

Exchange Program Student Report

UCEAP at UC Berkeley

Academic Year 2013-2014

Ms. Athicha Nontikarn
BBA Program
Thammasat University



Chapter 1: Preparation prior to an Exchange Program

- ***Visa and important documents***

The most important things to do prior to an Exchange Program are to prepare and request for the Student Visa. Make sure that you get all the documents needed, for example, Student Status Confirmation Form given by the university, Medical Examination Certificate, Confirmation of Enrollment from the host university, Financial Statement passport, recently taken photos, etc. The information about the student visa application can be found on the embassy website of the country that you will go studying abroad. Arrive early on the interview date with the embassy officers! You don't want to book the interview again if you miss the first one.

- ***School Contact***

Usually the contact person of the host university would send a welcoming email to the exchange students and specify about the preparation process as well as the important dates the students should know, such as class registration dates, orientation day, and the first day of school, etc. If you have any questions or concerns about school or even your personal life during the exchange program, do not hesitate to shoot an email to the contact person to ask for their help/advice. It is their job to make sure your overall exchange experience is the most pleasant one. For me, I always send an email or go to my contact persons at Haas School of Business, Renee and Barbara, when I need some help or just would like to say hi.

- ***Courses Registration***

It is crucial to keep yourself updated about the registration dates and make sure that you understand all the registration process. Information about the courses offered can be found at the university website or if you would like to know how other former students thought about that particular course, you can check rating websites like *ratemyprofessor.com* and *ninjacourses.com* (for U.S. universities) to learn about their comments.

Try to do research and enroll on the courses you are interested in as much as you can, especially the courses which are not offered at your home university! This is a great opportunity for you to explore and get exposed to the new class materials, teaching techniques, and classroom environment.

- ***Housing***

There are many housing alternatives for students both on-campus and off-campus. The good thing about on-campus housing is that they are close to the school campus (5-10 minutes walking distance). The examples of this kind of housing are dormitory, university apartment, fraternity and sorority houses, and international house. They usually offer double bed rooms for this type of housing, meaning that the students have to share the

room with another roommate. For the off-campus housing, most of them are apartments or houses rent out by the landlords, which are usually quite far from the campus. There are many options for this kind of housing from a single studio to a suit with 4 bedrooms within. Thus, you should learn and understand about your own preferences and concern. If your study is your most concern, I would recommend you to rent your own apartment in order to have privacy. If you would like to get to know a lot of people and participate in a lot of activities and parties, shared spaces like dorms and international house are probably the good options.

From my personal experiences, as an exchange student, it is better to stay in a place where you can meet new people and make friends with them. It is easier to get closer to your roommates/floor mates/housemates than to your classmates. Thus, I would recommend to all exchange students to try to stay in a place full with many people. If you want to study or be by yourself, library on campus or shared study rooms at your school/housing should always be available.

I chose to live in an *international house* (I-House) in the first semester as most of the exchange students live there. These people are really friendly and fun to hang out with as they are also there for only a semester or a year, so they will find any opportunity to travel and explore their studying abroad year as much as they can. On the other hand, most of the local or full-time students there are usually busy with their study and work, so they might not have that much time to hang out with you even though they would love to.



- ***Fun and adventurous trips***



One of the most anticipating and fun time of studying abroad is 'TRAVELLING'. Mark down the map and plan your dream trip! My friends (from Thammasat University) and I planned our trip to go to L.A., Las Vegas, and San Francisco before our school started. Booking the hotel rooms, air tickets, and rental cars prior to the trip will make your life much easier. Travelling websites like Expedia, Agoda, Kayak, and

Tripadvisor are very useful in booking everything and give away such an awesome deal for your trip.

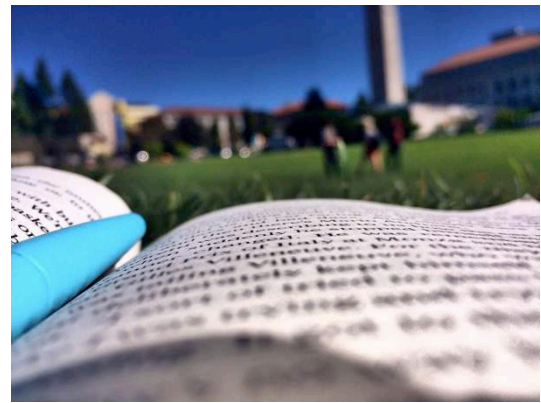
Chapter 2: Life, Activities and Experiences during Studying Abroad

- ***Independent Living***

In my entire life, I have never stayed away from my home/parents for more than 2 months. This is the first time in my life being on my own for almost a year! Studying abroad in the United States not only improves my academic performance but also enhances my survival skills by learning to be independent and take a good care of myself. As I have 8 AM class almost every day, my daily routine starts with waking up around 7:15AM, get ready and leave my place around 7:45AM, and use about 10-15 minutes to arrive school. Most of the time, I finish my day around 3PM.



