

Final report - My two quarters at UCSB in a wrap:

Hello! I am Alina, I study biochemistry, and I went abroad to UCSB for the fall and winter quarter 2021/22 (Wintersemester 2021/22). As these were the first in-person lessons after covid and the first arrivals of in-person exchange students, the situation for applying for a visa and finding housing was slightly different. In the following, I am going to tell you about it.

Preparation, Housing:

While deciding what your three preferred Universities are in the process, you should consider what these Unis stay for and why you would profit from them in your future career. All the UCs have an excellent reputation, so it was hard for me to decide which UC campus would suit me best as all the departments are represented in all UCs. So, I checked online if I could find something about the actual live on those campuses and their outstanding reputations/ what degrees the Unis are “famous” for. I decided that UCSB has a tremendous scientific reputation and a busy social life. Moreover, this campus is right next to the beach, and if you find a room on Del Playa IV, you would not only have the beach on your doorstep and have the Uni close but also experience the “whole” college life/ vibes.

Once they accepted me for UCSB, the following essential organization things were the visa appointment, applying for a scholarship and the DS-2019, housing, insurance, and flights (+transport to SB/ new house). As it was in Covid-times, the only available visa appointments in Berlin were emergency appointments (only available shortly before departure day). You had to fill out a lengthy digital questionnaire before applying for the appointment; take this time into account. They will also take your passport to put the visa inside, but no worries, they ask when you depart and send it accordingly. In general, I would not do anything last minute during this application process as deadlines approach fast.

You will have to do more research and invest time in choosing and applying for a scholarship, as especially SB/ Isla Vista is an expensive area to live in. Moreover, you will have to apply for your DS-2019 on the UCSB website, but again no worries, this process is straightforward and well explained in the emails UCEAP (exchange team from UCSB) sends you. When I was looking for scholarships, the DAAD deadline had already passed, and for the Fulbright program there were far more applicants than spaces. Finally, I applied for the PROMOS scholarship and got it, which helped me financially. It was beneficial for me to identify other students who were going to go to UCSB in the Direktaustausch meetings and chat with them about the application process we were going through. Also, it is very comforting to know at least one person in SB during your first days in your new environment.

As you could read in the other reports, the best, cheapest and accepted international insurance is from ISO, and it only will take you about 10 mins to get the certificate. Also, be aware of the waiving deadline for the costly UCship insurance as there are also fees if you miss it. I never used the ISO insurance, so I cannot tell what would be covered and what is not. Furthermore, UCEAP will advise you when your passing time is for your courses. Before this starts, you should have looked thoroughly through the class schedule of the same quarter the year before (I advise you do this also for your motivation letters) to know what courses you want and what you would take as an alternative because spaces fill up fast in passing times. If the course you are looking at has prerequisites, you should text the professor of the class with your UCSB-email, tell him about your situation, and attach proof that you have done such courses (English transcript and translated course description from the FU website). As many people drop courses after the first two weeks, you might be able to get a spot – be there in the first class and talk to the profs or TAs (older students who will lead you through your sections, aka Übungen). This is called: crashing a course.

Housing

Housing was a huge problem for all the FU exchange students that attended UCSB. The key is to look early, and I recommend applying for student housing. As exchange students are a low priority, it is not likely to be admitted, but possible! Due to the current housing crisis, UCSB put many applicants in hotels in Goleta or Downtown (“far” from Uni, about 30 min by bike or bus; the bus takes 45 min -1 h to Downtown). This is not an ideal situation (no kitchen, no laundry, no one to talk to if you have no roommate), but better than nothing. As the whole Covid situation was not clear and many exchanges got cancelled to other countries, I started only 2 .5 months before departure to look for a room on Facebook. As the other reports described, I also used all the available UCSB Housing groups on Facebook. I also tried on Craigslist, but there are many scammers as there are on FB! Please do not fall for their lies and always request a video call to see the room. Unfortunately, it is typical to ask for up to 2 rents ahead of your arrival and deposit, so before sending that money, be sure that it is a genuine offer. In any case, it is known that the landlords in IV are very unfair when it comes to overcharging or returning the deposits. That is why the ideal situation would be if you could sublease a bed in a room from a girl that is going for an exchange as well. In my case, my housing for the first quarter was only pure luck: 5 days before departure, a friend's friend of mine I texted earlier about my housing situation finally got back to me and said he knew someone who rents out a room in his house. I took it and learned that it was 30 min with the bike to the University (still in Goleta, next to the trader joe's grocery store). At first, it seemed fine for me, but when I arrived and saw that everyone else was living in IV or a maximum of 15 min with the bike away in Goleta, I really wanted to move for the next quarter. So, I applied

