

What made you choose the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley)?

Among the universities available, UC Berkeley was my top choice because I was planning to take social science modules on exchange and this university was best known for its social sciences. The modules that were offered for other disciplines I was interested in also appealed to me such as the Introduction to Human Nutrition: Managing Life. Finally, UC Berkeley was also more preferable to me than other UC campuses as it works on a semester-based instead of a quarter-based system, allowing me to take my desired number of modules over a more spread-out timeline. This provided me with more free time and thus a better balance between education and exploration while abroad.

Tell us about your favourite class in UC Berkeley.

My favourite class was the Sociology of Education. I learnt so much about education and inequality in education, as well as the processes behind it, such as how income-differentiated parenting styles shape student identity and influence educational outcomes. I also enjoyed working on the assignments, even though they were difficult, as they made us think more about the processes that influence inequality in education and allowed us to apply what we learnt, providing creative room to suggest real-life solutions to these problems. For instance, for our final exam, one essay question asked us to imagine we were starting a non-profit for a local school district and allowed us to design its mission and strategy as well as write about its potential impact based on course material. The professor taught me many life lessons by conveying deeper truths and missions in his ending speech; that every child is meant to be loved and meant for so much more, how education is meant to help them learn who they truly are, what they are passionate about, to teach truth and plant seeds of hope for a better world. I remember him saying, "From deep inside my heart, you are welcome here", and I felt so moved in that moment. These moments where what he spoke resonated with me, made the class unforgettable.

What was your most memorable trip that you had on exchange?

My most memorable trip was a road trip to Yosemite. I remember having so many new experiences on this trip, like staring into the night sky and being in awe of the biggest stars I had ever seen. The views in Yosemite were also amazing; the snowy mountains and clear blue skies hiking up Yosemite falls were really beautiful. The waterfall itself was spectacular - water, as it flowed down from between the rocks, turned to snow and there was a rainbow painted across the middle. It was really a sight to behold.

What did you learn / realise about yourself from your exchange at UC Berkeley?

After travelling without much rest over spring break, I came back to Berkeley sick and exhausted. Because of this, I wasn't able to get started with the plans for work I had that week and had to skip a week of classes to recuperate. The shape I was in made me feel really bad about myself, and I kept thinking about the plans I had ahead of me. I experienced adverse reactions in my body; it was then that I realized how stressed I was feeling. This made me realize how many expectations I had put on myself in work and also in life in general. Not being able to meet my expectations made me feel ashamed of myself. Yet, in this experience, I also came to encounter love through my friends who cared for me in my frailty and told me that it was okay not to be perfect. In being loved and held, I could learn to embrace my own imperfections.



Cheryl hiking Yosemite Falls.

Doo Wei Jun Cheryl



The rainbow over Yosemite falls.