



UU Study Abroad Report Form

faculty/college	Humanities
level	Bachelor's
name study programme	Liberal Arts & Sciences

destination city & country	Berkeley, United States of America
name university abroad	UC Berkeley
start date	17 / 08 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	15 / 12 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

PREPARATION

exchange application process

During my application process, I was also doing a board year for my study association. This meant it was quite busy, but because I was really determined to go on an exchange I also had fun researching the different available universities. My first preference was UC Berkeley and I knew this already in the first year of my bachelor's. Studying in the United States would be expensive, so I wanted some time to save up and plan my study program, so I could attend in my fourth year. My other preferences were more of a last-minute decision, so I hoped to get into my first preference. I think the University of Utrecht application process was fairly easy. There were some forms to fill in and it took some time to figure out all the courses and reasons for applying, but overall it was very doable. After being accepted by the UU to apply for the University of California, you need to go through another application process by the University of California itself. They will then determine which university college you will attend. This took a bit more time, as I had to request my transcripts from multiple schools I attended. To get into the school I wanted it was not only important to provide transcripts but I believe my extracurricular activities were also of high(er) importance.

counseling & support at Utrecht University

Counseling and support at Utrecht University for the application was fine, meeting with the counselor for North America in person was very helpful for me. After applying however, I did miss a bit of support for the visa application, figuring out what insurances were best to get and how to get them, and finding housing was a bit stressful. In the end, everything worked out luckily (except for waiving the expensive health insurance, but I could cover it with the money I earned over the summer). The preparation meetings were beneficial in my opinion, but since the group going to California did not know their final exchange university yet it was a bit abstract to follow sometimes.

academic preparation

The academic levels at the University of Utrecht and UC Berkeley are somewhat the same, so I did not need other preparation than just to have the required amount of EC. What I did notice at UC Berkeley was that they require more participation in the classroom and it is arguably less academic or traditional in

comparison to the UU. Since I was following public policy courses and city planning courses, some discussed topics may be common knowledge for Americans, but not for European students. By asking questions and discussing this with peers it is easy to bridge this gap. In addition, in my classes, I was hardly ever the only international student who needed some extra explanation from time to time.

language preparation

Because the spoken language in the United States is English, I did not have to worry about being able to communicate with Americans and applying for courses. In addition, I already had one year of studying an English-thought study, so I knew what studying in English was like. To get into Berkeley I had to have proof of a certain level of English, but I could apply with a Duolingo test, which costs only 50 euros and you can take it at home fairly easily.

Finances

This is quite an important part of an exchange to the United States, because it's an expensive country and California is the worst cost-wise. There are scholarships that you can apply for, I lived at home and they also had scholarships (unfortunately I discovered this too late in the semester). At the beginning of the semester, I was really stressed about money, especially because my health insurance waiver was denied, which meant I had to pay a lot extra for health insurance. I even looked into getting a job in Berkeley, but it was very time-consuming and a bit complicated since the USA has a lot of restrictions. Before going on an exchange I made an Excel sheet with my income, a saving plan, and the costs, so I was able to cover it. Sometimes I had to be a bit more critical about expenditures on trips than other students, but it was worth it and everything worked out fine.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

Study program (content and organizational issues)

Before applying you have to research the courses they provide at the exchange universities and come up with a little study program. But once you actually have to apply courses may have changed or maybe there are restrictions for courses you intended to take. Another problem at UC Berkeley is that it's hard to get into the classes you want because the classes are so packed. So sometimes when you apply for a class you are waitlisted, and after two weeks or so into the semester you will hear whether you got into them or not. This is why I was following 19 units at the beginning of the semester and why I emailed some teachers if they could help me get into the classes. In the end, I was able to get into some very cool classes and it did not matter that I had to switch my original plan up a bit. It was also good for me to learn how to improvise, think of solutions, and fight for the classes I wanted to take.

Academic quality of education activities

The academic quality of the education activities I followed was very good. UC Berkeley tries hard to maintain its status as the best public university in the world. There is also a lot of room for feedback from students. Next to the quality of the classes, Berkeley and its professors offer many lectures, events, and excursions of high academic value. Teachers are very approachable during so-called 'office hours' and you can ask them questions about course content, their research, and their career path. What I enjoyed the most was doing field research and seeing how academic theory unfolded in daily life in California. For instance: I followed a course on the homelessness crisis and we had to map facilities and encampments in Berkeley. This made the topics discussed very real.

