

Experience Report: The University of California, Santa Barbara

Overview:

My year abroad at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) was easily my favorite year in college thus far. In just a few months I made lifelong friends, learned invaluable lessons, and experienced new destinations. I would like to thank the Direktaustausch Committee at the Freie University Berlin for having given me this chance and for allowing me to grow as much as I have through this program. I could not have imagined going anywhere else and am glad to have been able to call UCSB home.

Flight, Transportation, Living:

Norwegian Airlines was the best priced flight I could find as a one-way flight to Los Angeles. It cost around 200 euro and I could add an extra checked suitcase for only around 50 euro. Some Norwegian planes even have wifi and I can only recommend it. Once arriving in Los Angeles, there is a bus that goes from LAX to UCSB for \$50 but in my opinion, there are much cheaper options. On Facebook there is a group called "UCSB Rideshare" and students post frequently about driving to LA, UCSB or other destinations. If you want to get a ride with one of them, you simply comment or message them and it usually costs around \$10-\$15. This way you also get to know a UCSB student and are not stuck in a slow bus all day. This option also works for going to places such as San Francisco and even Las Vegas. The Amtrak, their train system, is nothing compared to Germany and is pricey for what it delivers.

When you arrive at UCSB, you will see that it is a university of bikes. They have one of the best bike paths in the nation and almost every student owns a bike. Again, beware of where you buy your bike. Some foreign exchange students buy theirs from the Bike Shop which ends up costing more than double. Some accidentally buy a stolen bike. In the Facebook group "Free and For Sale" people are constantly selling bikes and they are usually much cheaper. You can even just drive down the four main streets of Isla Vista which are Pasado, Trigo, Sabado Tarde and Del Playa and look if there is a bike for sale in anyone's front yard. It is a healthier, greener, and faster way to get around the campus and Isla Vista. Isla Vista, or "IV", is where the students live and is a nice community.

These four streets I previously listed, are the best place to live in IV. They are the perfect location: close to all your friends, school, and the beach. Rent for anything in the Santa Barbara/Goleta area is going to be expensive. It is unfortunate but you can still try to find the best deal. People post in the Facebook group "Free and For Sale" looking for roommates all the time. To be added to the group you just need to request it and sometimes put in your UCSB school email. The best is if you can find a place to live that is not under the control of a major Real Estate company. They will overcharge you and are famous for keeping your deposit for small things like a mark on the wall. Your deposit could be around \$600-\$1200 and that is not money you want to lose. I had Meridian and do not recommend renting from them. I had a shared room which was okay but if I had the option I would get my own room. However, a single

room can run between \$800-\$1400. It is a very interesting cultural difference that people share rooms and there may even be three people sharing one, small room. However, with California as expensive as it is, it comes to no surprise. Don't forget, it is worth every dollar to be able to live in this beautiful place and experience California! I am still in contact with my friends at UCSB and am very willing to help anyone find a place to live. I know how hard it is and it helps when you know someone there.

Academics:

UCSB is truly a one of a kind university. It ranks high internationally for a wide range of disciplines and even tops national charts for their programs such as Sociology and History. For any major, you will find a multitude of courses pertaining to your subject and even courses you never imagined would exist. The year I was there they even offered a course on memes, which turned out to be a rather difficult class for my friends who took it. For myself, I took courses in Sociology, Global Studies, Marketing, Spanish, Political Science, and more. Due to the quarter system, I was able to take more courses in a year than I would have been able to on a semester system. However the quarter system is not necessarily easier, in fact, I find it more difficult. Midterms, papers, and finals came around much quicker and you were learning information to the day before the final due to the short amount of weeks in a quarter. Everything was fast paced and you had to work to keep up. Yet again, it is manageable and there are so many great study spots on campus.

Something interesting to take is the Technology Management Program (if that interests you and fits your major). Foreign exchange students are allowed to complete the program and it takes about a year. If you do not wish to do the program, you can also just take courses. I took the TMP 111 and it is by far my favorite course I took. The program is a certification which is extremely helpful for your future. On the subject of classes, if there is any class you really want to take but it is full or it says you do not have the correct prerequisites, email the department and their assistant is usually very understanding and can often grant you a spot!

Culture:

The self-proclaimed school culture at UCSB is "work hard play hard". As much as this phrase has been overused by our generation, it really fits to the UCSB culture. While the school sometimes is branded as a party school, the students are amazing at balancing both a healthy social life with a serious school mentality. For me this is important as in future jobs, recruiters and bosses want to hire someone not just for their skills but also their personality. After all, they will have to work with you and want it to be someone they enjoy working with. Students at UCSB are molded to be just that.

Extracurriculares, Alpha Kappa Psi:

During my one year I tried to do as much as possible. I joined numerous clubs which ranged from OxFam to CALPIRG to the AMA (American Marketing Association). I ended up being Vice

President at OxFam, which is a non-profit with the goal to reduce poverty and end hunger in the world. During the first or second week of every quarter, there is a fair where most clubs present themselves and you can sign their email list to become part of their newsletter and find out about when they meet. I highly recommend this to meet people and add interesting things to your resume.

I also joined Alpha Kappa Psi, which was the most life-changing decision I made during that year. As a foreign exchange student, the University would not let me join a social sorority but I learned I could join a professional fraternity. These are also social groups but they differ in that they are like-minded people who have the same professional goals. Alpha Kappa Psi is the premiere business fraternity on campus but there are also fraternities for Medicine, Law, and cultural ones which focus on ethnicities or other belongings. For girls: fraternity in the professional and cultural sense can mean for men and women. Social fraternities are only for men. Social sororities are for women. Therefore, I was able to join this professional fraternity as a women. It allowed me to meet the best people who I have so much in common with and they even turned out to be like a family. It is a group where we had internship workshops, resume building, date-events, and much more. Professional and cultural sororities or fraternities are another great way to meet people and grow both personally and professionally.