

SEP Report

1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	FASS/Sociology
Host University	University of California Berkeley
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY 15/16 Semester 1

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**
- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**
- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

Studying/ Learning Culture at UC Berkeley

To summarize the learning culture at UC Berkeley, it is based on an independent, individual-based learning model. As a student majoring in the social sciences, the learning culture I experienced was more self-driven than Singapore's model. Students are expected to complete readings before class and discussions are actively constructed around these readings. Failure to complete any readings would make it difficult to follow lectures and discussion sessions. Readings are usually discussed in-depth during discussion sessions and are similar to tutorial sessions at NUS- they are mostly driven by student participation.

These are the important parts of assessment: class participation, groupwork, individual essays and mid-terms as well as finals. Class participation is akin to tutorial sessions in NUS. Essays are either individual or group-based. This is also very individually-driven as students are expected to arrange meetings with professors during their office hours at their own available times to discuss their paper. Overall, majority of the responsibility of learning falls upon the shoulders of students. Students' questions fuel discussion sessions. They are expected to follow up on readings and approach professors or teaching assistants at specified office hours if they have any queries.

Academics at host University

What I liked most about the academics was that there was a lot of independence and autonomy given to students to pursue their interested topics of research. For some of the modules that I have taken (Social Consequences of Population Dynamics, Transnational Feminism), I had enough freedom to even apply what I learned to social phenomena in Singapore.

However, at certain times, I found it difficult to convey ideas during discussion sessions. Certain classes involved heavy discussion sessions that required a fair amount of general knowledge about current issues in the United States. It was daunting at first but with some independent reading during after-class hours, understanding the local context is still manageable.

Module registration and mapping advice

I have noted a few helpful points for future SEP participants, especially those who will be attached to the same school and are also FASS/Sociology majors.

> Plan modules and map at least a month in advance as you might not be able to get the modules you

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want in the partner school. Priority is given to local students.

> UC Berkeley's credit transfer system enables 4 modules to be taken and mapped back to an equivalent of 20MCs in NUS. However, this requires extra planning. This will only work if all the modules taken are of one category (e.g. Major, minor, UE or Breadths). A combination of modules from different categories will not enable a complete transfer.

> UC Berkeley's classes are intense and will require a lot of independent studying. 5 modules was a stretch but it is still manageable if you are consistent. Be prepared to deal with additional workload if you are going to take more than 4 modules.

> It is possible to write e-mails to UC Berkeley's professors and appeal to be enrolled in certain modules that are already full. If you are placed on the waiting list, there is a high chance of getting into the class. However, do have a back-up class/plan in mind in case the appeal fails.

Please list the courses that you took during SEP. (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit (Host School Credit)	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
DEMOGC126	Social Consequences of Population Dynamics	4.0	SC3xxx	Level 3000 Sociology dummy code	4*
GWS102	Transnational Feminism	4.0	PS21CP	Level 2000 Political Science dummy code	4*
LGBT20AC	Alternative Sexual Identities and Communities in Contemporary America	4.0	SC3219	Sexuality in Comparative Perspective	4*
RELIGST190	Buddhism in America	4.0	SC3208	Religion in Society and Culture	4*
SOCIOL127	Development and Globalisation	4.0	SC3xxx	Level 3000 Sociology dummy code	4*

*Transfer ratio: 20 units at UC Berkeley = 24 units at NUS

From: http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/prospective/undergrad/exchange_ratio.html

2. Accommodation

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

Do you have any other suggestions?

Staying at off-campus accommodation

I stayed at an off-campus accommodation during my exchange stint at UC Berkeley. This was a shared apartment with 5 other tenants. I found this apartment from an online advertisement which was risky as I was unable to view the apartment before I arrived since it was so far away. There are certain pros and cons to renting an off-campus apartment.

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Pros:

- ✓ Cheaper and much more affordable than on-campus accommodation
- ✓ Flexible arrangements for personal needs (cooking, shower facilities, etc.)
- ✓ Rooming with locals can facilitate acclimatizing to local culture

Cons:

- × Difficult to see the room beforehand because of the physical distance
- × May be located far from school compound
- × Have to make additional arrangements for transport and food
- × Not all leasing offices allow for signing leases for only a semester

Suggestions

In view that on-campus accommodation is extremely exorbitant, it is almost always that students would have to look at off-campus accommodation options.

To ease this difficult process, an online platform could be created with liaisons between UC Berkeley and NUS to assist us in searching for accommodation. My personal experience was particularly unpleasant as I had very little assistance and had to place my trust in people whom I met online which was risky and caused me much distress. More assistance has to be provided in helping exchange students find accommodation, especially in countries that are located further away (USA and Europe).

