



faculty/college	Science
level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> bachelor's <input type="checkbox"/> master's
name study programme	Information Sciences

destination city & country	Merced, United States
name university abroad	University of California, Merced
start date	18/ 8 / 2018 (dd/mm/yyyy)
end date	14 / 12 / 2018 (dd/mm/yyyy)

PREPARATION	
exchange application process	
<p>At first, it was a little confusing that you have to complete a second application that is specific to UCEAP so that you can choose your top 3 UC's. But, eventually, it is pretty straightforward and you just really have to take a look at what the UC's have to offer and where you would like to spend the semester of course. Moreover, it was a little confusing that at most of the UC's you can only take part for a quarter of the year instead of the whole semester for the fall semester. So, I think it is really important to base your decision of the top 3 on what semester you want to go abroad and then to base your decision on where exactly to go. Planning out the year in which I was going to study abroad was really helpful for me. UC Merced was in my top 3 because I wanted to spend a full semester abroad and because I thought it would be interesting to spend a semester at a university built in the 21st century. However, with this particular university it was really hard to gather information because it was new and because it was a new addition to the UCEAP program last year. There was no one from Merced in Utrecht and there was no one who had previously been to Merced. So, this is why my exchange application process was a little tough but I don't think that will be a huge problem for future UC Merced exchange students. I was also one of the last students for the UCEAP program to be informed about where I was placed and this is why I also received a lot of the information on applying a visa and such pretty late. So, hopefully the process will go much faster in the coming years because all of this delayed my interview at the embassy.</p>	
counselling & support at Utrecht University	
<p>As I said before, there was no one in Utrecht who had been to Merced so there wasn't much support. However, the Student Exchange Coordinator was still really helpful whenever I needed some information about the host</p>	



university because she would contact that university for me and forward the information to me. Moreover, just hearing the study abroad experiences of other students was also really helpful at the study abroad presentations. I could easily ask any questions that I had even though those students did not attend my specific host university.

academic preparation

I didn't have to prepare much academically before going to my host university. The only thing I had to do was take 3 courses one quarter at Utrecht during the application process because I wasn't sure if I was going to attend a full semester at the host university or only a quarter since I didn't know where I had been placed.

language preparation

I only took the IELTS test for language preparation and I only did that because I had to. It was the easiest English language test that I took but that's also because I already have an IB diploma. However, I only had a 5 out of 7 instead of 6 out of 7, which is why I still had to take the IELTS test. Yet, I still think that no other student from Utrecht has to prepare much for this language test.

finances

Studying in California was definitely more expensive than studying in an Asian or European country, especially since I was living on campus. Housing on campus is extremely expensive in Merced. However, I would definitely recommend to live on campus here instead of living off campus, which is why it is good to start saving really early. From the moment that I applied to study abroad, I started saving some money and I also put my DUO loans at the max. Moreover, I got some help from my parents.

STUDY ABROAD PERIOD

study programme (content and organisational issues)

Because I took 3 courses in 1 quarter at Utrecht, I decided to take 3 courses in Merced instead of 4 since I was there a full semester. This gave me a lot of free time to enjoy my time there to the fullest. I had decided that I wasn't going to do a minor because I had a lot of different interests and I was only going to take 3 courses. So, at the beginning I had signed up for the following courses: Introduction to Cognitive Sciences, Introduction to Biological Anthropology and Introduction to Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. However, after 1 week I decided to drop out of Biological Anthropology and signed up for Astrobiology. It was really easy to drop the course and take up another one via their sign up system for courses. However, it takes some time to figure out how to sign up at first. The description of the courses cannot be found through the sign up system, there is another course catalogue in which all the different courses that are given are described. Via this course catalogue I decided which courses I wanted to take when I was still in Holland. However, when I started to sign up for courses, I noticed that some of them were already filled up. So, on the sign up system I first had to figure out which classes still had some spots left. By doing this and then reading the descriptions of the courses in the catalogue, I figured out which courses I was going to take. The sign up system also shows what day and time the lectures and discussions for the course are held. So, this way I was also able to create a schedule that gave me 2 days off and in which I had no morning classes. Lastly, I had decided to only take introduction classes because there were always prerequisites for the upper classes and since I had not taken those classes, the system would not let me sign up for them. However, I think that if you really want to take an upper division class, you could attend the first lecture and talk to the teacher. I just didn't think that was really necessary for me since I took courses that are quite different from my bachelor.

academic quality of education activities

Even though I learned a lot from the classes that I took, I didn't think that the classes were really difficult. The academic quality was fine. There was usually a higher workload for the courses then for courses that I take in Utrecht. However, that didn't make the courses any more difficult. They were still a lot easier than the courses



that I have to take in Utrecht. This could also be the case because I only took introduction classes. However, the students from the host university would tell me that they think the introduction classes are usually a little more intense or difficult than the upper division classes because they are very broad and because these classes also take attendance.

counselling & support at receiving university abroad

The counselling and support at the host university was really good. I could always email the international officer from there if I had any questions and she would always forward me towards the right person or she would even handle some matters herself on my behalf. I thought the counselling wasn't great when I was still in Holland because some of the staff would reply a little late. However, once I got there the support from everyone at the international office was really good.

transfer of credits

I still haven't heard from the international office at Utrecht University if they have received my transcript or not. I had gotten an email that I would hear about it but it has been 5 weeks already since I left my host university and I still haven't heard anything. So, I can't say much right now about the transfer of credits.