Counseling & support at receiving university abroad

Counseling and support is very well-organized at UC Berkeley. They have different places to go to for different problems. In some way, there were so many resources that I got a bit lost, but after asking my classmates or mailing to the International Office I knew how to navigate myself. With the right health insurance healthcare is very accessible, and especially for mental problems it is super easy to get help. The

people at UC Berkeley are super supportive and understanding, so even with problems back at home teachers will help you get the right help and extend your deadlines.

Transfer of credits

The transfer of the units earned at UC Berkeley to credits at the UU was very easy. My transcript was sent by UC Berkeley to the UU and I just had to follow the steps that were listed on the UU website. All of my courses were accepted by the UU board of examiners.

STUDENT LIFE

Welcome & Orientation Program

Since I started during the fall semester, there was a whole introduction week to get familiar with the campus, university values, and student life. During the 'Golden Bear Orientation', I was able to meet other international students, some first years, and also transfer students. UC Berkeley accepts many transfer students, which is nice because this way I was able to make friends with Americans who were also about to start their careers at Berkeley and were a bit older than first-year students. At the accommodation I had for the semester, there were also a lot of welcome activities and even a retreat to get to know one another. Overall the welcome and orientation programs gave me a great start and a lot of friends at UC Berkeley.

Accommodation

The International House was not only my accommodation for the fall semester but also a place where I encountered many cultures, found many friends and engaged in many activities. At the very start of my stay, the board of the I-House stressed that this was not the place for you if you were just looking for accommodation, it was meant for a full cultural experience and to engage in cultural exchange. Looking back at my experiences there, it was super valuable to live with so many cultures under one roof and have conversations about differences over dinner. I made so many friends from all over the world and I will never experience anything like this ever again. At first, I wanted to apply for a 'coopt' which is a house where you have chores, but the rent is a lot lower. In addition to this, I applied for on-campus housing and I tried finding some off-campus housing through Facebook. There is a very big housing shortage in Berkeley, which is why it's quite hard to find a nice and affordable place. In general, the housing prices are quite high. At some point, I got stressed so I wrote down my motivation to get into I-House and I sent some emails to make sure I had a chance of getting in. I am really glad I got in and it contributed a lot to my experience at Berkeley. Additionally, the dining hall is one of the best and the location is great as well.

Leisure & culture

Berkeley has many clubs, courses, and free (!) sports facilities. This was not only a great way to explore the campus and the bay area (by visiting the different pools or the sailing club), but also to meet new students and try out different sports (there are group classes, a climbing wall, and try-outs at the beginning of the semester). It is very hard to get into some clubs, so you need to fill out application forms and/or go to interviews, but it is very interesting to experience this university-oriented student life. During the weekends I made a lot of trips with fellow international students, but I also got invited by American friends to meet their families, join a Thanksgiving dinner, or experience a real American barbeque. In general, Americans are very welcoming and enthusiastic to show foreigners their country and culture. San Francisco is an hour with public transport and this was perfect for museum visits on a Sunday, going out on a Friday, or some shopping during the week. The Bay area has a lot to offer, from company visits to cultural sites, there is history and innovation and the people are very friendly.

suggestions/tips

My first tip would be: to try out the Decals. It is a course for just one or two units given and graded by other students with a very broad variety of topics. Unfortunately, these units are not transferable to credits at the UU but it is a fun and new way to explore student life at UC Berkeley.

Another thing I would suggest is to visit the sports games. This is where you see the American school spirit come alive. Most of them are free and often there is a way to get free tickets one way or another and the popular sports are very different from the ones in Europe.

Lastly: just try out as many new things as you can. During my exchange, I did some volunteering at a Middle School, went to a roller skate church, camped in someone's backyard, and went to a conference in Sacramento by myself. This way I got to meet American people, get out of my comfort zone, and get a glimpse of daily life in California. Even going for a walk to the supermarket or taking the bus or train was a way to have a quick chat and meet people. If you ask teachers there is a possibility they give you a class off for activities outside of the university, as extracurriculars are highly valued at Berkeley.