for student housing and texted every day on FB for rooms for the winter quarter. Eventually, I found my absolute dream house right next to the beach on DP, where I could sublease a bed in a quad (3 other girls lived in the room). In this house lived a total of 14 other girls. Of course, the bathroom was locked often, and there was noise, but falling asleep with the sound of the waves and waking up to have breakfast in front of the ocean every day was worth it! Also, the girls I lived with were all so friendly and welcoming; I was fortunate. I heard of different stories in student housing, e.g., where all housemates did not get along/ were not respectful. To experience this college life within campus and community, you will have to live in IV. However, do not worry if it does not work out– it is always what you make out of your situation!

Studying at UCSB:

I do not have to add many things here because most of the critical differences were all stated in older final reports:

- The quarter is ten weeks long, so midterms and assignments/ weekly quizzes approach fast.
- If your house is noisy, no problem, go to the extensive Davison library with eight floors.
- There is lots of homework and various weekly deadlines, so be aware if you quickly lose track of deadlines!
- The Professors and TAs are easy to reach, and their communication is closer and more open than we know it from the FU.

First things I did when I arrived:

- Getting a bike and the student ID (allows you to travel on the bus for free but warning: the buses are not reliable so with a bike you are more flexible and can take it with you on the bus)
- Going to all the “get to know more international students” meetings from UCEAP
- Opening a chase bank account (most of the students wrote that in their reports as well) + Venmo or PayPal
- I did not need to worry about my SIM card as the Mint mobile SIM card came already in my DS-2019 letter, so I just needed to install the app and choose my plan (\$75 for three months) and had a connection once I landed in LA.

Final, personal tips:

If I did this again, I would not open an account there, even though it was easy. I would do an account on Revolut (which comes from the UK) where you get an IBAN and a VISA/Mastercard Debit card and can send money via regular bank transfer to that account. No need for TransferWise etc. You can change EUR into any currency you want, and the rates

are excellent! Additionally, when you leave the US, you get a travel card, and there is no need to close the (Chase) bank account again. (Advice: For opening an account in any case, you will need your social security number or in German Steueridentifikationsnummer)

I also recommend the excursion club located at the end of DP right at the entrance to Devs Beach – ideal to rent surfboards/ stand up paddleboards and wetsuits and catch some waves after class. The membership costs \$30/ quarter; they offer weekly excursions such as hikes, surfing, etc. They allow you to rent tents and sleeping bags for outdoor trips on your own or with them together!

Moreover, being 21 and over is defiantly an advantage if you like to go out on weekends and especially Thursdays (college night). The parties on DP do not require IDs, obviously, but the clubs in Downtown do, and some students with fake IDs/ alcohol also got caught, so do not be one of them. Yes, there is much party life at UCSB, but they all live after the “work hard, play hard” concept.

Finally, I want to bring your attention to the foodbank. It is in the UCen and provides groceries for free for students that are not working. They have pasta, rice, fruits, vegetables, oil, canned food, and toiletries, eggs, bread, or milk on special days. All the international students I knew went there almost every day and could save a lot on grocery spending.

In conclusion, I can say that I have learned a lot and achieved my goal – improving my scientific English understanding, writing convincing essays and communicating better in English. Furthermore, I had the best six months of my whole study time and experienced the “college life” every movie talks about. I am trying to say that I gathered a lot of new skills both academically and socially/personally, which is what an exchange semester is all about. Not to mention all the new friends I made, which I would say I will stay in contact with for a long time and use this opportunity to visit them in their home countries. UCSB was the best choice for me personally compared to, e.g., UCSD or UCLA, which I have visited over one of the weekends. Choosing the right campus for you depends on your personal goals from this exchange and the study/ living situation you would feel most comfortable in. Therefore, I tried to give you a detailed impression of my stay at UCSB, and I hope it helped with your decision.

Good luck to you, and enjoy your time abroad to the fullest!