

EDINBURGH SCHOLARS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT COMMENTS FALL 2017

Elise Cutts '19 – Geology Caltech/Geology Edinburgh

If you're a geology major, you really should study abroad. I'm sure it's great for other majors, but really, you'd be proverbially kicking yourself in the shins not to take advantage of the opportunity as a GPS student. Southern California is a geologist's playground for sure, but if you're going to study the Earth you had sure better see more of it than one corner of one continent.

The Edinburgh study abroad program is a great opportunity to reach new academic horizons (quite literally, as a geologist, since chances are you'd be going on plenty of field trips here). The terrain here is so wildly different than the basin-and-range features that we usually go out to observe in the desert – and you won't melt waiting for your professor to explain what you're looking at either. I took three classes with field trips (although unfortunately two conflicted with each other so I had to skip out on the enrichment trip in favor of a mandatory trip). If you're here, you absolutely need to take Paleontology and Sedimentology – it's taught by this Chicagoan professor with the same enthusiasm for dinosaurs you'd observe in your average six year old, and involves weekly afternoon field trips to fossil-rich locations within 1-2 hours from Edinburgh. Caltech doesn't offer a Paleontology course, so studying abroad is your only chance to learn about T-Rex. Even for folks in other majors, the sheer size of Edinburgh University means that there are course offerings far more diverse than those you'd find at Caltech.

If you're the kind of person who wishes that you had more time to work on personal projects, you'll love the teaching style at Edinburgh. Instead of problem sets, most classes have things called *practicals*, which are basically recitations in which you work through a problem set or lab with your professor(s) and TAs around to make sure you get everything. Practical usually aren't graded – they literally just exist to make sure that you're learning, meaning that for someone like me who does my best learning in low pressure environments, picking things up is a lot easier and a lot less stressful. Learning is really done at your own pace – you'll need to keep up on what projects are due when to make sure that you're not rushing to do everything at once, but at Edinburgh you'd certainly have time to work on non-academic things which are important to you. I've personally really loved having the time to work on fiction writing and on filling my sketchbook – two things Caltech has effectively prevented me from doing for the past two years.

There are certainly opportunities to fill your free time with more structured activities as well. The societies are awesome and diverse – you'll want to join more than you actually can. My advice is to show up to the first couple of meetings for a handful you're interested in, meet the folks in the societies, and then choose one or two you want to join. I chose the linguistics society and the "adventuring" society (tabletop roleplay like D&D), and both have been great. Your department will probably have a society as well, which is a good way to meet folks in your field of study. There's also fun stuff to do all over the city, from the more touristy attractions to bar trivia. I HIGHLY recommend bar trivia – since you can go to pubs in Scotland, why not try it out? One of my friends from Caltech got a group together with a couple of Edinburgh students and go once a week for food, cider, and quizzes. We do pretty well, actually! Often, they throw

in questions about American states to try and catch the UK patrons off-guard. Having an American on a trivia team is usually an asset – but be sure to bring someone British to answer the UK pop culture questions.

Finally, and I can't stress this enough – *study abroad isn't just the city you're studying in*. Europe is small. Like, Texas alone could probably eat up most of the "continent" (*cough, Europe is part of Eurasia, *cough*) on its own. While a flight to London from LA has serious bank-breaking potential for your average college student, a flight to London from Edinburgh can be as low as 20 pounds if you're travel savvy. Plenty of study abroad folks have enjoyed flying around Europe on the weekends while they're here – while cheaper than flying from the US, this still is a lot more expensive than flying domestic within the UK. There are a ton of places in the British Isles that are really worth seeing, from cities to the highlands, to crazy islands in the far north where you can see puffins and the northern lights.

To sum up? Study abroad is great, and especially great if you're a geologist. There's time to learn in your own way, and to pursue personal projects if you're into that. If you're more into structured recreation, the school has a ton of societies which cater to wildly diverse interests and there is a lot to do in the city as well. It also puts you at the doorway to Europe, and, more accessibly, Britain (which honestly, I think is a better bang for your student-budget buck than skipping across Europe). If you're thinking of doing it? Do it. No house position, club presidency, or whatever else you're on the fence about giving up to study abroad is worth missing out on this opportunity.

Mary Giambrone '19 - Computer Science Caltech/Informatics Edinburgh

Edinburgh is a very walkable city. Even with a stress fracture that necessitated my left foot being in an orthopedic boot for the first 7 weeks of my study abroad experience, I was still able to explore the city. I climbed Arthur's Seat, walked to Princes Street to pick up all the essentials for my new flat, and even danced at the International Students Ceilidh and the Welcome Ball Ceilidh (KAY-lee) - and that was all during Welcome Week!

