

EDINBURGH SCHOLARS PROGRAM: PARTICIPANT COMMENTS 2016

Thom Chaffee '18 – Geology Caltech / Geology Edinburgh

I've always loved to travel, and always had a bit of that American obsession with UK culture. Coming to Edinburgh was an easy choice, not only for the famous Scottish geology, but also as a way to experience a different culture and get new perspectives on both my social experiences and my education at Caltech.

I'd been to London before, but was surprisingly not prepared for Edinburgh. The accent is what got me the most—ask a random local for directions, and you may find yourself more confused than when you started. Fresher's week, the time before classes when the University puts on a huge amount of events, was a great introduction to Scottish culture, especially the ceilidh (KAY-lee) dancing! It was also a fantastic start to the social side of things here. As someone who is always worried about making friends, I was amazed to find that for any activity I was interested in, it was no trouble to find groups of people who wanted to do the exact same thing. And it seems like everyone you meet is friendly, and so many people are from places all over the world that you never feel you don't fit in. Edinburgh is amazingly multi-cultural, and I've really enjoyed the diversity of experiences available to me here.

The University societies (what we would call clubs) are also a great way to make friends and have fun experiences. I signed up for about a dozen the first week, but ended up consistently going to only a handful. My favorites are the Vegetarian society, which has weekly potlucks of amazing homemade food, and a volunteering group I joined called Dirty Weekenders. With the Dirts, I went on environmental/conservation volunteering day trips every Sunday, as well as one weekend getaway to the beautiful countryside, and got to meet an amazing set of people who devote their time and efforts to helping the planet. Working with them has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life, and so much of my social life here has revolved around their events and activities that it's hard to imagine what would have happened if I hadn't bumped into them at the club fair.

Being here, at a large university with so much to offer, has been an amazing chance to branch out and try new things and figure out a lot about myself. It was really hard at first to break out of my shell and try new things, but I'm so glad I did.

I could talk about the rocks here for a long time, but I'll restrict myself to one paragraph. I was planning on doing some geo-tourism on my own, but I lucked out as my sedimentology class involved 4 day trips to famous geological regions around Edinburgh. On one trip we went to a waterfall where a famous paper was written; another to a beach to collect fossils. These were very enriching experiences, and instead of weekly problem sets for homework, I just had a single field report. This required me to take responsibility for learning about the sites we visited and let me

synthesize my observations into conclusions about geological history. The city of Edinburgh itself also has some great geology, and on my first trip to the top of Arthur's Seat, where you overlook the entire city to one side and the North Sea on the other, I was blown away and ended up going back several times. Whether you're interested in geology, or just nature and hiking and beautiful landscapes, I cannot recommend this city enough.

I have to say, I didn't expect to spend much time feeling like I missed Caltech, but I surprised myself. Maybe it's cliché, but being away made me realize what a great and unique place it is, as well as the opportunities that I have while there. I'm really glad I was able to get that perspective. Edinburgh classes feel less stressful than those at Caltech because of the longer semester, and while this has been a very different experience from the last two years, it is actually hard to say which I prefer. So I'm very grateful I gave myself something to compare the Caltech experience with, and I feel like I'm now even better prepared to make the best of my time at Tech. Of course, when I return next term and the workload hits again I know I'll be thinking fondly of the days spent digging in the dirt, and the cold nights spent dancing and meeting new friends.

Lucy Chen '17 – Mechanical Engineering & English Minor Caltech/Mechanical Engineering Edinburgh

Study abroad has been a pleasant break from the nonstop work schedule of Caltech. There is time to cook, pursue hobbies, go out with friends, and in general, feel human again. Edinburgh is an underrated gem of a city that feels both cozy and vibrant. Also, going to a big university for a change has its perks; cheap yet well-taught dance classes, brain-expanding humanities lectures, interesting clubs (like for beer brewing, or whisky tasting) and, most importantly, the time to enjoy them all. And of course, study abroad wouldn't be the glamorous rite of passage it is without some weekend trips. Isle of Skye in clear weather is truly breathtaking. For more of the music and art scene, there's a cheap bus to Glasgow. London is just a train away too. I'm finding study abroad to be a fantastic experience and I know you'll find it just as fulfilling and fun, if not more.

Jaden Geller '17 - Computer Science Caltech/Informatics Edinburgh

When I was applying to colleges, I never dreamed I would have the opportunity to study abroad. Growing up in a large family, we never travelled far—my first flight ever was to Prefrosh Weekend at Caltech—so I've always wanted to visit another country. Caltech's study abroad program has enabled me to see new cultures, immerse myself in a new environment, and feel independent.