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

In conclusion, I would highly recommend UC Berkeley for a semester abroad. It has a lot to offer academically, career-wise, culturally, and socially. It is very well organized and you meet a broad variety of very open people. The USA is a very diverse country and has a lot of influence on Europe, with big cities but also beautiful nature. The people in California are friendly and approachable. And if you are looking for a total package of cultural exchange I would also recommend staying at the International House to learn even more about even more cultures.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

Start thinking about your exchange in advance and save up for it. Think about where you want to go and why. Hard work will pay off in new friends, many experiences, a broader network for the future, a lot of knowledge, and cultural sensitivity. Don't forget to list your extracurricular activities because they are often more important than super-high grades. I think an exchange anywhere is super valuable, but for me, this was the perfect destination due to the combination of academic quality, opportunities, and social life. My major is in city and economic geography, where American cities are discussed very often. This was also a reason for me to go to Berkeley, to get the American point of view on city geography. So some last advice would be: look at your field of study and the topics you study. For two different disciplines, very different exchange universities may be relevant.



UU Study Abroad Report Form

	Contact info at the IO.
faculty/college	Faculty of Humanities
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's
name study programme	History (BA)

destination city & country	Berkeley, United States
name university abroad	University of California, Berkeley
start date	16 / 08 / 2023
end date	17 / 12 / 2023

PREPARATION	
exchange application process	<p>The exchange application is an extensive one, requiring a lot of hours besides the usual workload of your studies at UU. Although the process of filling out all the documents perhaps appear as a daunting task, it will familiarise you with the various systems of the universities. Including the UC network in your preference is especially complicated, since in addition to having to sketch out a plan on which courses you intend on following at the two other universities, you also need to do this for your UC application. I, for example, selected the University of Toronto and Trinity College Dublin besides UC, and within the UC system, I had the following top 3: 1. Berkeley, 2. UCLA, and 3. San Diego. This meant that I had to figure out all the different course manuals to come up with a plan for my abroad studies. On this topic, I would like to assure you that this is by no means a definitive plan, so do not think that the courses that you selected will be the courses that you will actually follow while at UC.</p> <p>Absolutely the worst part of the whole preparation for your exchange is getting a visa. I strongly advise anyone who is going on an exchange abroad to commence applying for a visa as soon as possible. I made the awful mistake of thinking that it would not be the ordeal that it was. As a consequence, I received my visa only one week in advance of departing to Berkeley. Start as soon as possible!</p>
counselling & support at Utrecht University	For counselling, we had a presentation on the whole process of the exchange and received a handbook on how to manage an exchange.
academic preparation	This was not an important matter. I did not prepare myself academically. The university in California will give you all the information on how to prepare for classes in advance.
language preparation	Since you must do a language test in order to be eligible to apply to the UC system, I took the online Duolingo English Test. If this is still an option, I would strongly advise you to take this test instead of the alternatives because you could do it from home, it is cheaper than the alternatives, you can buy two tests and share the best score with UC, and it only takes 45 mins if I remember correctly.
Finances	



Going to the United States, and especially California, is in all likelihood the most expensive destination. Housing, insurance, the high price levels of the Bay Area, and additional costs that UC administers for matters such as the introduction week amount to a hefty financial burden.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)

Since I study history, getting into classes was not difficult. However, others had great difficulty getting into their desired classes. In this regard, I would advise you to check out the classes you want to take in advance and to be punctual when the time comes to sign up for classes.

academic quality of education activities

In general, the academic quality is high. You will have the chance to study under eminent professors who are among the most cited researchers in the world, given Berkeley's outstanding reputation for academic research. In addition, the various departments of the university host different guest lectures you are free to attend. These lectures are given by well-known professors from all the major universities in the United States. I would highly recommend going to these lectures since this is an opportunity that you will not usually get while studying in the Netherlands.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

I am not able to speak on this topic, because I barely had any problems that needed counselling or support from the university. However, I do know that the university offers an array of different resources that one can use if he or she desires to do so.

transfer of credits

UC Berkeley is the only university within the UC system at which one is able to earn the full 30 points, which I needed to be able to graduate this year. If this is an important factor for you, I would pick Berkeley to be your first choice.