After school finishes, I usually go to study at my favorite café, caffè Strada, or lie down on UC Berkeley iconic memorial glade for sunbathing. For the first semester, my life was quite convenient as I lived in *I-House* where there are cleaning services, meal plan, and many activities held by I-House Program Officers. However, for my second semester I decided to move to a student cooperative housing called *Hoyt Hall*, a women-only house with 60 super friendly girls in it. The reason why I moved to Hoyt Hall is that I would like to learn more about Berkeley unique culture and truly know how to live like an American. Even though living here gives me so much fun and a bunch of good friends, to tell you



the truth, it is not that easy as people think; all the residents have to do 5-hour work shift every week! My work shifts are pre-dinner kitchen cleaning, vacuuming 1st and 2nd floors of the house, bathroom cleaning and intensive kitchen cleaning. When I was assigned with these tasks, I spoke to myself "how in the world I can clean all of these by myself?" I have



never done these many chores by myself before in my life. I was really shocked and worried in the beginning. Yet I learned to be applicable and adapt myself to the new environment. I felt I have grown up so much after spending a semester here. I have learned how to balance my study time with my assigned work shift as well as my relaxing time. I have also learned to live with other people in a very cooperative way; in order to do something with the house like painting the mural on the wall, holding a party, or

purchasing things for the house, we need to get an approval from the house council in which the meeting usually holds during Sunday dinner. For those who will be on an exchange program soon, I would totally recommend you to stay at the co-op house once in your life if your host university provides one! It is such a life-learning experience that one could ask for.

- **Cool classes**



I am so lucky having an opportunity to be a part of University of California at Berkeley, one of the world's most prestigious and reputable academic institutions. I did enjoy and learn so much, especially from the classes offered at Haas School of Business. I am not going to lie to you, it was not easy studying there. Haas students are so smart and career-driven; sometimes they can be really cutthroat. I was

extremely nervous in the beginning and experienced such a culture shock. As a Thai student, I was not used to that much participation in class. Yet people here put their hands up all the time and always give their thoughts about the lecture. Therefore, the class here is not just a normal/boring lecture, but an effective two-way communication between the professors and students. Apart from the useful and practical classes, the students can also benefit from Office Hour with Professors and Graduate Student Instructors (GSI) if we need some advices on class material or life in general. I would recommend all the exchange students to go to the Office Hour, this is when you get a chance to get connected to your professors and learn some insightful knowledge that cannot be taught in classroom. I am so thankful to one of my professors at Haas School of Business, *Prof. Frank Schultz*. He has helped me and my other exchange student friends get through difficult time during our exchange year. So please kudos to him!



DeCal Classes: DeCal is a class created and facilitated by UC Berkeley Undergraduate Students. Even though units derived from DeCal classes cannot be transferred back To Thammasat University, I decided to take several of these classes anyway. This is due to the fact that these classes are very interesting and hard to find in Thailand. The good examples would be The Wonderful Wizarding World of Harry

Potter, Disney and Our Daily Lives, Can't Tell Me Nothing: The Development of Kanye West's Music, etc. I took 'Meditation class' in which there is a real yogi coming to our class to teach us how to meditate properly. I also took 'Cooking101' class where basic cooking techniques and easy dishes are taught. Another interesting and unforgettable DeCal Class I took is 'Calstar Yoga' in which the volunteered students are assigned to assist people with disabilities in an authentic yoga practice. I was crying the whole first class as I had never expected or realized how difficult it be to live a life as a disabled/sick person. What I learned from this class is that "no matter whom you are or what happen to you, do not ever give up on yourself". It was an honor to witness the strength and determination these disabled yoga practitioners possess through my own eyes.

- **Friends**



Exchange student friends: The easiest way to find good friends during your exchange year is to make friends with other exchange students. These people are as much enthusiastic and excited as you are and tend to be very friendly since the first time you meet them. Living in I-House and participating in any activities arranged for exchange students have helped me meet a lot of good friends who come from all over the world.

Local friends: It's good to make friends with full-time/local students at the university you study abroad. These people know the best about cool places to hang out, yummy restaurants, and fun parties to go. I mostly found these friends from classes, students' clubs and association, and the place where I lived. If you are close to them enough, they might take you to their hometown to meet their family during the holidays. I am so lucky to get closed with one of my roommates, Yasmin, who is very nice and generous to me. I meet her parents and sisters quite a lot of time as they come to visit her during the weekend. Thus, they always invite me for dinner, and even invite my parents to have a big family dinner with them as well.



