are many libraries that are open 24/7 during the study week and exam week. On top of that, the university offers a wide selection of possible clubs. Also, the bus is free when using the university bus card.

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 in dorms is possible, however, it can be very expensive as it also requires catering. The average rent is of about $1 000 – $2 000 per month, but it can be much more for certain housing arrangements. There are multiple facebook pages where students sublet their rooms for a

reasonable price. There is also an international house for students, however, there is a selection to get in.

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

The culture in San Francisco is very diverse. There is a lot of very good Asian cuisine near campus. While there is an existing public transport system, most people commute by car. I recommend to find people and make friends that have a car, as this makes it easier to visit California. A key part of the student culture is to go to football or basketball games. Overall, people are very open to help others out.

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

My current rent at Berkeley is of about $1 450 per month, compared to 450€ in Wageningen.

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

The public transport is generally pretty good. Very practical to go into San Francisco. You buy a card and top up the money whenever needed. A trip is usually about $2-4. A common alternative transport option is using Lyft or Uber. When in Berkeley, the university is a walkable distance, however, it can be safer to call for an Uber at night.

6. Free time

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

I definitely recommend visiting San Francisco as there are so many different things to do there (Pier 39, Alcatraz, Musée Mécanique, Golden Gate Bridge, …). I also highly recommend going to Point Reyes National Park. It is beautiful for hikes and bonfires (with a permit). You can see elk and coyote there. It is 1.5h away driving. Yosemite is also a great destination. The Pacific coast is also just a great place to see.

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

Musée Mécanique I highly recommend. It is an old arcade by the pier. There are many things to do in San Francisco (you just need to do a little digging). If you have the time and the courage, I recommend planning a trip to Redwoods National Park to go see the tallest tree in the world (requires some off-path adventuring to find the hidden tree of 115m).

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

I recommend knowing someone with a car willing to drive to go see other cities outside of San Francisco. Like Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara. There is a cluster of Asian restaurants near campus that is very popular. Also, Artichoque makes delicious pizza.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

My biggest challenge throughout this exchange was to balance my workload with discovering the city and state, creating an experience for myself. It required some planning and a lot of spontaneity, with some sacrificed sleep.

What was your best memory abroad?

Seeing the tallest tree in the world was definitely quite a strong memory for me. Otherwise, the Halloween party and other events I organized with my new friends were really memorable. We made numerous trips down to Santa Barbara and even LA. Bonfires are definitely a must (but do it safely with a proper permit).

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes ☒	no ☐
Name/e-mail	jacotte.monroe@wur.nl	