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

I did not like the welcome programme. Apart from the campus tour, the whole introduction programme was designed to cater to incoming freshmen, resulting in a kind of mismatch. This was especially a negative aspect due to the fact that it was mandatory, and due to the costs associated with it.

Accommodation

During my time in Berkeley, I stayed at International House. This accommodation is located just along the campus on the east side and offers all of the facilities a student could wish for. The international house has a dining hall which provides all the meals you need, and it is included in the price of the accommodation. My experience was a very positive one because the accommodation offers a very rich and culturally diverse social life, something that is of great importance while studying abroad. You will make a lot of good friends with whom you have the opportunity to explore California.

leisure & culture

Although Berkeley itself doesn't have a lot to offer in relation to leisure and culture, nearby San Francisco does. Only 45-60 minutes away with public transit, San Francisco has all the leisure and culture you need. Some obvious locations of interest would, for example, be the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and Chinatown. But discovering the different neighborhoods of San Francisco is something that is highly recommendable as well. In addition, San Francisco possesses some world-class museums, such as DeYoung and the Museum of Modern Art. If you would like to have a relaxing day, I recommend the beautiful Golden Gate Park and Ocean



Beach. Having a stroll through the park and watching the sunset with some snacks and drinks is the ideal way to spend a Sunday.

suggestions/tips

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

I would certainly recommend UC Berkeley to other students who are interested in going abroad. Apart from the obvious reasons, such as the academic reputation and the “college experience”, I would like to stress that exchange at UC Berkeley provides you with an amazing opportunity to enjoy, arguably, one of the most interesting places in the United States, the Bay Area, while studying at a top university, where you will make social connections that, in all likelihood, will last a lifetime.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

If the financial situation allows it, I would highly recommend applying to stay at International House. My whole exchange experience would have not been nearly as enriching if it weren't for the fact that I stayed at International House.



UU Study Abroad Report Form

faculty/college	Humanities
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's
name study programme	Philosophy Politics Economics

destination city & country	Berkeley , California, USA
name university abroad	University of California Berkeley
start date	23 / 08 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	16 / 12 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

PREPARATION	
exchange application process	First there is the normal UU process. For University of California you do not initially apply to one specific university, but to UC at large. Then, if UU selects you, you must complete a pretty long application, with personal statement and all through UC portal for exchange students. There you express which UC you would like to attend and why. Overall, it is quite a lot of work, but one should not be discouraged.
counselling & support at Utrecht University	UU is pretty good at following exchange students. The visa process for the US for instance is quite long and painful, but UU really tells you step by step what one must do. Of course it is still the individual who must make sure that everything is alright, but overall they really help you. Also they reply to emails super fast. Big plus.
academic preparation	Berkeley has an insane amount of courses, some easier other harder. Overall I felt prepared and loved it all.
language preparation	Nothing prepares you to American slang. The rest was good!
finances	California and San Francisco in particular are really really expensive. Be ready to spend \$5 for a coffee and \$20 for a lunch. Also, rent is super expensive, recommended to not live on normal uni dorms but sign up for the co-ops! Good thing is you can work on campus if you want.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD	
study programme (content and organisational issues)	Berkeley is amazing, there were no organizational issues, I loved learning (some subjects more then others). They also reply to emails super fast and really help you if needed.
academic quality of education activities	The academic quality is generally very high. I recommend to do research beforehand on the professors and their work and the courses (there's a website called rate my professor where students write reviews on courses and professors). If you pick courses that you are interested in and the professor is good and you like



their work, you are gonna love it. Also you can switch classes at the beginning if you want. Remember to sign up for classes asap: they fill up super quickly if it is a good class/ cool professor.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

I did not really need much counselling and support but as stated before, they reply to emails really fast and help you if needed. Berkeley has so many resources in general, so if you need anything or struggle with something, there is always a support system.

transfer of credits

1 Berkeley unit is worth 2 ECTS, I took 17 units worth of courses, which is the maximum amount allowed by Berkeley (you can do more but you have to ask for special permission, however, i do not recommend it, you may also wanna enjoy your exchange). All of my courses got approved except one. That course was a DeCal. DeCals are courses thought by students and they can be about literally anything. It did not get approved because the one I took was not academic enough: the literature was not entirely academic; the assignments were not what UU sees as okay in university. I would still recommend taking DeCals, it's very cute and fun and very Berkeley as well. Just know that they might not approve it.

