IT University Travel Report

Dear Student, this is a template – the aim is to inspire other students who may wish to follow in your footsteps. You are free to give your report the shape you want and to go beyond the questions, as long as you cover the information asked for below. You are also very welcome to include pictures and contact information – but you need not. Remember that the report will be made available on the intranet.

Host University: UC Berkeley, School of Information

Study Programme at IT University: Digital Design and Communication

Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad: One semester as a freemover

Courses studied abroad:

- Needs and Usability Assessment
- Managing in Information-intensive Companies
- Designing Mobile Experiences
- Design and Development of Web-based Product and Services
- The Politics of Digital Piracy

Exchange Period: Spring 2014

Your stay abroad

What was it like to study at [the university] (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

The School of Information is a cross-disciplinary graduate program with around 70-80 students in each year group. That makes the faculty one of it smallest by size at the university. This is a huge advantage when it comes to socializing and in general, the students at the program arrange a lot of social events such as Thirsty Thursday, Trivia Game Night, I-Tea etc. The diversity of the students is strong, they come from very different backgrounds and countries and it has been great collaborating with so many different personalities.

As one of the best universities in the U.S. the academic level at UC Berkeley is very high. Both professors and fellow students set and expect high academic standards. The professors come from highly respected companies in the IT industry and many of them have also grappled with entrepreneurship. Thus, they have a very up-to-date knowledge about what is happening in the industry and which practical skills that are in demand in the "real world". At the same time, they teach from a more practical perspective unlike many Danish university professors who’s research is more theoretical grounded.
The students typically work a few years between their bachelor and their master’s education. Since they are paying for their education their choice of courses is very carefully considered. The students are very ambitious and determined which is very noticeably during group collaborations. They spend a lot of time on their studies and they spend a lot of time being physically present at the faculty. This makes the faculty a breeding ground for professional discussions and socialization.

Generally, the workload on the different courses is very front-loaded. Where we in Denmark are used to spending an additional amount of time during exam periods, a lot of work is expected during the semester at the School of Information. On the other hand, the final exams are not so heavy. Almost all courses rely on group projects with both a verbal and written exam part.

The university is located in the Bay Area, which is rich on culture, food, sunny weather and of course tech (Silicon Valley). It is difficult to avoid being influenced by the tech and start-up atmosphere.

**What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?**

My main motivation for studying abroad was to challenge myself on an academic and professional level. I made it very clear to myself that my focus was on that specific part which is why I chose to apply for UC Berkeley. The university is known for its challenging and motivating institution with an energetic environment of collaboration between many different students of different academic backgrounds. Although I had enormously high expectations for the stay it turned out to be more rewarding than expected. I got very much challenged on my creative, academic and practical abilities, I improved my English and I got to know a lot of interesting people and their cultures.

**Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?**

As mentioned, I learned much but one of the things I have to highlight is the high standards of the professors and the students at the School of Information. I learned from the very best within my field. Altogether, the strong academic legacy of the university, the vision of the professors and the collaboration with fellow students have further defined my approach to the field of user experience research and design. I intend to combine my solid theoretic foundation from the IT University with the exciting practical dimension from UC Berkeley into my final Master thesis.

**Arranging your stay**

**Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay:**

When you apply for a university that is not one of the IT University’s partner collaborations, it involves a lot more personal work. As a freemover, you have to arrange everything yourself with involves a lot of emailing back and forth. I knew a student who had been through the same process a year before which was of great help because the process can be a bit overwhelming. Often the U.S. universities’ websites do not provide a lot of information but the School of Information staff and the UC Berkeley Extension office are very helpful and always ready to answer any question you might have. Even though it may seem as a challenging and frustrating process, it is entirely worth it.
What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use (if any)?

If you by any chance can get in touch with other students who are or have been in the same situation as you, this would be a great resource. The student I knew that had been through the same process was of very great help to me. Also, the International Coordinator at the IT University has a lot of good inside information of the exchange processes in general.

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

The UC Berkeley Extension office provided me with a list of recommended housing possibilities. I chose to live at a kind of small housing arrangement with 11 other students from different studies and countries. Rent in Berkeley is in general very high but it is possible to find a cheaper shared apartment in town, which I think I would recommend. The only downside is that it is easier to find an apartment while you are in town, which makes it difficult to do if you want to plan ahead while you are still in Denmark.

Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad

Housing is as mentioned expensive in Berkeley and you might have to share a room. This is pretty common when studying in the U.S. Also, grocery shopping is pretty expensive but it is cheap eating out, which is also a good way of socializing.

I recommend buying a used bike from another student but public transportation is also very functioning.

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?

I applied and got funding from:

Kontorchef Waldemar Paulsen, Nordea, Knud Høijaard, Oticon and the ITU Travel Pool.

Other scholarships worth applying for:

Augustinus Fonden, Otto Bruuns Fond and scholarships from your local high school or community.

I recommend applying for scholarships as soon as possible since some of them only have 1 or 2 deadlines a year. Also, the process of applying can be time consuming.

Recommendations for other students:

Make up your mind and be very specific about what you want out of your exchange and chose a university that suits your needs.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me:

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