3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

Recommended activities/ student groups

1. SMSA (Singapore- Malaysia Student Association) organizes many events such as celebrations of local festivals (such as Mid-Autumn Festival) as well as adventures around the Bay Area. The group is open to everyone and is not restricted to Singaporean or Malaysian students. It is definitely recommended to join the group if one ever gets homesick as they often organize cooking events which would please those who miss local delicacies.

2. ASUC SUPERB, which is run by the student association in UC Berkeley, often organizes free movie screenings, concerts, games and other exciting events that anyone in UC Berkeley can join.

3. RSF gym facilities at UC Berkeley provide many group workout sessions that do not require any additional fees to join.

4. Cost of Living

Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?

Please list travel expenses separately.

> An estimated expenditure at SEP:

- Accommodation (including electricity, water bills, Wi-Fi): About USD 3000

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- Food: About USD 1000-1200 (Higher if one eats out often)
 - Phone bills: About USD 80-100
 - Personal Expenditure (shopping, personal goods, etc): About USD 1000
 - Transport: <50USD (UC Berkeley student card lets students ride buses around Berkeley for free)
- > Travel expenses:
- Travelling around US, Canada (air tickets, car rental, etc.): About USD 800
 - Accommodation during travelling: About USD 900-1000
 - Food: <200 USD (depending on length of travel)

5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

Pre-departure challenges: Finding accommodation

The largest challenge I faced was in the pre-departure phase as I found it difficult to find suitable accommodation without busting my budget. Living on-campus was extremely expensive (the cheapest option was USD1600/month). Despite being warned about high expenditure for exchange stints to the US, it was still beyond my expectations. Off-campus accommodation was much more affordable (USD 600/month). However, there was a lack of advice or help in looking for these apartments. Many apartments required us to be physically present to sign the lease, which we were unable to do, as many of us were only arriving in US days before the school term commenced. The entire process was frustrating as we were rejected or ignored many times as we were only short-term international students that were not staying for long. I managed to find accommodation from an online website and skyped with the locals to secure my housing.

Even though my friends and I were able to secure off-campus housing in the end, it was still an arduous process that caused unnecessary stress before we arrived in the US.

Academic challenges at host University

Studying at UC Berkeley was difficult at first because of the differences in academic culture. However, the professors and faculty were very approachable and were always readily available at their office hours to help with any queries.

Travelling challenges

Travelling in the US/Canada is much easier if you have a driver's license and are willing to drive in a foreign country. It is not impossible to travel without a car but there are many areas that are much more accessible if one can drive. Exchange students who do not possess driver's licenses can find friends who are willing to drive. It is most ideal if there are 2-3 drivers in each group to take turns to drive as driving trips can be up to 7-12 hours.

6. Overall SEP Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

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Many months of planning and decision-making culminated in a unforgettable exchange experience. Particularly amusing was that most of the difficulties and challenges I faced occurred pre-departure while searching for accommodation. However, my spirits eventually lifted up as my exchange stint officially began. It was an extremely eye-opening experience to revel in the academic culture and environment of the US which noticeably differed from Singapore. Many friends or acquaintances rave about travelling adventures during their exchange stints. As the months passed, however, I realized that the most life-changing moments did not happen during travelling but occurred subtly during day-to-day living and studying in Berkeley. I learnt that I was more capable than I thought I was. As clichéd as it sounds, I was able to step out of my comfort zone and became much more comfortable in conveying my opinions to others. I was able to hone my communication skills as well as ability to adapt in an entirely foreign culture and place. In the end, it was these harrowing and difficult experiences that contributed most to my personal development.

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7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

- Stay open-minded and stay determined even in the face of adversity!

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1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	FoS/ LifeScience
Host University	University of California, Los Angeles
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY 15/16 Semester 1

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**
- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**
- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

Classes were conducted very similarly to those in NUS. However, students were more engaged and responsive during lectures - even in large group settings students were asking questions and enquiring. I feel that this is because the American culture is more relaxed, and thus people are not afraid to step out and say/do something whereas in Singapore it is faster paced and people are always rushing. Hence we sometimes tend to be afraid to ask/do something because we feel that we might be disrupting other people/their thought process/creating a delay in the lecture.

What I did not like most was the grading system. The top scorer in class will set the standard for an A and the subsequent grades will be adjusted according to the top scorer. I feel that this elicits a sense that we do not actually have to do very well, we just have to do better than others. It makes things more competitive between students and may also result in an unhealthy form of competition.