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

Orientation was super super great, it's a whole week of fun activities and getting to know the campus. They do special orientation for exchange students and introduce you to everything.

accommodation

I stayed off campus, which was cool, and im glad I did because it was cheaper, but as mentioned above in the finances part, I recommend staying in Co-Ops. Berkeley cooperatives are a pretty cool system, you live in a house with other students, and it is really really cheap because it is all student-run. In exchange you have to work for the house (take cooking shifts, cleaning,...). It's a pretty cool concept.

leisure & culture

California is insanely beautiful. You drive two hours in one direction and you have amazing landscapes, you go another direction and it is even better. We went camping a lot, roadtripped on the coast and hiked in most of the national parks. Just amazing. I must say San Francisco and Los Angeles are cool, but nothing beats the nature. In general it can be pretty dangerous, homelessness and drugs are very high. The US is perhaps not the country for me, as a student of politics, the lack of social welfare and the way people are abandoned to themselves is pretty upsetting and at times shocking. That is America though, it's part of the experience, just be safe.

suggestions/tips

If you see a brown bear, scream, it will go away. Same goes for frat boys.

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

1000%!!!! Again, Berkeley is super super cool. I really loved learning and being part of that university. I also really fell in love with the land, the colors and the vibe in general. California is a great place to be.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

No.



ERASMUS+ STUDIES - UU Report

faculty/college	Rebo
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's <input type="checkbox"/> PhD
name study programme	UCEAP

destination city & country	Berkeley, United States
how did you travel to your destination?	Airplane
name university abroad	UC Berkeley
start date	12 / 08 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	15 / 12 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

PREPARATION

exchange application process

The application process was in the end fairly easy but it took me quite some time to understand what I exactly needed to do. For instance, you needed to hand in a "studyplan" where you included your planned courses for your chosen university. This was a bit unclear because you have to figure out how the website of that university works, when the courses are given, how the schedule works etc. These kind of things took me more time than expected and sometimes the explanation of the UU could have been clearer. You should really take your time for everything and make a list of what you need to do.

counselling & support at Utrecht University

The exchange coordinator for the exchanges to North-America was very helpful and helped me a lot with my questions. The support at the UU could be better in my opinion because during the entire process you have to figure out everything yourself and the instructions are most of the time not really clear.

academic preparation

I didn't need to do any academic preparation other than

language preparation

Because my exchange was to the US I didn't need any language preparation, only thing I needed was a Cambridge certificate and I still had one from high school.

finances

For finances I made a plan with my Dad that I worked before I went on exchange to save money and that he would support me for important expenses there. This was a bit more challenging in the U.S. because I couldn't work there.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)

I was free to take courses at Berkeley during my exchange period, so I did not have a set programme other than that I had to take undergrad courses and that the units had to be converted into 30 ECTS. Over there it was much easier to switch courses and to make your own planning so the courses that I handed in as "studyplan"



ended up being totally different. The stress of trying to figure out which courses I had to take, turned out to be for nothing because there you still could change almost everything.

academic quality of education activities

The academic quality is good and comparable to the UU. I definitely wouldn't say that it was better, even though I expected that a little bit because the name of Berkeley is so widely known. Participation plays a bigger role but examinations are easier. They also use different scale for grading, which makes it as a student of the UU way easier to get top grades. Your grade is build on little assignments, participation and one exam that doesn't count for a big percentage of your grade. The UU system is stricter and requires to know the material much more thorough.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

I personally haven't used this.

transfer of credits

The credits I received there counted double in terms of ECTS. I took three courses of 4 units (berkeley units) and one course of 3 units. This together made 15 units so 30 ECTS.