Thai community: I do believe that there is always Thai community within any university you are going for an exchange program. For Berkeley, we have *ThaiSA* (Thai Student Association at Berkeley) which is a community all Thai people in the area come together and take care of each other while they are staying away from home. We usually hold activities and gather together on Thai special days such as Songkran Day and Loi Kratong Day. Thai people understand Thai people the best, so it is good to know other Thais and have them around. They could help or advise you when you are in some troubles or facing difficult situation. However, do not stick around only with Thai people. I understand that you might feel more comfortable and relaxed when you are with them than with other foreign friends, still you need to go beyond your boundary and have a variety of different friends as many as you can.



Clubs: Join clubs or student association you are interested in as it is another way for you to make new friends who have the same interest/passion as yours! During my exchange year at UC Berkeley, I had a chance to join a fashion magazine club called 'BARE Magazine' as one of the creative team members. As a creative, I had to work together with my team to



generate ideas for fashion shoot pitching and proposals, and then style models by borrowing clothes, shoes, and accessories from local shops. And lastly we need to direct the photo shoot and edit the photos. I did have so much fun during my time with this club for 2 semesters. It is where I discover my true passion in fashion and work with people who share the similar dreams.

Chapter 3: Tips and Tricks

- ***Textbook and Class Material***

Don't buy textbook from bookstores on campus, as they are VERY overpriced. Buy or any books from website like 'Amazon.com' since they are trustable with cheaper price and a very fast delivery service.

- ***Bank account, Debit Card and Credit Card***

It would be much more convenient for you to open a bank account and issue a debit card there (only if the fee is not that expensive). I would not recommend you to have credit card as you might not be able to control your shopping mania/addiction and everything can go wrong as a result. Having debit card is like having cash because most of the shops, restaurants, gas station, etc. accept debit card, unless the super small ones. Also it is safer not to carry around that much cash with you since you can drop it anywhere or get robbed by anyone. Moreover, if you need to shop online, the only way you can do it is to type your debit/credit card information at the end of the purchasing process (which means you cannot buy things online with cash). Therefore, don't hold that many banknotes or coins with you, hold card!

- ***Study hard, play harder!***

It is true that you have to do well at school and maintain your GPA, yet please remember that you are in your exchange year in which you have a chance to travel to new places and meet new friends. That's why it would be a shame on you if you stuck yourself only in your room or library! Come out and play as well! Sometimes it is good for you to come out of your comfort zone. Life is a lot more than books and classrooms, and only a few people have the opportunity like yours. So promise me to live your life to the fullest and enjoy it as much as you can! Work-life balance does really exist, therefore it is possible for anyone to do well at school and also outside. I would recommend you to study on weekdays and have a short trip to somewhere or hang out with friends on weekends. Yet, don't play too hard and please take a good care of yourself!



Chapter 4: The Conclusion



This is a picture I took on my last day in Berkeley....I cannot say it all about how much I love and appreciate the experiences I have gained studying abroad at UC Berkeley. It might be a bit too dramatic to say this one year here has changed me into a whole new person but definitely I have been growing up a lot since I first stepped into this land of golden bears.

Berkeley is a city full with characteristics and good vibe. The university itself is not only a school that provides one of the best educations to its students, but also a place where fun and smart people gather together.

For all people I have met there, each of them has some positive impact on me. Thank you for the friendship we have formed together...I mean it.

I-house, you really teach me the meaning of 'international love'. This is where I meet a lot of new good friends.

Hoyt Hall co-op, this is the first time I learn how to clean a bathroom! Hoyt is a house full with cool and friendly people. Thank you for the generosity and kindness you guys have given to me for a past semester. Also this is where my discipline lifestyle has developed...thanks to those weekly work shifts aha!

Haas School, to be honest, in the beginning of my year here, haas people scarred the hell out of me. But then I realized it was just my self-assumed illusion. Yes, they are tough BUT I do learn a lot from them and they are not as intimidating as I thought they were. Thank you

to all the professors and classmates who have helped me get through such an amazing journey.

Thank you so much UCEAP program and also my home university, Thammasat for giving me an opportunity to be a part of this exchange program. It is such a wonderful and unforgettable experience one can ask for.

Berkeley, you have treated me so well that I can wholeheartedly tell everyone that this is so far the best year of my life.

My time here is ending but I know this is not yet the end, it is just a beginning of another chapter of my life...this goodbye is not forever, it just simply means I will miss you until we meet again.

Fon