When I first landed in Scotland, I was in awe. I kept checking my current location on the map on my phone, endlessly amused that I was on the opposite side of the world. On the bus from the airport, I looked out the window, watching the beautiful Edinburgh scenery pass by. I couldn't stop taking pictures and sharing them with my family! And

when I first saw the magnificent Edinburgh castle, perched up beautifully on the crag just behind the gorgeous Princess Street Gardens, I knew I was going to have the time of my life.

My first week abroad was quite busy! Accommodation events, societies, Edinburgh sightseeing, and countless more welcome events were planned, yet I still needed to buy sheets for my bed! It can be overwhelming, but good overwhelming. I knew that Pasadena's suburban community, the place I had lived for the last three years, would contrast with Edinburgh's metropolis, but I didn't really realize how different this would feel until I arrived! There are constantly places to go, sights to see, and things to do; it's hard to be bored.

This highlights an important difference between Caltech and Edinburgh: when studying abroad, it's very important to establish good time-management skills. Although Edinburgh coursework certainly is less daunting than Caltech's, it also requires more disciplined study habits to keep up, especially when many classes are graded largely based on the exams. Instead of being forced to learn the material by completing weekly problem sets, I must set aside time each day to review course material, prepare for the exams, and work on slightly longer-term assignments.

This increased self-responsibility extends outside of coursework into my daily life. Normally on a meal plan at Caltech, I really enjoyed the increased freedom of planning out my own meals. Sometimes I'll go out to eat, but many days I like to cook. This requires grocery shopping in advance and determining what I should buy such that I'll have both enough to cook my next few meals but not too much that it will expire before I use it. On the days that I do eat out, it's always exciting choosing a new place from the many delicious options. I've often been impressed by how affordable and tasty many restaurants are in Edinburgh.

After the daunting task of determining courses, applying for study abroad, applying for a visa, packing my bags, and countless other tasks, I'm honestly so very glad I seized the opportunity. It's such a unique experience that I would have certainly regretted missing out on had I not done it. Edinburgh is an absolutely beautiful city and is jam-packed with history! I've had the opportunity to take really interesting courses that aren't offered at Caltech—my History of Edinburgh course just to name one. The city is extremely walkable, there is plenty to do, and the people are all very friendly. I've also found it to be very fascinating learning about the cultural differences between the US and the UK. Studying abroad is absolutely a wonderful experience, and I definitely would urge you to apply!

Alec Ho '18 – Chemical Engineering Caltech / Chemical Engineering Edinburgh

Having been abroad to parts of Europe and Asia before, I am surprised how different studying abroad in Edinburgh has been compared to simply travelling to a foreign city.

Rather than just rushing to see all of the tourist attractions, I have had the chance to make Scottish friends and learn about Scottish culture while attending a university much larger than Caltech. The student experience at the University of Edinburgh drastically contrasts that of Caltech with regards to scale, teaching style, and student life.

While Edinburgh is a train or bus away from beautiful lakes and hike-able mountains in the Scottish Highlands, the city of Edinburgh itself is also full of historic sites and fascinating geological features. Within walking distance of our accommodation is Arthur's Seat, a mountain peak that gives a panoramic view of the city, and Calton Hill, where an unfinished monument modelled after the Parthenon sits. The cobblestone streets and old architecture of the city juxtapose modern construction in the outskirts and give a unique feel you just don't find in Los Angeles. The city as a whole is massive, and I enjoy wandering around without a destination, finding new restaurants and coffee shops along the way. For longer distances, the buses are convenient, and there's a regular, free bus to and from the science and engineering campus.

The courses at Edinburgh vary from those at Caltech in how they are organized and how they are taught. I have a few two-hour lectures that include a 10-minute stretch/socialize/coffee break in the middle and the pace of presentation is definitely slower than lectures at Caltech. This allows places quality over quantity and allows students to actually learn the material during the lecture. While I do have homework sets for my classes, they are ungraded and simply for practice, since the academic culture is centered around self-study and learning the concepts in whichever way works best for you. The bulk or often all of the grade for a course comes in the form of a final assessment. There are numerous classes available at Edinburgh not offered at Caltech; for example, the Russian language class I am taking here has been interesting and well-taught—and it hasn't been taught at Caltech since the Cold War.