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

The orientation programme was fine but they stretched it out a bit to long. I think they could've done everything in two days instead of five.

accommodation

Accommodation in the U.S. is really expensive and hard to find. The university didn't help me at all with that. If I ever would go on an exchange again I would spent more time in taking care of finding good and affordable accommodation.

leisure & culture

The campus of Berkeley is beautiful and they have a lot of sporting facilities on campus. Furthermore, Berkeley has a lot of student bars and San Francisco is close enough to go to on the weekends, so enough places to have fun. I enjoyed that you could take sporting classes, which were a great way of meeting people and staying fit at the same time. The state of Calidornia also has a lot to offer such as national parks, LA, San Diego, hikes etc. so definitely enough to do.

suggestions/tips

My tip would be do as much as you can during your time there. Explore the state, go on trips when you have a free weekend, go to San Francisco, football gameday on Saturday (buy a season ticket at the beginning of the semester).

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

I would definitely recommend this destination. The campus is beautiful, the city of Berkeley and the state of California are great and the university is good. Only problem is that it is extremely expensive so make sure to save enough money.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

Start on time with finding housing and applying for your visa.



UU Study Abroad Report Form

Contact info at the IO.

faculty/college	Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen/Faculty of Humanities
level	Bachelor's
name study programme	Honours Literary Studies

destination city & country	Berkeley , California, The USA
name university abroad	University of California Berkeley
start date	16 / 08 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	15 / 12 / 2023 (dd/mm/yyyy)

PREPARATION

exchange application process



The application process is unfortunately quite lengthy (but worth it!). First you apply to your chosen exchange destinations through Utrecht, and once you're chosen from the other applicants you'll have to apply once more to selected University of California colleges (so - Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Riverside, UCLA etc.).

Once you're accepted you'll receive your email and login to the UC university portal (for Berkeley it's CalNet), where you'll be guided through all the steps you'll have to take before arriving. Among them: vaccinations! (there is one which you'll have to get specifically for the States), confirmation of financial resources (Berkeley will ask you to showcase the sum of 9000 dollars in a bank account), as well as the visa application.

Please start applying for the visa a little bit earlier - I ended up working on this a bit last minute which became rather stressful but absolutely does not have to be. You'll find all tips about preparation of documents in CalNet already. Additionally as Berkeley vouches for you, you won't really struggle with getting a visa - genuinely!

Another positive aspect of getting your visa earlier is the plane ticket prizes - those are expensive. As soon as you have your visa, check out the planes. It's best to fly directly to SFO (San Francisco International Airport), because you can take a direct train all the way to Berkeley. There are two more airports in the area - one in San Jose, and another one in Oakland.

counselling & support at Utrecht University

The international Office in Utrecht is incredibly helpful - you can send an email any time, or reach your advisors through the phone if very urgent. Whatever it is that you need help for - they are here for you to make the process much easier.

academic preparation

I can't really think of much here - each course outlines the content so you'll be able to find out if there is anything you need to prepare (in terms of reading) before the semester begins.

language preparation

If you're programme is taught in English you won't have to submit any additional documents. Otherwise I think there is a certain level of English proficiency you'll have to prove! For that Duolingo courses are affordable and you can take them anytime - and as many times as you want.

finances

Unfortunately scholarships are not that widely available (depending on where you're from). I was very lucky to secure one which applies to studying in the United States - the Holland Scholarship award (a grant of 1250 euros) and I would of course very much recommend applying.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)



You'll have to register with your chosen department and take at least one course within it. Otherwise you're free to apply to courses from other departments.

The seminar/lecture format is quite similar to what we do in Utrecht - but there are slightly less assignments (although depends on the course). Within my programme I was very used to preparing presentations which is not a thing in Berkeley at all. Instead I wrote reports, essays and had to go through final exams. Plus! Because the Fall Semester consists of two Dutch teaching blocks, mid-through you'll have to prepare for your midterms.

academic quality of education activities

Everything depends on the course of course, but you're assured that the people who teach are incredibly passionate about their fields.

I took courses in Film, Literature, Poetry, German, and Dance. Berkeley offers a lot! of language courses (which is something that I've missed in Utrecht). Most students are recommended to take 3/4 classes per semester because the teaching, amount of readings gets quite intense. I initially took 7 classes but then dropped out of a few.

You can pass either with a grade or a fail/pass (grades don't get transferred so it doesn't really matter that much!). Additionally you're allowed two late drops/change of grading during your time in Berkeley. Although the exchange lasts only a semester, you're still allowed to late drop twice.

