

Post Exchange Report 2021

USA, UC Berkeley

Faculty of the Arts and Social Sciences - International Studies

June - August 2021

Tianna S

Post Exchange Report - Berkeley Summer 2021

During the Summer 2021 semester, I had the privilege to partake in a (virtual) Exchange at UC Berkeley. During the pandemic, like other students I was feeling the stress of online school and faced challenges of completing courses that were otherwise supposed to be online. However, having been a year since going “virtual”, I started to think about opportunities that I may not have the chance to do if they were in-person, so I decided to apply for a virtual exchange. Many people thought that I was “missing out” by not being on campus (which in some cases may be true) but financially it was the best decision for me (with no additional travel/living costs) and if it were in-person I may not have been able to go. As well, it allowed me to continue to work, participate in clubs and take classes simultaneously at SFU - and I would not change my experience for anything.

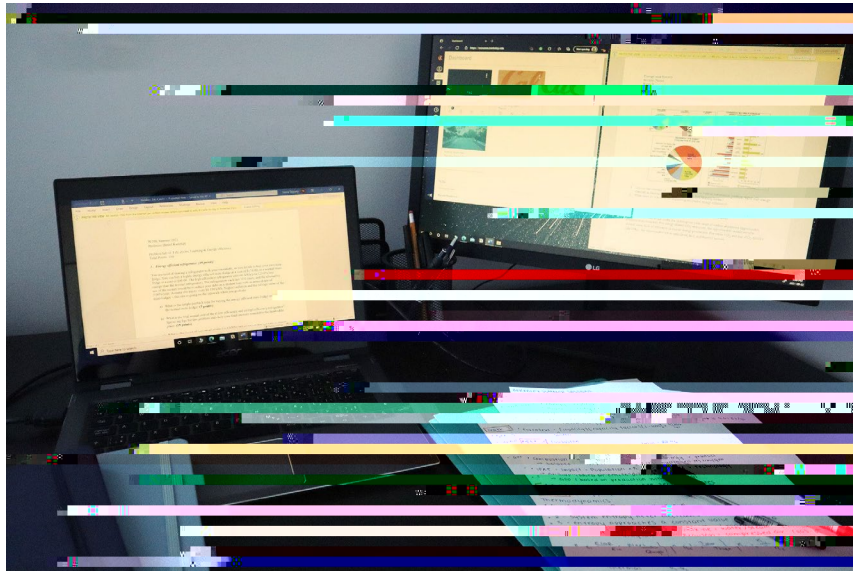


Fig. 1 Image of Tianna’s online workspace

Preparation (February - May 2021)

Since it was a “virtual exchange” I did not have to prepare any documentation, visas, or any travel-related information, however all the preparation was to make sure I was enrolled

properly and had access to the resources, campus information and programs I needed to start my exchange.

Firstly, there are two major differences between the UC Berkeley Exchange and other SFU partnered exchanges, in that (1) it is an Early Application deadline and (2) it is a Direct Fee-Paying program. Most study abroad applications are due in February, but with Berkeley the application is due in early January. This is so once you get a conditional acceptance in February, you are able to enroll in your classes early (summer session students get to enroll one week earlier than Berkeley students). As a Direct-Fee paying program, instead of paying tuition through SFU, you pay through direct Credit/Debit/Visa with an international payment website (such as Flywire). Sometimes this makes it easy to pay tuition as it is a direct method, however if you are on an SFU scholarship, paying directly you are unable to use it to cover the costs as the payment is “unaffiliated with SFU”. Lastly, once you enroll in your classes in February, you are given one week to pay your tuition - since it is an international transaction make sure to give

keep in mind which classes you want to take and if they will fill an elective or required course.

Therefore, be mindful that going on an exchange has a possibility of extending your degree.

Which leads to the very last preparation task before you start your exchange, which is the Exchange Credit Application. I recommend starting this as soon as you have your class syllabus, as the process can sometimes take a while - and once you complete it you do not have to worry about it for the rest of your semester (until you have your Berkeley transcript at the end of the

a group with a few other international students participating in the summer sessions and for 8 weeks we were encouraged to join specific community events hosted by our mentors, and complete discussions through BCourses to get to know other students. At the end of the session, we got entered into a draw to win a Berkeley swag bag!

Reflection (September 2021)

system for coursework: everyone has their own ways to manage their actual courses (google docs, Notion or Evernote to name a few), but it is also important to bookmark, download or copy links to important school sources as well (like the school library, summer sessions handbook, academic calendar, and transcript order service). These sources and where to find them differ from school-to-school, so going to info sessions or searching them up prior to the start of the semester eases the stress when you need them.

Overall, my experience at Berkeley has been nothing but a great learning opportunity, and I highly recommend studying abroad for a semester in your degree (even if it is virtually). You get to meet a ton of different people, take classes that may not necessarily be offered, and get access to workshops, events, and resources to enhance your learning. Now, studying abroad does come with some challenges, and for me, it was -- but I think the challenges I have faced like navigating new interfaces, online communication, new academic subjects, and expectations (and maybe even more for those who are actually travelling abroad) those are just part of what makes it a great experience.