Module registration process was very easy in UCLA as it was first- come first- served, and as exchange students we could email the prof directly to allocate us modules because he needed to waive our pre-req. Module mapping did not go very well for me because my initial mappings were all rejected, even the final one. I did not want to take the risk of registering for modules that might not be mapped, so I went ahead and registered for modules that have already been previously approved for the seniors. This resulted in me registering for modules I was not 100% interested in. I was limited to modules that have already been mapped (to play safe) and could not register for electives (in fear of them not being able to be mapped). Despite multiple emails to my home faculty, no reply, advice or approval was given. Hence I took only 3 modules and have to overload for the remaining quarter (7 modules). I wish that I had received replies for my enquiries because being overseas alone and far from home was quite scary and I needed advice before making the next move.

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Please list the courses that you took during SEP. (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Module credit
NEURO SCM10 1A	Cellular and Systems Neuroscience	4	LSM32 13	Molecular and Cellular Neurobiology	4
MCDBI O138	Developmental Biology	4	LSM32 33	Developmental Biology	4
MIMG1 68	Molecular Parasitology	4	LSM39 91	Exchange Enrichment Module	4

2. Accommodation

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

Do you have any other suggestions?

On campus hall with one roommate, public toilet on same level. Very much YES for staying in this dorm because the food in the dining hall is AMAZING. Imagine a more casual form of fine dining. Pretty food in small portions already prepared at "stalls" and all you have to do is take them. Buffet style. You can take as much as you want. They have different flavoured milk- non-fat, low fat and full cream... all sorts of dessert that tastes amazing, pizza, pasta, Asian and everything. Four dining halls to choose from. The best part is, it is all healthy!

3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

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Dasheew Centre for International Students had a carnival for international students to mix and mingle around. They also organized many events such as bus tours around touristy areas of Los Angeles.

4. Cost of Living

**Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?
Please list travel expenses separately.**

\$6,000 approx on housing in a double occupancy classic room (food in dining hall included)
\$2,000 on flight from Singapore to Los Angeles
Spent a total of \$3,000 during the whole quarter and an extra 3 weeks after the quarter ends on extra items such as food outside when we are off campus, on travels including flights to New York, Arizona (Grand Canyon National Park), Montreal in Canada, Zion and Bryce National Park in Utah.

5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

Felt alone and so scared the first time I arrived and had to make my way to the hostel in the evening. Just be prepared and sort out a map and transport to the place you will be staying at. Once you are in school you will meet a lot of friends. Make friends with students who are also on exchange! You both are going through the same thing and would want the same thing/expect the same thing out of the exchange programme.

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6. Overall SEP Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

It was amazing. Saying goodbye was terribly difficult because you would have bonded so much with friends that you meet there- they become your family out there. Probably the most cherishable thing about studying abroad is all the people that you meet – and not only that, when you meet new people who are very different from you (of course, from the way they are brought up) you gain their perspective and you add that to how you view life to broaden your horizons. It was an eye-opener.

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

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1. Student Information

Faculty/Major	Science/ Bachelor of Environmental Studies
Host University	University of California, Merced
NUS Semester and Year of Exchange (eg. AY14/15 Semester 1)	AY15/16 Semester 1

2. Study at Host University

Please provide information on the academics at your host university:

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**
- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**
- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

- **Studying or learning culture at your host university. How were classes conducted?**

The learning culture at UC Merced was slightly different from the culture at NUS. Lectures were held in a significantly smaller setting, where each lecture only had 30- 40 people at each time. This gave the students more time and space to interact with the lecturer. Because of the smaller group size, the lectures were more discussion focused, with the students asking questions and the lecturers raising it as a discussion to the rest of the students. The setting felt more like the tutorials that we have in NUS. Also, the modules held mixed module codes, where both graduates and undergraduates would attend the same lectures, but were graded differently. I feel that having graduates in the lecture really benefitted me as they raised many insightful questions that were discussed and answered by the lecturer. The labs I took were conducted in the computer lab and were headed by the TAs for the modules. For each lab assignment, there were clear instructions given to us in the form of a manual that instructed us on every step. The labs were mostly self guided using these manuals, and the TAs would walk around and help those who had questions.

- **What did you like most or dislike most about the academics at your host University?**

I really liked how the lectures were conducted. With a smaller class, I felt that there was less distance between the students and the lecturer and hence I felt more inclined to ask questions and participate actively in the discussions. I also liked that the module included graduates, who value-added to the discussions that went on during lectures.

What I disliked most about the academics is that their curriculum is not as well planned as that of NUS. Certain assignments do not have a specific rubric or framework for students to follow. As a result, sometimes it is difficult to know what the lecturer wants from that particular assignment.