At Caltech, there are typically problem sets due each week for each of your classes, but at Edinburgh, each class has only a couple of essays or assignments, and an exam at the end. This means that there is greater flexibility about when you can do your work, but if you manage your time poorly you may find yourself with three essays to write in the same week, and it can be stressful. If you plan, however, you'll find that you have much more time day-to-day and on weekends. This allows you to go on cool weekend trips. I've been on 3 trips hosted by the International Student Center here; to the "Harry Potter Bridge", Aberdeen, and the Isle of Skye. Each of these trips was a nice chance to see the beautiful scenery of the Highlands. I've taken hundreds of pictures on these trips, and just around the city of Edinburgh, because the architecture and nature here are really pretty.

The living situation here is quite different than what I am used to at Caltech. Living in a 12-person flat sounds like it is similar to living in an alley in one of the Houses, but in practice it's different because we all have to cook for ourselves, which means that the kitchen and lounge areas are much more heavily used. Also, because there is no standardized House dinner time, it is more hit-or-miss in terms of who you'll see as you eat each day. Also, at Caltech, most freshmen are in the same classes, and a lot of bonding takes place through working on problem sets together. However, I'm hardly in any of the same classes as my flatmates, and the work

here is much more individual than that at Caltech. The RAs here do make some effort to foster community here, including a fun weekly event where they provide dessert as they show the Great British Bake Off weekly episode.

There's an abundance of societies here. The club fair can seem a bit overwhelming, especially in the midst of all of the Welcome Week activities, but it's a good chance to see what organizations are out there. I joined the Catholic Student Union, the Wind Band, and the Clarinet Choir. The CSU is a really nice community, though I've missed some of their activities because of the weekend trips I've been going on. Wind Band and Clarinet Choir have been a nice way to keep up with playing the clarinet.

I've also had more time to get back into hobbies I don't have time for at Caltech, as well as trying some new ones. I already mentioned cooking as a necessity here, but it's been fun to get a chance to try out new recipes and learn more about cooking for myself (and explore all the nearby stores). I also have gotten into baking, which is a fun (and yummy) way to fill up time between classes. Also, with a bit more relaxed schedule, I've actually had time to read for fun, which is something I don't really do at Caltech, and something that I missed.

Caroline Howard '18 - Computer Science Caltech / Informatics Edinburgh

Studying abroad at the University of Edinburgh is without a doubt one of the best decisions I have made during my time at Caltech. I have always loved traveling, but living outside the United States is a completely different experience than going trips, and I can't recommend it strongly enough.

Learning is much more independent here. There are fewer assignments for grades, but just as much material to learn—this means that the responsibility is on you to stay on top of the material, do the reading, and go to tutorial prepared. Tutorials are in addition to classes, and are like a round table discussion of class material and group working of problems. You never know if your tutor will put you on the spot, so it would be clear to everyone if you come to tutorial unprepared. They also provide a structured environment to receive clarifications on the material, and cater to a much more hands-on learning style.

Because Edinburgh is a much bigger school than Caltech, the social and extracurricular opportunities abound. No matter what you're interested in, chances are, somebody else is interested in it too, and has formed a society to enjoy that interest in an organized fashion. At Caltech, I sing in an a cappella group; here, at the music section of the societies fair, there were 6 groups I could join, in addition to multiple show choirs, chamber choirs (including the Royal Scottish National Orchestra!), folk singers, and the group I ended up choosing, a Renaissance Choir. It's been a great experience, totally outside the realm of what is available to me at Caltech. Additionally, I powerlift, which has always felt like a very solo hobby. But at Edinburgh, I found a community of serious female powerlifters—one of them is on the Norwegian national team—who inspire me, check my form, and keep me motivated. I've grown invaluable from their help and support.

The University's size also means that Old Town in Edinburgh feels much more like a college town than Pasadena. There are tons of good student deals at restaurants, and more coffee shops than you could dream of visiting in the short 4 months here. Rather than just the Red Door, the university itself has at least 3 student-friendly cafes, as well as multiple bars. With

400,000 inhabitants or so, it is a small enough city that it is all very walkable, but large enough that it'll never bore you. There are also a couple of great hikes at Arthur's Seat and Calton Hill that provide amazing views, and you don't even have to leave the city. Entry is free for the Scottish National Museum, the Scottish National Gallery, the Royal Botanical gardens, and many other smaller museums.