With the lack of lengthy homework assignments comes a great deal of time for activities, hanging out and cooking. I am a member of modern dance society, chess society, beer and brewing society, and chemical engineering society, to name a few. Societies here are much more popular than clubs at Caltech, and there's always a high weekly turnout. Curling originated in Scotland, and Scotland is consistently top 3 in the world, so I decided to try it out. Now I meet up with the curling team at the nearby ice rink every week to throw some stones and brush some ice while learning the strategy behind the sport. With my free time I also have had time to go to the gym and to cook elaborate curries and at least a dozen permutations of chicken dishes.

Studying abroad has been a unique and enlightening experience. I'm constantly trying new activities, cooking new dishes, and making new friends all while exploring the beautiful sites Edinburgh and Scotland have to offer. Even if you're a junior Chemical Engineer, don't be dissuaded by all of the apparent obstacles. There are equivalent courses that can satisfy Caltech core and major requirements, and you can certainly

stay on track for your major. I highly recommend studying abroad, especially in Edinburgh.

Julie Kew '17 - Mechanical Engineering & Computer Science Caltech /Informatics Edinburgh

I am enjoying the chance to live and study in a foreign city for half a year. It's very different from visiting as a tourist for a couple days, much less focus on getting to all the canonical attractions because I know I'll get to them eventually. Most of the national museums are free (barring special exhibits), so it's convenient to wander in and out of those as the mood arises. Sites like the castle and the palace collect entrance fees, so it's best to plan them out ahead of time. But as a full-time resident, albeit for only a few months, you get to know the rhythms of the city: the cheapest grocery stores, the party streets that will be noisy long into the morning, the tourist traps, the good running routes.

I'm taking a class on the history of Edinburgh. It does not always offer the most enthralling lectures, but I am surprised as I walk around at how much interesting trivia I've picked up about the city and its history. The controversy when the city put in a new connecting street, the accusations that they were willfully demolishing homes. The first Enlightenment-era New Town that was going to be shaped like the Union Jack until it was decided that buildings were difficult to construct with 45 degree corners. The riot touched off in the cathedral when an old Presbyterian woman threw her prayer stool at the head of the minister reading from an episcopal prayer book on the king's orders.

I enjoy getting caught up in Edinburgh and Scotland. There's a pub that has a tradition of live music every night, some locals who enjoy playing together for their own entertainment. Anyone can stop by, have some whisky or a Guinness and listen to some traditional Scottish music. While there I was recommended to read Ian Rankin's Rebus detective series, which is set in Edinburgh. I've just started it now, and I wish I'd done so before I got here, to get a taste of the city before even seeing it for myself.

Living in Edinburgh feels closer to living in the real world than does living at Caltech. I miss the constantly-occupied common spaces at home, but I am excited to be able to cook for myself. I was off-board sophomore year but ended up living off free cookies. Here not only do I need to find my own food, I have the time to make it balanced and healthy (ish). I enjoy planning my contributions to the weekly vegetarian/vegan society potluck. I have time to run or rock climb almost every day (except when there's a lab due in Intelligent Autonomous Robotics). Bizarrely, I think studying abroad have improved my employment prospects because I've had enough time to apply for jobs, which I struggled with at home.

I highly recommend study abroad in general and Edinburgh in particular. It's a break from the usual, an exciting adventure, a reminder that there is life beyond Caltech.

Sonia (Seohyun) Kim '17 – ACM & Computer Science (Minor) Caltech / Mathematics Edinburgh

Ever since freshmen year at Caltech, studying abroad was something that I wanted to do. Three years later, that dream has finally become reality, and it's everything that I had hoped for and more.

Having grown up in a suburban city all my life, living in Edinburgh was truly an eye-opener. My flat in Kincaid's Court is in the center of a variety of restaurants, grocery stores, pubs, and entertainment, all within ten minutes walking distance. Edinburgh is absolutely aesthetically beautiful, with its brick roads and medieval-style monuments and buildings. Because Edinburgh is an old city, it is enriched with culture and history that you cannot get from the States. Compared to Pasadena, nightlife in Edinburgh is definitely more active and vibrant. The drinking age is 18 in the UK, which attracts a lot of college pubs and social events during the week for university students. One of the biggest culture differences was that a lot of events in the first week at Edinburgh (called Fresher's week) were involved around drinking, which was nice because I was able to explore the city and the different pubs this way.