- **Advice on module registration and module mapping**

Definitely start mapping early. At my host university, there is no bidding system for the modules. Instead, it works on a first come first served basis and slots are often highly limited, with core modules being filled up really quickly. Mapping early also helps you react quicker to sudden changes like changes in lecture and exam timings that might disrupt your entire schedule.

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Please list the courses that you took during SEP. (Please take note that the list of modules available to exchange students at the host university are subject to change. This table merely serves as reference.)

Host University			NUS Equivalent		
Module code	Course title	ECTS Credit	Module code	Course title	Modular credit
ENVE130	Meteorology and Air Pollution	4	GE3741	Dummy Module	4
ENVE152	Remote Sensing of the Environment	4	GE2215	Introduction to GIS & Remote Sensing	4
ESS124	Terrestrial Ecosystem Ecology	4	GE2220	Terrestrial and Coastal Environments	4
WH004	Intro to Carto and GIS	4	GE2227	Cartography and Visualisation	4

2. Accommodation

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

Do you have any other suggestions?

What kind of accommodation did you stay in during your exchange (eg. on campus / off campus)?

I stayed off campus during my exchange. I rented a room in a house that housed other students as well and took the bus to campus.

Would you recommend this accommodation to future outgoing students?

It depends on the price difference between on campus and off campus housing. Off campus housing is usually going to be cheaper, but for that price difference you would be giving up on on campus activities and interacting with a large proportion of the student community. In my case, the price difference

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between on campus and off campus housing was simply too large to forgo, hence I chose to stay off campus instead.

Do you have any other suggestions?

If you do stay off campus, try to find an accommodation that is near to school or at the very least, near to a bus stop that has buses that bring you to school. Also, while looking for accommodation, do some research on the neighbourhood that the accommodation is in to get a feel of how safe the neighbourhood is.

3. Activities during SEP

Were there any activities organized by school/student group/external organizations at your host university which you would like to recommend to other students?

At my host university, they had a program called the Outdoor Experience Program that was pretty similar to our Outdoor Activities Club (ODAC). This program organizes outdoor trips that happen almost every other weekend and these trips include everything from backpacking in Yosemite National Park to kayaking at San Francisco Bay to surfing at Santa Cruz. At a really affordable price, these trips really allowed me to experience California in a way that I would have never been able to do on my own! It also allowed me to interact with many of the students that went on this trip as well. I would highly recommend that if your host university has anything that is similar to an outdoor exploration club, definitely go for it.

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4. Cost of Living

Please provide an estimation of how much money you spent during your SEP?

Please list travel expenses separately.

I spent a total of about 22k SGD when I was on exchange, including, rent, travel and health insurance, visa application fees and flight ticket but not including school fees.

Travel expenses (Flight, train, etc) – 40%

Accommodation (Hostels, hotels) – 30%

Food and activities – 20%

Misc – 10%

5. Challenges

Did you face any challenging issues during your SEP stint? How did you overcome it/them?

The biggest challenge I faced was the inconvenience in travelling. The area I was in was relatively remote and the public transport available was not as good. Hence, simple tasks like buying groceries could take up a good amount of time as you had to synchronise your time with the few buses that were available. I overcame that challenge by better planning my activities for the day such that I would efficiently get my things done and still manage to catch a ride home.

6. Overall SEP Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience and attach some photos that represent your exchange experience.

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My exchange experience is one that I will never forget. I feel like I have grown so much in this half a year that I spent abroad. I feel more independent and more open minded to the world around me and I feel that this experience has definitely helped me develop and mature as an individual. I had such an enjoyable time in the USA, where I made many friends of many different races and went to so many different places that I would not have dreamt of going to prior to the exchange. At the same time, I feel like after living abroad, I have also learnt to appreciate the things I have back in Singapore more as well. Small things that we often take for granted like public transport and security are things that may not be present abroad, and are definitely underappreciated by Singaporeans. After this exchange, I definitely feel more comfortable living abroad than I have ever been and it has opened my eyes to to the world around me and I enjoyed every single moment of it!

7. Suggestions for future outgoing students

Please share any other suggestions for future outgoing students.

Definitely try new things. Try things that might not be found in Singapore such as local delicacies and activities like skiing and skydiving.

Do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Exchange is a time for you to discover yourself and expand your boundaries. By stepping out of your comfort zone you will learn so much more about yourself and what you are capable of.

Interact with the locals. It might be difficult to assimilate into a foreign culture straight away but try to talk to the locals as much as you can. They will give you an insight to their culture that you may not be able to experience in Singapore.

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