The pace of life is slower in Scotland. I find myself with plenty of free time to get enough sleep, to spend time on my hobbies, or just to sit and read with a pot of tea. Before coming to Caltech, I loved reading for pleasure, but once I started Caltech I almost never did. Study abroad gave that back to me. It is such a refreshing change of pace. If you are unsure about whether you might want to study abroad, do it. You'll be glad you did for the rest of your life.

Cindy Huang '19 – Mechanical Engineering Caltech / Mechanical Engineering Edinburgh

Whenever you are in a new environment, I think you will discover bits of yourself that you had not known before. As with no exception, study abroad has been an amazing opportunity to grow, meet new people, and experience new things. I think that there is no place I would rather do it than at the University of Edinburgh, situated in the heart of Scotland's beautiful, lively city. In my classes, I am working with people from France, Germany, Sweden – places from all over Europe – and learning more about their accents, culture, and how they interact with others. I am living with people from Glasgow, Perth, and London, which is definitely a unique study abroad experience. The diversity at the university allows me to see issues from a more global perspective and I am also able to see how engineering classes are taught from another country's point of view.

During the weekends and spare time, there are so many societies and activities that you will never be bored. There are trips to places in Scotland, such as the Isle of Skye and St. Andrews, planned by the International Student Center in Edinburgh. You can also go on trips to other countries in the UK and EU where you will learn so much history and culture that you really feel like that place where you grew up in North America is only a small speck on the world and you do not know much at all. At a local level, you can walk to Stockbridge, visit the free museums and galleries, and hike up Arthur's seat with people you meet, whether they are Caltech students, other study abroad students, or students who are doing all four years at the University of Edinburgh.

As the classes are less workload intensive, the students get more time to engage themselves in extra-curriculars, which is reflected in the range of societies that the University has to offer, including the Pole Dancing Club, the Wine Society, and the Hyperloop Society. You will find yourself learning a ton of new skills, whether it pertains to how to talk to people at bars or how to cook for yourself. Studying abroad has been an amazing experience and I am so glad I took this opportunity. I think if you do decide to study abroad, it will be an experience which you can take with you for the rest of your life.

Chih-Chieh Lee '19 – Computer Science Caltech/ Informatics Edinburgh

Study abroad has always been something that I dreamed of since applying to college. Having grown up in Taiwan and the United States, this exchange program has provided an opportunity to learn and experience a different culture by living in a foreign city for a whole semester.

Edinburgh is truly an old and beautiful city. Walking around the city, you can observe the stunning sceneries of Edinburgh. From the top of Arthur's Seat, you can see the entire city landscape and the North Sea. If you want a more casual climb, Calton Hill is a great place to visit while viewing some of the iconic monuments and buildings. Outside of Edinburgh, the Scottish Highlands contains many great attractions to visit. The International Student Centre organizes many trips to the Scottish Highlands in September and October. These trips are great for a weekend visit to Glencoe, Fort William, Loch Lomond, Aberdeen, or the many Scottish castles. The Isle of Skye, in particular, is my favorite place to visit in Scotland. The two-day trip to the Isle of Skye took us to the most majestic geological features in Scotland. The beautiful waterfalls and the Old Man of Storr left a lasting impression on me. We were even able to take pictures with the Highland Coos off the side of the road. The Highlands was truly a magical place to visit!

On the academic front, the University of Edinburgh offers a very different educational experience comparing to Caltech. The School of Informatics provides a selection of courses that cover study topics not taught at Caltech. For instance, I am currently taking "Computer Security," an interesting and well-taught class not available at Caltech. It is important to know that the informatics classes here focus on the more practical aspects of computer science. Other than computer science classes, the University of Edinburgh has a wide selection of humanities and social science. "Archaeology 1A" is a fascinating class that I am currently taking. Classes at Edinburgh tend to have a more doable workload. For most of my classes, there is only two graded assignments and one exam. However, there are ungraded practice questions for my tutorials. These problems help me prepare and study for the classes without stressing over grades. With this more doable amount of work, I can spend more time on preparing for interviews and applying for internships. It also allows me to participate in many of the "societies" at Edinburgh and meeting new people.

Overall, I would recommend study abroad to anyone. It is not only an opportunity to visit and explore Scotland, but it is also an opportunity to learn outside of Caltech.