The academic structure of classes at Edinburgh is very different than that at Caltech. Instead of having weekly sets, most of my classes have bi-weekly sets, with the final exam contributing to majority of the grade. The pace of classes is slower in comparison to that of Caltech, which is nice because it gives students enough time to review and learn the material. There are also mandatory tutorial and discussion sessions, where you cover the weekly material with a TA in small groups. For my math classes, independent studying of the material is highly encouraged, as most of the lectures at Edinburgh are focused on example problems rather than reciting the textbook. I think this is a nice change of pace from Caltech, because it forces students to stay on top of studying if they want to understand the lectures.

One of the aspects of studying abroad I looked forward to was travelling and exploring Europe. Scotland is home to many great attraction sites such as Calton Hill and Arthur's Seat, as well as the Highlands and Loch Ness. Because the workload for classes is lower than at Caltech, it's not difficult to take short weekend trips to other parts of Europe. Last week, I went to Dublin, where I got to visit the Guinness factory and Cliffs of Moher. I have never been to Western Europe before study abroad, so having the opportunity to explore new cultures not only in Scotland but also in other countries is truly a phenomenal experience.

In my six weeks at Edinburgh, I have learned to cook (kinda), be more comfortable in a new setting, made great friends, and more. I would definitely encourage all and any students to study abroad!

Nailen Matschke '17 - Computer Science Caltech / Informatics Edinburgh

Ever since my freshman year, when housemates would come back from other countries and tell stories of the exciting experiences they had, I knew that I wanted to study abroad during my time at Caltech. Never having left North America myself, any choice would have been a rewarding chance to broaden my horizons, but I settled on Edinburgh thanks to a friend of mine who came here for college. From the valuable challenges of adapting to a different way of life, to the engaging academic opportunities of studying at one of the world's oldest and most prolific research institutions for computer science, I'm confident that I came to the right place.

Edinburgh itself is a beautiful and unique city, and the University provides a great way to take it all in, starting with the campus' close integration with its surroundings. The first week is packed with a schedule of diverse events, between helpful tours, food and drink tastings at the student center, and nights out with hundreds of students from around the world. It's impossible to do everything you might be interested in, but fear not - once orientation ends, you'll find that the vibrancy of the city carries on around the clock. The flats that Caltech students stay in are at the intersection of two of its busiest corridors, and you only have to walk out your front door to find something to do. My housing experience hasn't felt too far from home, given that I live with two other Americans and an Edinburgh native, but his friends quickly became ours and there's always a chance to have some fun. We frequently stop by the school-run "sports bar" for some quiet games of pool, but we're no strangers to the city's pubs and clubs when we're not having fun just hanging out in our flat. This is a far cry from Caltech's house culture, which, while it offers a great group of friends to spend your time with, can feel isolated from the rest of world at times. Another thing that I really enjoy is the diversity of academic disciplines, which leads to far less esoteric conversations than you get while surrounded by STEM students!

On the academic front, I knew I would have the chance to study topics not taught at Caltech, but I continue to be impressed by the depth and rigor of the classes here. My favorite class this term has undoubtedly been "Compiling Techniques," a fun yet demanding version of the compilers class that is fundamental to the computer science curriculum at many schools besides Caltech. This and two of my other classes in the field are run similarly to those at Caltech, with engaging lectures supporting assignment- or project-based work with due dates throughout the term.

I recently discovered that one of my professors is not only a well-known researcher but one of the original designers of the Haskell programming language, and it shows in the thorough approach he takes to teaching programming from a mathematical perspective. His curriculum almost seems designed to provide a practical grounding to my fourth and final course, which looks at similar material through an even more abstract lens, and the two together have done a great deal to add to what I learned in some of my electives at Caltech. All in all, I have had a great time diving into topics that I wouldn't

have had the chance to back home, and I can't overstate how valuable a semester in Edinburgh is for computer science majors.

These are just some of my favorite aspects of my time abroad, and as I write this, it's only halfway over. If you choose to come to Edinburgh, rugby games in the national stadium, the city's famous castle, and the towering Arthur's Seat rock formation are just some of the sights you'll get to see. I've already had a fantastic time not just within the energetic core of Edinburgh itself, but also traveling to other parts of the UK, and I have plans to do more as the semester draws to a close. Learning to interpret the local accent (and its cornucopia of slang), where to find daily necessities, and how to navigate the city are challenges you'll face, but more often than not they result in an amusing story to tell. Personally, I haven't found Scotland's culture to be that much of a departure from what I'm used to, but in many respects the University provides a refreshing and complementary alternative to Caltech, and there's something to do here for everyone. I know I made the right decision by studying abroad here, and I'm sure anyone else would feel the same.

