



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Field of study in Wageningen	BSc International Land and Water Management
Study period exchange (dd/mm/yyyy)	17/01/2023 until 12/05/2023
Country (exchange)	USA
City (exchange)	Berkeley, CA
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 have an experience studying at a different university to broaden my college and learning experience.

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

I wanted to go to the United States because although I am a citizen of the US, I never lived there before and wanted to experience US college life. UC Berkeley is a top public university in the United States and is known for its political and social activism. Because it is a large school, it also allowed me to interact with students from different academic backgrounds which I valued as a contrast to Wageningen where many of us specialize in topics around food/agriculture.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

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

The BART (train system in the San Francisco Bay Area) connects you directly from the San Francisco International Airport to Downtown Berkeley. Once you're settled into Berkeley, as a student you receive a UC-affiliated transit card, where you can take the AC transit busses for free. After this, I rarely travelled by BART and mostly took the bus to go places.

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	Urban Ecology and Evolution	8	Covered a wide range of topics from ecology statistics to environmental and multispecies justice.	3.5	A rare course completely dedicated to urban ecology (a new discipline only 8 years old!). Several concepts I had known from basic ecology classes, but the professor had captivating lectures on environmental justice and was very well-spoken.
2	International Rural Development Policy	8	Critical analysis of impacts of international aid on “development” projects in the Global South. Focused on heavy structural critique of the World Bank.	5	This course was absolutely phenomenal! The professor was extremely charismatic and although the lectures were in the evening from 5-8pm, the time flew by like it was nothing. This course made me change the way I look at global politics. 10/10.
3	Earth Systems Remote Sensing	6	Focuses on how to use remote sensing to address earth system questions for both natural and human-impacted environments. Emphasis on application questions over technical skills.	5	A very fast paced class with only one hour-long lecture a week and a 2 hour lab afterwards. We got to do labs in the computer lab which helped since many of our personal computers would be too slow running remote sensing software
4	Human Palaeocology: How Humans Shaped the Earth	8	A multidisciplinary course to study broad trends of human ecodynamics over the past 50,000 years. Highlights cumulative and irreversible impacts of humans on natural and built landscapes.	3	This course highlighted archaeology perspectives on natural resource conservation and food production, but I thought the classes were very theoretical and lacked practical application opportunities.
5	Step Out of Overdrive: Meditation for Stress Management	0	A DeCal course (led by students) on different breathing and meditation techniques for stress management	4	This was a fun extra course I took that was only an hour a week and taught me so much! DeCal courses are popular, and registration usually opens the second week of classes. They’re also a great place to meet people!

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

Students take an average of 13-17 units per semester with a maximum of 20 units. 1 unit at Berkeley is estimated to be around 2 ECTS and most courses are 3 or 4 units. There are points of examination throughout the semester so there is not a huge pressure on the final exam (which might be worth 20% of the final grade). There were more assignments throughout the semester compared to WUR, but very doable in terms of difficulty. I had many open-note exams and general course content felt less difficult than WUR.

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?)

Lecturers were super engaging. There is also a lot of diversity in both the student and faculty body which is super inspiring to learn from. Some of my professors were very involved with the class and approachable (scheduled office hours in cafes and spoke to students casually outside of class) while some professors left the classroom as soon as the class ended. Still, the professors that were engaged really rooted for their students and it made everyone inspired for their future. At WUR, I did not experience the same degree of inspiring students for their future and telling stories about how they (professors) got to where they were and offering career advice to students. In the classes I was in almost all the students were grade-oriented and there was a lot less groupwork (or even if there was a group project, it would be divided and felt more like independent work patched together).

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

The gym is huge and feels like a celebrity gym with everything from free weights to machines to group classes. You can buy "meal swipes" at the beginning of the semester if you want to eat in the dining halls (you swipe in and then it's like a buffet) which would be around \$14 a meal. There are so many fun clubs to join (I joined the potluck club, Berkeley student food collective, Nikkei student union, etc.) so there are lots of avenues to find your smaller community. There are also lots of research opportunities for students although these could be a bit harder to organize as an exchange student.

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?)

There are dorm rooms at the International House which many exchange students stayed in. This is a pricier option, and there are also many exchange students in co-op housing and student apartments. Most people live in doubles or triples because these are cheaper (ranging from \$700-\$1100 per month) and singles are the most expensive (maybe around \$1600 per month). Water, electricity, utilities are paid separately and are around \$50/person/month in most households. I stayed in a

student apartment in a triple because this aligned the best with my budget and what I was looking for. You could live in Northside (quieter, more co-ops) or Southside (closer to bars, fraternities and sororities) with Southside being relatively more dangerous at night.

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

People are very chatty and make conversation with strangers. It wouldn't be weird to start a conversation in an elevator or say something to someone at a grocery store, etc. I enjoyed the food options a lot more because it reflected the greater diversity of people in Berkeley and the Bay Area. The culture at Berkeley is also very liberal, social activist, "woke" which is inspiring to be around.

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

Rent is VERY expensive. I felt like groceries were also more expensive and even a cup of coffee would be from \$4-7. I got lucky with my apartment with rent of \$766/month which is the lowest I've seen anywhere around Berkeley. To make living costs lower I recommend going to the Berkeley Student Food Pantry and you can get some staples (pasta, bread, bananas, eggs) once a week. This is competitive so you can look up times on their website so you can get to go. But because of this I spent a lot less on food than I did 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?)

Bus rides on AC Transit (East Bay) are free for Berkeley students. The BART is around \$4.50 to go to San Francisco and \$11.50 to the SFO Airport. The Muni is the metro system that runs within San Francisco. You can also cross the bay on lots of different ferries that run around the Bay Area (from around \$4.50-11.50). I use the bus a lot and the F bus (although slower) can take you to the tip of San Francisco). Around Berkeley almost everyone walks (some people have electric skateboards or scooters). I walked around 10,000 steps a day just going to and from campus and between classes. Some people bike but there are INTENSE hills in Berkeley.

6. Free time

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

I went out to San Francisco almost every weekend. Major tourist attractions are easy to reach by bus, Bart, and Muni. There are also beautiful national parks throughout California but to reach these it's easiest to rent a car and drive there (public transportation beyond the Bay Area is not good but you could take the Greyhound bus to some places). Take advantage of spring break which we get in early April.

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

It probably is in a travel guide but my favourite neighbourhoods in San Francisco are the Mission district (known for their burritos and lots of restaurants, shops) and Haight-Ashbury (right by the Golden Gate Park and lots of cool thrift/vintage stores).

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

Be aware that there are lots of unhoused people around Berkeley and even more in San Francisco. Avoid areas like Tenderloin and Civic Center especially at night. Most women at Berkeley carry pepper spray (\$10 on Amazon) or some form of self-defence tool — you probably won't have to use it, but it is good to have as a backup. There are so many good restaurants in Berkeley and SF — definitely try Imm Thai Street Food (Berkeley) and a sourdough soup bowl at the Fisherman's Wharf (San Francisco).

7.Challenges & best moment abroad

What was a challenge you have experienced?

One part I missed about Wageningen was being able to walk around at any hour of the night and I didn't worry about my safety.

What was your best memory abroad?

I became really close with my housemates and every memory with them was so fun. We loved doing potlucks together and taking walks around Berkeley to get Boba together. I especially loved going to Bakers Beach (great view of the Golden Gate Bridge) with my closest friend in the exchange but we took the wrong bus on the way back and ended up in another city which was a funny and memorable experience.

8. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
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