Hye Joon Lee '19 – ACM Caltech/ Mathematics Edinburgh

Studying in the University of Edinburgh feels very different from studying in Caltech. What I find the most fun about studying here is meeting all the people who are pursuing majors that are either very rare or nonexistent at Caltech. I have talked to politics majors who know more about my country (Korea) and its' history, and I have talked to first year med students who had -in their first month of attending the university- analyzed a dead body, and I have asked art majors how they brainstorm for their next projects and seen their very impressive sketches. There is such a diversity in thinking and majors in the university that I am humbled every time I talk to someone new.

Within the first few weeks of coming to the University of Edinburgh I was able to make good friends with people who I can explore Edinburgh and nearby cities with (like St. Andrews). Edinburgh is unlike any other city I have been in. Every street corner that you go to is absolutely beautiful and there is just so much to do and explore that I will never run out of things to do. Also, a friend I made in the taster session of the Gymnastics Society somehow convinced me to join the Skydiving society. I never thought I would ever say this, but I am skydiving in November.

I really enjoy academics in the University of Edinburgh. The lectures are well paced and the tutorials are so wonderful. During tutorials there are several tutors who go around and you can ask questions. I really liked that you can ask questions one on one with tutors, without feeling the pressure of having to ask the question in front of an entire class of students. I find that this makes learning less stressful for me. Another cool thing is that one of the classes I am taking is actually taught by a Professor who is a Caltech alumnus.

I found that study abroad is a great opportunity to learn how to be more independent. For example, I have always lived on campus (and been on the Caltech Board program) so I had not been used to cooking for myself, which I found to be necessary in trying to budget wisely. I never realized how much I enjoyed grocery shopping and cooking until I came here. There is the general grocery store that is about 3 minutes away from the dorm that can satisfy all your grocery needs, but there is also an Asian supermarket, Indian and Arabic supermarket, Farmers market (etc.), and visiting all these different grocery options has been my new favorite thing to do.

I can say that choosing to study abroad was one of the best decisions I made since coming to Caltech. Time flies when you're studying abroad in the University of Edinburgh and I can't believe that I'm already halfway through my time here. I would strongly recommend studying abroad at the University to anyone at Caltech, and I can promise that it will be a blast!

Michael Miller '19 – Computer Science, Chemistry Major and English Minor Caltech / Informatics Edinburgh

Studying abroad is an adventure, and Scotland is the perfect setting. Let's start with the classes. Having only four feels like a vacation, especially when most of them lack weekly assignments of any sort, instead having 2-3 long term assignments and final exams. The lectures are slower paced than at Caltech, so I don't need to sprint to keep up as much outside of class. Additionally, I enjoy my classes a lot more now that I have time to really delve into the material at my leisure. The prime example is the English Literature class I'm taking. There is no skimming the reading here. I can read the poems, plays, and prose thoroughly, and then peruse the optional videos and critical analyses given by my tutorial leader.

Extracurriculars are also great, especially since I have time to do as many as I want. You can continue to do your sport as part of the team here, even though you're only a visiting student. So, I continue to play Frisbee, except with a larger team and more frequent practices and tournaments. My favorite society (club) here is Wine Society, something that just wouldn't work at Caltech. Every week, we try 6 different new wines, building my palette and my snootiness at once! I found a love for good wine, and will definitely explore it more when I turn 21.

All of the above is why you should study abroad, but why Edinburgh? Well the city is unlike any other. Let's talk about clouds. We were taught to associate them with rain and sadness. On the isle of Britain, they are omnipresent, and it is the sun I've only seen a handful of times. Yet Edinburgh looks so beautiful when it is overcast and drizzling, because it was built with that weather. The windy, winding streets literally loop through each other, as parts of the city are in two distinct levels. As a result, to get from point A to point B, there are many different viable paths going up, straight then up, up then down, and twisting in some other way. Each of the narrow, half-hidden cobblestone alleyways hides something interesting, something worth

seeing. Every trip to the grocery store is an adventure, where I find new restaurants, cafés, bars, and shops.

This place is magical, and everything is walking distance. Please consider it, and bring a raincoat!

Kabir Mohammed '19 - Geobiology Caltech/Biological Sciences Edinburgh

Studying abroad was one of those things that I always dreamed about doing, even before I applied to college. Sure, I had travelled with my parents before, but there was something about actually living and learning in another country that was inherently appealing to me. When I started studying at Caltech, I didn't think that would happen. I kept convincing myself that it would keep me from graduating in 4 years, or that it would mess up my class schedule (which it didn't). However, my friend managed to convince me to apply right before the deadline, and I am so glad I did.