Tim Maxwell '17 – Physics Caltech / Physics and Astronomy Edinburgh

Before coming to Edinburgh, I had spent almost my entire life in the town I grew up and then at Caltech. The exchange program to the University of Edinburgh has been a great way to experience a different country and culture.

In my childhood in the suburbs, I was always surrounded by generic low-rise wooden buildings; Edinburgh's elegant stone architecture is stunning by comparison. Kincaid's Court, where the Caltech exchange students are staying, is in the middle of the oldest part of the city. In the week before classes started I visited the ancient Edinburgh Castle, which houses the Scottish Crown Jewels. Every day on my way to class I ride my bike past the Royal Museum and the Old College building, which are over 150 years old. Even the stone stairs on the sidewalk outside my flat have depressions worn in them from decades of foot traffic. The city of Edinburgh has much more character than any other city I've lived in.

The green undeveloped spaces in and around Edinburgh are also quite beautiful. Near the city center is a tall hill called Arthur's Seat; from the top, one can see out across the city and the Firth of Forth. Half an hour from the city center by bike, there are wide open green fields, some with sheep and cattle. This is a welcome change compared to Pasadena, which is mostly just suburbs for miles in every direction.

The University of Edinburgh is much larger than Caltech, so there are a much wider variety of subjects offered. At Caltech everyone is studying a STEM subject, but at Edinburgh I've met people studying international relations, comparative religion, veterinary medicine, and even textile design. Even within the physics department there are some classes offered that are not available at Caltech. I'm taking advantage of the opportunity to study nuclear physics, which Caltech does not offer a course in.

The other advantage of being such a large school is that there's always something going on. The contrast is obvious during Welcome Week. Caltech only gets 250 incoming students every year, so it's possible for every prefrish to attend every event. With Edinburgh's 6,000 incoming students, that would be impossible. So instead, there were dozens of overlapping events scheduled every day, and students picked which ones to attend. The university also has hundreds of "societies" (what Americans would call "clubs") for people with different interests. I've been attending meetings of the Physics Society and the Swing Dance Society – the latter feels like it must be ten times bigger than Caltech's swing dance club. That's not to say that big schools are always better than small schools (there are some disadvantages, too) but it's definitely a different experience.

I'd recommend the University of Edinburgh exchange program for anyone who wants to add more variety to their Caltech education. It's a great way to see a new place, meet new people, and do something different.

Sean McKenna '17 – Economics, Applied and Computational Mathematics, Caltech / Economics, Edinburgh

My study abroad experience may be quite unlike some of the others you are reading about. To my knowledge, I am the first student from Caltech to study abroad in Economics as my major subject at Edinburgh. This has influenced my study abroad experience in a manner that may be different from the other comments you read. Study abroad has been everything I hoped it would be, in an academic and an experiential sense.

We all know two things about the teaching at Caltech: (1) if you aren't deriving equations on the board all hour long, are you even teaching a class? (2) in advanced courses, the topic material is 90% up to the whim of the instructor and what they feel like lecturing on in a given year. These two factors greatly influenced my desire to study abroad and my course selections in Edinburgh. I am enrolled in a course where I spent legitimate amounts of time learning the *historical context* of economic models, not just how to prove that they work. I am enrolled in another course where we study the disparities in household purchasing power between the husband and wife in households of developing countries, instead of simply assuming that all household follow a uniform 1- or 2-agent decision-making process. These courses have definitely allowed me to round out my academic experience, and having one term away from Caltech to think about the ramifications of mathematical models before going back to solve them is definitely the perfect amount of intellectual breathing room.

Another part of study abroad which has lived up to my expectations is the internationality of the experience. For example, in my tutorial for a class on the economy of Japan, the students in the tutorial group hail from Scotland, England, Germany, France, Finland, the United States, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Japan itself.

Also, I gave a group presentation for this class with a partner from the Netherlands. The international presence at this university is incredible. Beyond the university itself, the city of Edinburgh is even more cosmopolitan than I would have expected. Given its population (~500,000), I would not have expected it to be so bustling. It's full of world class shopping, entertainment, museums, and food, much more than any American city of a similar population size.

So that brings me to my last point: study abroad is FUN! I've made great friends with other Caltech students whom I didn't speak to before study abroad. I've met other Americans living in our building who I can genuinely say I hope to visit upon returning to the states, and I've met a host of charming Britons, Europeans, ... I think I've met someone from every continent while here! And the exploration I have done so far across Europe, before term started and on a few weekends during term, is the stuff of dreams. From 21st century opera houses to 500-year-old cuckoo clocks, I'm thrilled with Europe. And Edinburgh is the perfect stepping stone: you'll have a great time while you're here, you'll learn something new in your classes that's different from what you see at Caltech, and the rest of Europe is less than a two hour's plane ride away.