You can apply for one graduate course (even if you're an undergraduate student!) - would recommend. Teaching becomes much more intimate and personal but also (of course) slightly more demanding.

One more thing! Every professor has office hours, so you can come by at designated times for a chat about anything you find interesting about the course, or additional questions (which students do quite a lot).

Berkeley is research university offering a lot of research opportunities (for undergraduate students too). During the summer a programme called URAP opens, when professors post available research positions (each lasts one semester). A lot of various possibilities - you can help research insects, work at a museum, translate documents, work in assisting research groups - would absolutely recommend to take a look.

Lastly, the teaching doesn't really become much more demanding (in my experience at least), so do not stress too much! There is lots to simply enjoy.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

For all things related to arrival/application you can contact the Berkeley International Office (incredibly helpful). Later on for academic related inquiries you'll be able to reach you department advisor.

For mental health related issues - Berkeley has a few hotline you can call anytime and schedule a free-of-charge counseling session. Your insurance covers the costs of University counseling so that will be also available to you (both in person and online).

transfer of credits



After your semester finishes you will have to get your credits transferred back to Utrecht. It's possible to request that online - you can contact your study advisor (every department has a few) about this. A note to self: course credits are not transferred

Later on you'll be able to request a board of examiners to reevaluate your courses through osiris. The grades do not count though, so you're free to enjoy your chosen courses without too much pressure.

Berkeley offers a large variety of courses (try to explore the academic course guide because there is so much to choose from). Additionally there are decals (so courses organized by students for students) for which you can register at the beginning of the year. A friend of mine organized a decal on poker, there are hiking decals, animation, meditation decals - everything under the sun! Each decal is about 2 units so it also counts towards your university credits (if it gets approved).

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

(For the Fall Semester) You're recommended to arrive a little earlier than 16th of August as the Orientation starts on that day. But it's also okay to arrive later if that's a must for you - I arrived on the 18th because of my plane ticket. (You are required to report that to the advisors though!)

accommodation



Urgent findings here!

The good thing is: Berkeley secures student accommodation for every student. You can easily apply through the student websites and be assured that you'll be given housing options.

The rather worse things is: The Bay Area is one of the most expensive regions in the whole of the United States which makes housing really expensive (even the one offered by University).

An alternative - which is the one I opted for, is a COOP (Berkeley Student Cooperative) which makes housing a little bit more affordable. COOP's are initially buildings managed by students (so the tenants that live in them) - managing a space together also means work! Every person who lives in the house is allocated 5 hours of work throughout the week - which can become very pleasant (I cooked every Friday). There is a variety of spaces to choose from, when it comes to the themes of the houses, size, or proximity to Campus. The are all however located very very close, so you're not actually missing out on anything.

The fun part about coops, is the integrated culture, the variety of people you meet and how close the community becomes (coops organize their own events!). You are given access to a whole kitchen (with lots of food to use whenever!), outdoor, studying and common spaces. I lived in Cloyne Court, the academic themed, substance-free house where I ended up quite accidentally (I would recommend looking up their website and signing up sooner than later), and it very sincerely became the most beautiful part of my experience in Berkeley.

It's quite rare to find exchange students in coops - it's not as known of a tradition outside of the States, so you get insights from people who have already lived and been a part of Berkeley for a while. I was able to crash events and parties I would have not known, or not been able to attend - had it not been for the friends I made there.

But it's also just simply (once again!) the emphasis placed on community building. Belonging, being a part of a space becomes so challenging when you move someplace for a short period of time. Coops cherish, nourish, celebrate its tenants - one of the most beautiful traditions is the evening dinner cooked by one of the cooking groups (every day at 6pm), that the whole house eats together, day after day. It became such a remedy for me, as I struggled with the strange sense of temporality that lingered for a few days when I first moved in.

The only downside I can think of is perhaps the quality of the living space, which doesn't really compare with University-funded dorms. Other than that, from the bottom of my heart I'd recommend for you to take a look.

leisure & culture



Where to even begin!

When in Berkeley, you're experiencing not only an unimaginably awesome University, but also a city with incredibly deep culture and history of resistance (there is so much to do!)

The Bay Area in itself is beautiful too.