Studying abroad at Edinburgh has been amazing. I've made so many new friends from different backgrounds that I hope will last a lifetime. I get to live in this magical city with so much history. I have the ability to take weekend trips to Italy and Denmark and Belgium, an opportunity that I would never have at Caltech with the constant problem sets. So much is so close by.

I also have the ability to learn material here in a way that I never would have at Caltech. Before I left California, people kept telling me that I wouldn't learn anything at a university that wasn't Caltech. However, I am finding that my lectures here are interesting and full of new material, and I have yet to have a bad lecturer. My peers here are all intelligent and driven, and I'm finding myself really enjoying it.

Studying abroad has also made me appreciate Caltech more. Although a respite from the intense workload was very welcome, there are aspects of the learning environment that I find myself missing. I never thought that I would miss problem sets, but I do in the face of all the self-study here. Studying abroad has been an awesome experience, and though I will be sad to leave Edinburgh, I will cherish the connections I made and be happy to return to Caltech.

Ciara Ordner '18 – Chemistry Caltech/Chemistry Edinburgh

My time at the University of Edinburgh has been a welcome change from Caltech. In terms of academics, the workload is very manageable, even if you want to travel on the weekends. The lectures here are much slower paced than those at Caltech, and almost all of my classes post comprehensive lecture slides and notes online. Instead of recitations with graduate students like at Caltech, we have tutorials lead by the lecturer, but with a much smaller group. In terms of homework, there is much less to physically turn in. However, the time this frees up is left for the student to self-study. It has also given me ample time to apply to graduate programs and fellowships, probably increasing the quality of my applications.

In terms of the university itself, it is huge! My lectures all have around 100 people in them, but the tutorials shrink down to about 20 people, so you are not losing out on valuable face time with the lecturers. Since most study abroad students are STEM majors from Caltech that means most of your science classes will be at the King's campus – a 20-minute bus ride away from the main

campus. It's very exciting to be at a large university where you can't walk from opposite ends of campus in under 5 minutes.

That being said, Edinburgh is a small city, perfect for studying abroad. Don't let the large campus scare you away! Everything in the city you need is within a 15-minute walking distance — groceries, shopping, CASTLES(!) etc. Within about a week, you feel comfortable to walk around without a map. Also, the public transportation system here is phenomenal. There are bus stops on nearly every block, and the prices are quite affordable. Edinburgh is also a very international city. You will definitely meet your fair share of Scots, however, there are far more foreigners here than I ever would have expected. I have met people from Latvia, Poland, Hungary, China, Malaysia, Korea, and more. This makes for a much more culturally rich time abroad.

I'd highly recommend taking a term away from Caltech to go study abroad at the University of Edinburgh. The school and the city have so much to offer. And if you want a break from the city, it's a easy bus trip to the beautiful Scottish Highlands or a cheap flight to nearly anywhere in Europe. You'll certainly have some exciting adventures!

Kavya Ramakrishnan '18 - Computer Science Caltech/Informatics Edinburgh

I always knew I would study abroad when I applied to college. Studying abroad offers me a more well-rounded experience than just traveling to another country would. By moving to another part of the world for a term, I am exposed to other ways of thought and ways of life. I have found that the students here are well-versed in the politics, history and current events around the globe; this international perspective is something that I have been lacking as the American media is so America focused and insulates us from many international affairs.

I wasn't completely sure about coming to Edinburgh when I applied: I knew it looked gorgeous in photos but I've never traveled in Europe before so I didn't know what to expect. Within the first few days I knew I made the right decision. There is always something to do in Edinburgh, but there's not so much that it can be overwhelming; it's has much more of a relaxed vibe than a larger city like London, for example. I enjoy walking down Princes Street and getting some hot chocolate at Hotel Chocolat and doing some shopping. We also live right across the street from the National Museum of Scotland, which has free entry and is packed with interactive exhibits (as well as Dolly the sheep!). Edinburgh also has hundreds of societies (clubs), but my favorite is the Vegetarian/Vegan Society. I explored the farmer's market with VegSoc a couple weeks ago and did a cafe crawl with them. They also have weekly potlucks, and the food is always absolutely delicious.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go to the Isle of Skye which was absolutely stunning. We got to venture through the highlands of Scotland and meet other exchange students through the International Students Centre. I also went to Barcelona one of my first weekends, and visited a friend in London a couple weeks ago. This weekend I'm going to Paris which has been a dream of mine since I started learning French in middle school. Travel from Edinburgh tends to be slightly more expensive with a lower frequency of direct flights compared to an international hub such as London, so booking early is key to avoid higher fares.