Tyler Perez '18 - Planetary Science Caltech/Geosciences Edinburgh

This is my first time out of the U.S. and it has been quite an experience. And when I say "quite" I mean it has been a very good experience. Here in the U.K. "quite" signifies mediocrity or being average. Not that you would know this, but this is something that I have noticed here. Differences like these can be a little annoying, but overall the experience of interacting with a different version of English is one small but interesting facet of living in a different culture. And it's all fascinating.

The city of Edinburgh itself might be one of the most fascinating parts. One thing that always astounds me is the sheer age of everything here. It has become a staple joke with the other American exchange students to note ages of buildings and relics relative to the age of America. It's not too uncommon to walk by a church that is twice as old as America. Modern day Edinburgh has been built around a lot of this very old infrastructure and it creates a very unique feel to the city. The roads are all very narrow and twisty with some of them being old cobblestones. Most of the buildings exteriors are made of stone and there are several hills and bridges built right into the city that add a level of verticality that contrasts the skyscraper type verticality you might find in American cities.

You probably already know that the University itself is very academically admirable so I won't waste my time describing that. Overall I have found the classes to be a very nice change of pace from the cutthroat speed of Caltech. Homework is minimized with an emphasis on independent learning and more studying for the exam (which is often up to 80 percent of your grade).

One of the biggest positives for me about the University has been its sheer size. Straight off the bat you meet endless people studying History, Politics, Art – all sorts of majors that I forgot existed from my time at Caltech. The size also allows for a very diverse set of clubs and societies. I have made it a goal to try and do things that I couldn't do at Caltech so I am involved in Kickboxing, African Drumming, Dance Music Society, Christian Union and beatboxing. Okay, those last two do exist at Caltech but still, it has been a pretty rich experience so far in all of these clubs. Given that so much of my time is taken up by these clubs I haven't had as much time or money to travel Europe or the U.K. as I would like but I don't actually feel too bad about that. There is not set way to immerse yourself in a different country so make your own experience.

Zofii Kaczmarek, '17 – Applied Physics Caltech/Physics Edinburgh

Before I arrived in Edinburgh, I focused mostly on the logistical things I had to do and the trip itself seemed surreal and unreal, theoretical. When I arrived, I still spent a lot of time on the practicalities (things to buy, information to consume), and my existence here—or, rather, Edinburgh's existence around me—seemed almost unremarkable, just different ground under my feet. But, of course, another side of me recognized that things *were* different, and I was really excited about exploring this new place. I've continued to explore since my first day, and Edinburgh hasn't disappointed.

The highlights of my stay have been weekly veg potlucks, weekly free yoga at the chaplaincy, biking to class and around the city, being welcomed into the tango community, and exploring the food, museums, and outdoors with friends—and that hardly covers the half of it. The city is beautiful, both in terms of architecture and the rolling hills and meadows. There are lots of things to see or do and lots of communities to be a part of. One of the advantages of a large student body is the amazing wealth of student groups, ranging a wide breadth of interests and activities. Take some time to learn about what's out there, and you'll definitely find things you're excited about.

Academically, I have found Edinburgh way less stressful than Caltech. While I have small weekly short writing assignments and weekly readings, the lack of weekly sets to turn in has given me the flexibility to keep on top of my work in a way that works for me, without the stress. One of the reasons I chose to study abroad at Edinburgh was that it enabled me to take both physics and humanities classes, which is important to me. I've managed to be in two (freshman) humanities classes (and two physics classes), and the hums have been very reading-heavy, which has posed a new challenge in terms of keeping on top of them without spending all of my free time reading. This doesn't seem to be a common issue for Techers studying here. Although I am missing out on having the degree of free time available to my fellow 'techers studying abroad, I have enjoyed writing my essays and I am appreciating the interesting papers I have been reading. That said, I have still taken advantage of being in Edinburgh and engaged with what's around me.

As a note on my physics classes, I'm taking a year four intro-class and a year five advanced class. The difference is significant, both in terms of class size, difficulty of material, expected background knowledge, and the pace of lectures. Having PPTs or PDFs online for all of my classes has been useful, and essential in my year five class.

I would definitely recommend studying abroad, for many reasons. Academics aside, traveling provides an opportunity and a reason to explore and take initiative for your own plans and interests. And it's fun!