It takes about 30 minutes to get to San Francisco by train (BART - Bay Area Rapid Transit) which costs around 3 dollars. (visit Mission District, City Lights Bookstore, Caffe Trieste where Coppola wrote the screenplay for his Godfather, and Chinatown! the largest in the world). San Francisco is so full of extremes - you get to experience the whole world in one city.

Worth visiting - it takes 20 minutes to get to Oakland (!!), and around 40 minutes to get to Alameda (a smaller city with a beautiful beach). If you wish to travel further, you can easily secure cheaper tickets to Arizona, Oregon, Nevada or even Mexico. But Northern California is beautiful to explore on its own.

Berkeley

Sports:

The University has a wide range of sports facilities completely free of charge for all students. You can also register for sports classes (I took Contemporary Dance). Up in the Berkeley Hills, there is a very charming opera air swimming pool (Strawberry Canyon), also free of charge, and a dream in warm temperatures (it gets WARM here)

Culture:

- BAMPFA (the local modern art museum and Pacific Film Archive which screens really wonderful cinema every day, organizes a bunch of smaller festivals throughout the year as well as lectures and conversations with filmmakers, artists, creators. An absolute must, very closely located to the campus.
- Pegasus, Moe's, Half Price Books, are all great bookstores to visit (but there is plenty of them in Berkeley so just feel free to roam around). You can get most books for around 2-4 dollars in second-hand bookstores (Friends of the Public Library is a wondrous one)
- The Musical Offering Cafe organizes small concerts every weekend (worth a visit!)
- Most of cultural events in Berkeley are organized with/through the university - UC Berkeley Lunch Poems are worth checking out, but there is just a whole bunch of things happening at all times! You should get mail updates from your departments about the things that might interest you.

Cafe's/Restaurants:

- Strada is the go-to study place for most people in Berkeley (but! there are many more options to explore)
- You have two bigger coffee chains (Peet's & Blue Bottle), both founded in Berkeley, available to you in almost every corner
- 1951 Coffee Company is a non-profit cafe, that besides great coffee, creates training programs for refugees.
- The Hidden Cafe located in Strawberry Creek is a must to see!
- Berkeley Farmer's Market happens every weekend until noon (for fresh vegetables!)
- Blondie's Pizza, for a cheaper, to go slice (a legendary Berkeley chain!)
- Chez Panisse (owned by Alice Walker) is one of the best restaurants in the whole country. Said to have invented Californian cuisine - very very very very very expensive though.
- Remember that Taco Tuesdays is a thing! So you can roam around Berkeley in the middle of the week for cheaper tacos.
- Berkeley doesn't really have the most revolutionary pub scene, but Jupiter is rather pleasant!

But mostly - just do a lot of walking, explore it on your own (there is so much to see). I think that's always the best recommendation - you make the place your very own experience.



suggestions/tips

You'll have to get health insurance upon arriving in Berkeley - the one offered by the university is quite expensive. There are a few cheaper alternatives which the university approves of - I got International Insurance which covers all the basic requirements and is significantly cheaper.

Your J1 visa will expire on the day of the end of your exchange semester. But you can comfortably overstay 30 days (to pack and say your goodbyes or travel a bit). So! you're allowed a 30-day travel period - referred to as The Grace Period, quoting here "During this 30-day grace period, participants are no longer in J-visa status, and are under the jurisdiction of the USCIS. The USCIS grants this period to allow participants to settle their affairs and to prepare to return to their home countries. "

[/https://j1visa.state.gov/participants/current/adjustments-and-extensions/](https://j1visa.state.gov/participants/current/adjustments-and-extensions/)

CONCLUSIONS

would you recommend this university/destination abroad to others? please explain

Absolutely - Berkeley is a very magical and unique place filled with very sincere excitement and promotion of student belonging. It has a quirky reputation - which is rather true, you'll get to meet people fascinated with the most obscure of things.

There is also so much that happens in the whole area - culturally and recreationally (I took it as a great privilege to be able to witness and experience all that I had). So once again, I can't stress it enough - when it comes to academics, people, personal passions and joy Berkeley is a very beautiful place to find yourself in.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

Enjoy at your own pace, you most likely won't be able to do everything (the thought of which I struggled with at first). Have lots of tremendous fun and if there's anything you'd like to know - you can always contact me!