In addition to the cultural immersion aspect, I have had the chance to take more diverse courses abroad than those offered at Caltech. The computer science department at Caltech does not have all the courses that I would hope to take, whereas the University of Edinburgh

does. I'm taking Extreme Computing which is a really difficult course, but my previous internships have been incredibly valuable in preparing me for some aspects of the course that I haven't learned in my classes at Caltech. This course teaches us how to use Hadoop which is becoming increasingly vital in the software industry. Vision and Robotics is taught in a flipped classroom setting which I really enjoy. Computer Security is a really cool class (as expected); I get to try to hack into different systems for my assignments. I am also able to take humanities courses in a variety of fields not offered at Caltech. I am taking a Criminology course where we discuss current events (like Las Vegas, the stabbing at Oxford, etc) and apply the ideas we've learned to analyze these situations, which is a completely different (and more relevant) structure from any other class I've taken. I am also taking Introduction to Cognitive Science, which is exactly what I'm interested in: the intersection of computer science, philosophy, and psychology. I've really been enjoying all the lectures because we have had a different professor discuss a different topic almost every class. It's been really rewarding to take such an interdisciplinary course.

Overall, the courses have less work since (unlike Caltech) classes don't have weekly problem sets and your grades are largely dependent on your performance on the final. But for several of my courses, the assignments I do have are much larger than the average assignment at Caltech, so procrastinating isn't an option. You definitely have to be more proactive here than at Caltech because most of your grade is determined by the final, so you need to be self-disciplined and review material on your own.

Studying abroad is a truly unforgettable experience. I've had the opportunity to take really cool classes that aren't offered at Caltech while exploring some of the oldest cities in the world and living in a beautiful location that has the ideal balance of city and nature. I encourage everyone to apply for this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

Anise Rau '19 - Astrophysics Caltech/Astrophysics Edinburgh

As someone who has travelled a lot previously, I never realized how different it would be to live in a city abroad, rather than simply visit. Instead of trying to cram every touristy sight in a day, you have the luxury of taking the time to experience each one, while discovering hidden gems, and immersing yourself in the culture. I now know to laugh at the tourists who futilely resist against the wind with their umbrellas. Edinburgh itself is the perfect city. It is incredibly student friendly, and juxtaposes its history and beautiful culture alongside modern day amenities. I have spent a lot of my time wandering the city's different neighbourhoods and hitting up various cafés to find the best hot chocolate. The streets are curvy and can be very steep, and different parts of the city are on different levels. My favourite spot has to be the ledge behind the Edinburgh castle – it is a hilly patch of Scottish grass (which is greener and thicker than any grass I've seen before), perfect for sitting down with a book or some music, and watching the city go by.

A lot about the college structure emphasizes self-management. Living in self-catered halls, you have to cook for yourself, which is something I've always enjoyed, and like having the time to develop my skills. The classes are very interesting, and while there are assignments, it is up to you to get them done, giving you the time to really absorb the material. Physics classes are very standard lectures, with tutorial sessions that allow you to work on the problem sets. I highly recommend taking a humanities course, especially one not in a subject not offered at

Caltech – its very interesting to hear the perspectives of students who grew up in different education systems.

It is a bit easier here to have a work-life balance. The societies are a fantastic way to get to know people and participate in fun activities. I have been most active in the Harry Potter Society, which has mostly involved HP-themed games and trivia, as well as the Wine Society, involving wine tasting socials. They are a great way to meet people outside of your option, and people of diverse ages. Given the school's large size, there is a society for everyone, and always a chance to meet new people.

Overall, I would highly recommend studying abroad, especially at Edinburgh. It is a fantastic way to experience something new, and learn both in and out of the classroom. And as a junior year physics student speaking to other physics students – it's totally possible!

Tucker Reese '19 – Mechanical Engineering (English Minor) Caltech/ Mechanical Engineering Edinburgh

I don't think I could have properly prepared myself for Edinburgh. It's such a contradictory and unpredictable city, with the university to match. The diversity of experience available here means that it's easy to find your niche, but it can also be easy to feel overwhelmed. Coming from as small and relatively quiet a campus as Caltech, the size and centrality of the university can be a bigger culture shock than the change of country. Little things, like remembering to exchange information with people you meet if you ever want to see them again, have to be learned.

For me, studying abroad has been a refreshing change of pace. I've enjoyed the opportunity to live and work in a new environment, with a different culture and different resources. I've been involved with the Formula Student team here, as well as the Literature Society and the Murder Mystery Society. Otherwise, I've spent a fair amount of my free time exploring the city, which is unexpectedly easy to travel. There's plenty of old buildings to stare at and quirky little shops to visit, as well as a few absolutely breathtaking sights.