STUDENT LIFE

welcome & orientation programme

There was only one orientation meeting for the international students that were coming in that semester because there were only about 20 international bachelor students. So, the university is not that popular for international undergraduate students but that is because it is a new university and it just started taking part in the UCEAP program. They are slowly trying to build a more international profile for undergraduates so I think that in the coming years they will start having bigger orientation programmes for international undergraduate students. However, there are still a lot of campus broad activities in the first few weeks of the fall semester. There are some events for transfer students and there are a lot of activities for freshmen. However, everyone can still join in on the activities, which is what I did. It was a good way to interact with people and start making more friends. Everyone is very open and welcoming so there was always a good atmosphere. People would also always be excited when they heard that I was an international student, so that was a good way to make friends. I also thought it was more interesting to interact with the locals instead of with other international students.

accommodation

I was staying on campus in the Valley Terraces apartments. These are small apartments that you usually share with 4 or 6 people and you also have a roommate. The apartments were clean and they were also very spacious. They also had air conditioning and heating in the rooms, which was really important. Moreover, sharing the room with someone else was a little uncomfortable at first but once there are roommate agreements, you get used to it and it's actually really fun too to have a roommate. There is always someone to talk to and study with, which is really nice. My housemates and roommates were all students from the host university. However, they were extremely kind and open and treated me like I was no different from them. Some of the best moments that I have had were with my housemates and sometimes even in the apartment. Staying on campus was the best decision I made because it was so easy to meet up with other students living on campus and because there were always some kind of activity going on on campus.

leisure & culture

For leisure and culture I took part in a Christian club on campus that was very interesting and that really showed me a different side to the students there. Moreover, the university organizes a lot of trips to nearby places that are really pretty or famous like Yosemite National Park. Yosemite was absolutely beautiful and it is only 2 hours away from the university. Even if you have made friends that have cars, it is really easy to plan a day trip with them to go there to hike. Hiking is really big in California so almost everyone is up for it and it is also a lot of un



to do! Moreover, there are a lot of other places to visit as well like Santa Cruz and San Francisco. Lastly, I also tried to join in on the national holidays that the locals celebrated there like Halloween or Thanksgiving since those holidays are really big over there. The students there are very open and even offer you to go with them to their homes, which are usually far away from Merced. By going on random trips with the friends I made there, I also really got to see how they live, what they eat and what they do when they are back home. I, for example, made a lot of Mexican friends and by going to their homes I really got to know a lot about the Mexican culture as well. So, this way, I got to learn about 2 cultures: the American one and the Mexican one. However, I wouldn't go with just anyone to their houses, only with people that I would see often or that I had become real close friends with.

suggestions/tips

For other students going to Merced, I would really recommend to participate in as much as you can and try to talk with everyone. If you have any questions, there is always someone there to help you so there is no need to be shy. Moreover, I recommend that you join a club to get to know more people. This makes the whole experience way more fun and interesting because it gives you a group of friends that you can rely on and that will always help you. Also, try to say yes to every opportunity that you are given to do or join in on something. All of the little things add up to the whole experience of studying abroad because it is usually the little things that are very unique and different from anything you are used to. Lastly, I really recommend you to live on campus because it is a totally different experience. Especially in Merced it is way more fun to be living on campus than to be living in the city since the city is pretty small and there is not much to do.

CONCLUSIONS

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

I would recommend this university to others if you want to have a totally different experience from anything that you are used to in Utrecht. The campus is a little away from the city and it is pretty small. Right now, there are only about 8000 students, which is nothing compared to Utrecht. However, because of the small size, I actually really liked it there because you really get to know a lot of people very well and the connections that you make are very genuine and open. I also liked it because I was surrounded by the locals and not by internationals. Sometimes I missed having other international students to plan trips with but this way I got to know a lot about the culture there. I would only not recommend this university if you want to go to a big city where there is a lot to do. I would only recommend this university if you don't mind that the city is small and that you don't have much to do. Lastly, sometimes it was a little difficult that I didn't have a car to get somewhere or to go out to do something. I always had to rely on other people and their cars if I wanted to go somewhere, even though I have a driver's license in Holland. I just thought it was a little hard to hire cars and to drive in California. But if you don't mind all of this and want to experience something very different, then I would definitely recommend this university.

do you have any additional advice or comments?

Some additional advice would be to become good friends with your housemates and roommates because it is very common there that you are really good friends with them. You can try to contact people beforehand through the housing portal where you apply for the housing. On the portal you can see other people's profiles and see whether they have similar interests like you do or not. Then you can try and be housemates or roommates with them through the portal. However, even if you decide not to contact other people beforehand and let the university decide your housemates and roommates for you, they always try to match people with similar interests.