



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	Biology
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	15/08/2022 until 17/12/2022
Country (exchange)	United States of America
City (exchange)	Ithaca
University (exchange)	Cornell University
Faculty (exchange)	CALS

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I always wanted to study abroad, but due to Covid it didn't seem feasible to do my whole bachelors degree abroad. Now that I realised I might want to go into the field of astrobiology and it looked like studying abroad in Fall 2022 might be possible I thought I'd take the chance.

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

Cornell University offers an Astrobiology minor that I wanted to take (courses from). Also, I liked the idea of studying at an American College that's a part of the Ivy League.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

I went with my parents who rented a car, but I wouldn't recommend this for students travelling alone. The best option is to fly to an airport in/near New York City and take a bus from there.

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	From New Worlds to Black Holes	6	An introduction course about astronomy and cosmology.	2	Interesting, but a lot of the topics are already covered in secondary school Physics.
2	A Spacecraft Tour of the Solar System	6	Course about the policy and science decisions behind space travel and missions.	5	Very interesting course. Available to students of all backgrounds, great professor, my favourite course of the exchange.
3	Introduction to Biogeochemistry	8	Course that teaches and integrates content from biology, geology and chemistry fields.	3	Interesting course, at times a little difficult but I learned a lot from this course.
4	The Earth System	8	Course about minerals, geology, plate tectonics and other subjects relevant to the Earth as a system	4	I really learned a lot from this course, but it had a lot of overlap with Introduction to Biogeochemistry.
5	The Evolution of Dinosaurs	2	Special topics course that focusses on the different types of Dinosaurs that used to live at different points in history.	3	Interesting course but did not focus on evolution as much as I would have wanted.
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How is the study formalized? (E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material)

The academic level depends on the type of courses you take. Obviously a 1000 level course is going to be easy if you're in your 3rd year of your bachelor, but I felt like the 3000 and 4000 level courses were also not that hard to pass. The examination also depends on the course. It is more variable than in Wageningen University, though. For example, The Earth System had weekly quizzes, homework assignments and two bigger quizzes that counted towards the final grade. However, you could retake the quizzes as often as you wanted to, so only the homework really felt like a fair examination. A Spacecraft tour had weekly assigned papers and a group project, contrastingly.

The workload was comparable to the workload in Wageningen University. Some courses had a higher workload than others, however.

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?)

The culture in the university is quite different from Wageningen. Because you follow the same courses for a whole semester you have more time to get to know the professors and teaching assistants (TA's). The TA's also play a bigger role than Student Assistants do in the WUR. Talking to TA's and/or professors (after class/during office hours) is encouraged and considered the preferred way to communicate. This was something I had to get used to, because back at the WUR I would sooner send an email if I had a question I wanted answered.

Engagement with the local students was harder than I thought it would be. During classes I've made casual friends in only two of my courses. Especially at the beginning classmates seemed to be closed off or plain rude. Becoming friends with American students went easier at home (my roommates) or at clubs, in my experience. Joining a club (sport) is a good way to meet people.

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

You can go on the dining plan, but I would not advise it. You pay quite a lot of money for the dining halls and after the first week the excitement of the dining halls is gone. Because it is hard to get to the grocery stores without a car (or a roommate without a car), I would advise to go on a meal plan at one of the co-ops, if you live near one. It is cheap compared to the dining plan and even to doing your own groceries. You will have to make dinner (with some of the other members of the co-op) once a week, and it includes breakfast, lunch (you can take to campus) and dinner.

There are multiple sports facilities on campus, including a swimming pool. Joining the club sports is included in the activities fee you pay the university, but for fitness and classes you need to get an additional membership. There are some weekly free classes offered however.

Additionally, there are a many other facilities offered by the university. These include career services, many libraries, places to buy food/coffee (I really like Temple of Zeus) and of course the Cornell store, to buy Cornell merch.

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?)

You can get a room on campus, but availability is limited, especially during the Fall semester. I also would not advise it, because you already spend most of your time on campus and you might get a shared dorm. You can look for rooms to sublet off-campus, college town is the most fun/central (and already uphill), west campus is closer to the co-ops and the frats. North campus is the worst place to live. You can also privately sign a lease. A lot of exchange students choose to live in the Ravenwood apartments (Travis

High). This is a nice place to live, but a little further from downtown and college town. Another option is to stay in a co-op. The availability of a room here also depends on the semester. Rent will range from 800 to 1100 dollars.

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

The culture is pretty similar, but Americans are a lot nicer to everyone. This can come across as being fake, but it might also get you invited to your American friends' families' house to stay over break.

Making plans is a lot harder; if someone says "let's meet up (to get coffee/watch a movie/stay in contact)", it's not happening unless you follow up on the plan yourself. Realise that this sometimes also is said as a way of ending a conversation, they do not always really want to stay in contact.

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

Groceries are about 20% more expensive, with the current conversion rate. The euro was especially weak the past half year, so if the conversion rate goes back to 1 euro is 1,20 dollars, groceries are about the same price. The same is true for going out (to eat), depending on what restaurant/café/clubs you go to. Clothes you'd buy at a thrift store (salvation army is quite cheap but you can find nice things, Plato's closet is a little more expensive but has some really good stuff), the Urban outfitters (same prices as in the Netherlands) or the Cornell store (expensive but has a few sale events during the semester). The Cornell Health Plan is mandatory and costs about 1700 dollars.

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

There are busses in Ithaca, but they are not always as reliable. They're often 10 to 30 minutes delayed, so checking on google maps what bus you can take is smart to do every time you take the bus. For all students in their first year in Ithaca the bus pass is free (you do need to put it on your Cornell ID card). Ubers are not that expensive, if you share the cost, but most things (except for the grocery stores) are walkable.

Busses to the Busses to New York City, Boston and Washington range from 30 to 80 dollars one way, depending on if you book the bus on time.

6. Free time

What are must-sees in the area? (E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?) // What does not appear in the travel guide, but is worth a visit?

Be sure to visit the waterfalls and gorges in Ithaca, the farmers market, A.D. White reading room in Uris Library, the Art museum on campus. Go to at least one Ice Hockey game and if you're at Cornell during the Fall semester, go to the Homecoming American

Football game (and block parties beforehand) and the Halloweekend parties at frats. Eat at one of the Dining halls at least once. Take the bus or an Uber to visit one of the wineries for a wine tasting.

Look up the "161 things every Cornellian should do" list.

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

Moosewoods is a great but expensive restaurant downtown.

On Wednesday go to Fishbowl at Level B and when the music gets bad you can cross the street to Hideaway for karaoke. Loco's (karaoke on Tuesdays) entertains attracts more seniors (in contrast to Level B, where you'll find a lot of freshmen). Moonies in the commons downtown is fun on Saturday, you'll meet students from Ithaca College there. Also be sure to go to at least one frat party.

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

The month before I left for the US the Euro suddenly became a lot weaker compared to the dollar. This meant the cost of living went up a lot. Keep in mind valuta can fluctuate a lot.

What was your best memory abroad?

Celebrating NYE in NYC with friends (both exchange students and Americans) I met during the semester was a perfect way to end the year.

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
Name/e-mail	emke.mooney@wur.nl	