In my travels around the city, I've spent way too much money on coffee in the cafes that are all over the place. How one city sustains so many coffee shops is beyond me, but there's a spot for every vibe. They're great for studying or meeting friends or just feeling sophisticated while staring out the window at the rain. The café culture has definitely been one of the highlights of my Edinburgh experience.

Academically, Edinburgh is a refreshing change of pace as well. Where Caltech has a very assignment-based model, Edinburgh has a curriculum much more heavily based on self-driven study. This has taken some getting used to – the lack of structure can be unnerving – but I've grown to like this system. I think it can only be a good thing to learn a new way to learn.

In all, I would strongly recommend studying abroad in Edinburgh to anybody who wants to try something new: a new city, a new academic culture, or even a new club. There's plenty to do, plenty of people to meet, and plenty of things to see. The process is hard, the change is scary, but the experience is worth it.

Anna Resnick '19 - Computer Science Caltech/Informatics Edinburgh

Even before coming to Caltech I knew that I wanted to study abroad. My desire to travel, gain exposure to different cultures, and learn to adapt in new environments brought me to apply to Edinburgh - a beautiful, multicultural college-town. Edinburgh somehow exceeded all of my expectations. Walking around the streets my first day was unreal - if you're a Harry Potter fan, it is Diagon Alley come to life (which makes sense because JK Rowling inspired much of her writing from Edinburgh). There are also the stereotypical kilts, bagpipes, cafes, and haggis shops. Edinburgh nightlife is incredible. The streets are crowded with students on pub crawls, others grabbing a quick bite of 'chips' and curry sauce (chips = fries), and an adventurous few making a quick hike up Calton Hill or Arthur's Seat for scenic views. Almost every weekend the International Student Center organises trips around Scotland, the most popular event being a road trip to the Isle of Skye. Most Techers this semester took advantage of that trip to see the Highlands, and the landscapes were unreal.

Studying in Edinburgh isn't necessarily easier than studying at Caltech, it's very different. The work is a lot more independent and requires you to pace yourself, otherwise you'll quickly fall behind. At Caltech there is more of a sense that the work is a group effort. Tutorials are very helpful in applying knowledge from class to actual problems, and attendance is mandatory. Because there is less required work, you have more time to absorb the class material. One pro to being here as a CS major is that several companies will provide a free trip + accommodation to London for final interviews, as opposed to San Francisco for example. After completing half of a semester at Edinburgh I've come to realize that although being abroad is wonderful in certain aspects, Caltech is very unique in other aspects. When I described Caltech to my flatmates, they were amazed at how homely and collaborative the environment sounded.

Studying abroad will definitely help you expand your knowledge in politics, improve your skills in cooking and map reading, and increase your Scottish/British vocabulary. Edinburgh is certainly not short of events with the diverse set of clubs and societies available; most people I know here are struggling to make time for everything. Because Edinburgh has so much to offer, you could easily enjoy spending every weekend here; however, there's also an abundance of cheap flights/trains to places around the UK (Ryanair is the way to go) - Prague, Barcelona, Paris, Rome, Glasgow, etc. There is no better time to take advantage of being so close to all of these places. Studying abroad has honestly been one of the best decisions I have made. It truly is a once in a lifetime opportunity to soak in another culture and experiment with a different educational style. If you're even slightly considering going abroad, just do it! You won't regret it.

Allison Tang '19 – Chemical Engineering Caltech/Chemical Engineering Edinburgh

When I heard about Caltech's Study Abroad program as a prefrish, I was immediately hooked. I've always been fond of travel, and Europe has been on my bucket list for years – I wanted to experience the gorgeous countryside, the cultural diversity, and the area's rich history. As someone who didn't even move out of the county to go to Caltech, studying abroad at the University of Edinburgh has been incredibly enlightening, refreshing, and one of the best decisions of my life.

The University of Edinburgh's Welcome Week is a great introduction to the city. With over 400 events, I found plenty of opportunities to meet other students and get to know Scottish culture. People are incredibly welcoming and kind, and I felt like it was easy to talk to new people.

Some of my favorite memories from Welcome Week are attending multiple ceilidhs, a type of social Scottish dance. With a live band that taught the steps to popular dances, I had fun making friends while trying to keep in time with the rhythm, in time with your partner, and in time with the rest of the group.

Welcome Week also included Activities Fair. I ended up joining a few societies, though I stayed the most active in Chocolate Society and the Murder Mystery Society. In ChocSoc, we have socials at the best chocolate shops in Edinburgh and next month we'll have a chocolate making session. My favorite dish so far is definitely chocolate fondant paired with white chocolate ice cream, but that might change as term goes on. With the Murder Mystery Society, we meet up every other week to play a fifteen-person murder mystery game written by one of our members. Each person assumes a role with secrets to protect, goals to carry out and actions to fulfill their goals, and every game has left me surprised at our members' fellow deviousness. My favorite part is the hilarious post-mortem discussion session at the end of each game as people try to explain their weird actions throughout the night.

Classes at Edinburgh are pretty different from Caltech. As a third-year ChemE, I was worried that my Caltech requirements wouldn't mesh well at Edinburgh, but actually I was able to take all my five classes for either option credit or HSS credit. Instead of sets, we work on the weekly self-study problems during tutorials, where professors are on hand to answer questions. Thanks to the longer 14-week teaching period, I felt that the pace of classes was slower, which I definitely appreciated. Because of the more specialized curriculum, each department has its own teaching office where they distribute resources like molecular model kits for chemistry, which I thought was really cool.

Because classes are less stressful, I have time to travel. The International Student Centre organizes weekly trips around Scotland, so it's pretty cheap and simple to travel around the country. The Scotland Highlands are so picturesque and idyllic, and one of my most memorable trips was to the Isle of Skye, where we got to see a bunch of towering waterfalls and beautiful mountains. Outside of Scotland, I have spent a few days in London and a weekend in Venice. London was pretty fast-paced while Venice was incredibly tranquil, which made a nice contrast; I'll always remember traversing the Grand Canal via gondola. I feel really lucky to have the opportunity to travel while studying abroad, and I think I'm getting a knack for planning trips – I'm going to Copenhagen this weekend!

It's only halfway through term, but I know I'm going to miss Edinburgh. The city is surprisingly walkable, and I'm never more than ten minutes away from the main campus, the main commercial district, or sights like the National Museum of Scotland or Edinburgh Castle. Our building is self-catered, so I've been learning how to meal prep and can even make a decent spaghetti carbonara. I didn't think studying abroad would give me so many chances for personal growth, but I'm glad it did. Life is so different at Edinburgh, and I know I'll take these memories with me when I return to Caltech.

Michelle Xiao '19 - Computer Science Caltech/Informatics Edinburgh

I was raised in the South, a place where the people are nice and the suburbs, huge. It is also a place very homogenous in culture. Travelling to Edinburgh was one of the best decisions I've made. I've met people from all over the world, and I am living more independently than ever.

Edinburgh itself is a great place to be. The University is at the center of the city, which makes it very convenient for travelling and shopping. Everything you need or want to see is within walking distance, and the city itself is absolutely gorgeous. On clear days, taking a stroll in Edinburgh is incredibly relaxing. The National Museum of Scotland is literally minutes away from my flat, and is a great place to spend an afternoon. Because we're not on a meal plan here, I've started to take cooking more seriously and learning new recipes. There are at least four grocery stores in a fifteen-minute radius. I love being able to decide what I want to cook in the mornings and do my shopping every day after class.

Our housing here is suite-style (my flat has 12 people), so we all have singles and share a common area. This means that you can be as social as you want to, and you'll always have your flat mates around if you're feeling lonely. Edinburgh also has hundreds of societies to join- from archery to sewing. Fresher's week, which is held the week before term starts, is the perfect time to meet new people. The school and its societies set up a lot of socials, coffee and bar crawls, and trips to Edinburgh castle. I had a great time going to a tea tasting, and hiking up Arthur's seat during Fresher's week.

As for classes, most courses here put a lot more emphasis on self-study and less on homework. Unlike Caltech, where most professors give one set a week, most of my classes only have two sets a term. However, students are still expected to go over their lecture materials and supplemental work/readings on their own time. For my Informatics classes, the lectures usually go over theory, while the weekly tutorials explore more practical applications. Because there are so few sets, exams count for the large majority of your grades. When studying here, you must be diligent in keeping up with your courses so that you do well on the exam. That said, schoolwork here is still very manageable and I have plenty of time to pursue my hobbies and travel.

All in all, I am incredibly happy with my decision to study abroad in Edinburgh. It is really a unique experience. Although I'm half done with my semester here, there is still so much of the city to explore. I'm loving all of my classes so far, and I feel lucky to be able to learn things that Caltech does not offer me. I've never met anyone who regretted studying abroad, and now I see why. I definitely recommend coming to Edinburgh.