UCL SCHOLARS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT COMMENTS FALL 2017 & FALL 2016

Andre Liu '19 – Biology Caltech / Biological Sciences UCL
For all of the amazing things that happen within the Caltech campus, one experience that it can never replicate is studying abroad at UCL. The pace and patterns of everyday life are different from anything I could have imagined, with both the school and the city of London offering an endless range of activities. I've barely scratched the surface of everything that I'd like to do here, but the cultural, academic, and social impact of my time so far at UCL constitute some of the most enriching experiences I've had as a college student.

The academic system at UCL operates under a different philosophy than that of Caltech. Regular weekly/biweekly Caltech-style problems sets are not present in any of my classes; in fact, my assigned coursework varies from 0-4 assignments per class over the entire term. The result is that the assignments themselves may be time-consuming— most are essays (1500+ words), and all of them contain some sort of write-up on an open-ended topic. The classes I am taking are more application-based and less focused on foundational, theoretical knowledge than classes I took at Caltech were. One biology course I am taking is focused on ageing, and draws from a broad range within biology to address this interdisciplinary topic. Another course contains lectures in which practicing clinical psychologists discuss real patients, and my Art History class visits the renowned museums of London to analyze artwork. UCL's teaching method emphasizes independent learning, and that gives the flexibility which allows me to decide when I want to study, when I want to go out, and when I want to relax.

UCL has an extensive selection of active clubs and societies. In my opinion, the best part is that they are all very beginner-friendly! This has allowed me to explore new activities, such as photography and kickboxing, that I might otherwise have never given a chance. Taking up a brand new hobby can be a daunting task at Caltech— the relevant club may have sparse meetings, low attendance, or not exist at all. On the other hand, clubs at UCL are set up to guide new members at every step along the way. A weekly series of photography workshops and biweekly series of photo-walks around central London have help me get started in photography, and twice-weekly kickboxing training sessions led by a professional instructor have taught me the basics there. That's not to say that there aren't also opportunities for advanced-level activities— I also train with the UCL tennis team, and we compete against other local universities. These societies also hold social events, some of which include pub crawls, dinners, and (for athletics) Sports Night at the UCL bar followed by the ever-popular nightclub, The Loop.

Beyond UCL, there's a lot to do in London. UCL is located in central London, which means that it is feasible to walk or take the Underground to any of the popular tourist attractions. Most museums are free, and the exhibits are top quality— I really appreciated the art at the National Gallery, Courtauld Gallery, Tate Modern, and Tate Britain. Theatre shows are also great; I've seen *Les Miserables*, and plan to see other shows next month.

And beyond London, there's a lot to do in Europe! The nearby airports give easy access to myriad travel destinations— Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin, or if you're like me, you might even brave the Icelandic winter. That's the great thing about studying abroad— whether it's classes,

clubs and societies, or travel destinations, there's something here for everyone. I think every student has something to gain from experiencing new perspectives and interacting with a diverse group of people, and studying abroad is one of the best ways to do just that.

Ruchi Pandya '19 – Computer Science & BEM; Computer Science UCL
Very early on, I knew I wanted study abroad to be a part of my college experience. Studying abroad in London has been all that I had hoped for and more. I've called California home my entire life – growing up in the Bay Area and attending college in SoCal, but the few short weeks I've spent in London have made me feel like I could call London home too.

London:
The city is an incredibly charming cosmopolitan hub. The overground and underground train system makes it extremely accessible as well. London is a melting pot of cultures, ideas, and interests. Walk down the street, and you reach Trafalgar's Square, the literal center of London. Walk a little more and you've entered the perimeter of Buckingham Palace. Hop on the Tube and you can find yourself in Leicester Square, watching Les Miserables or Hamilton, or finding a delicious hole-in-the-wall in Chinatown. London has a great vibe for whatever activity you're in the mood for, whether it be watching a play, grabbing drinks with friends, appreciating the cultural and tourist attractions, or simply strolling along lesser known pockets of the city.

I particularly enjoy London's market scene. I love walking through Borough Market and Camden Market and talking to the street vendors – hearing their stories, tasting the unique food they're selling, and taking in the atmosphere.

Classes:
Learning in at UCL is very different from learning at Caltech. UCL emphasizes independent learning, whereas Caltech's style is much more collaborative. Problem sets at UCL are assigned more sparsely and there are fewer each term than we normally have at Caltech. I have found that the lectures are given in greater detail than at Caltech and with more examples for technical subjects. This style of teaching makes the learning experience conducive to more than just standard coursework. Students are able to immerse themselves in interest groups, extra-curricular activities, and very easily expand their education beyond the classroom.

Experience:
Travel: There's no better way to see Europe than when you're studying abroad. If booked in advance, flights are in the £30-60 range. Most tourist attractions are heavily discounted, if not free to students if you flash a student ID and provide a document showing temporary residency in the UK. Appreciating global culture and seeing different ways of life becomes very easy with weekend trips, and they're always an eye-opening experience.

So far, I have taken trips to Dublin, Paris, Prague, Vienna, Edinburgh, Cambridge, Dover Cliffs, Shakespeare's Birthplace, seen a few plays, and have been to more fantastic restaurants than I can count. Studying abroad has definitely put me out of my comfort zone. Life at Caltech becomes a routine very quickly. Life at UCL offers many unique opportunities – clubs, societies, activities. You can choose to do as many or as few as you want. I guarantee it'll be worth it. It's exciting to embrace all of these opportunities – travelling with a classmate from a different country, going sightseeing with someone who doesn't speak the same language as you, exploring London in a way that puts you out of your comfort zone.

When you look back at your time at Caltech, there's one term that will definitely stand out compared to your other terms…it's the term you spend abroad.

Avishek Dutta '17 – Computer Science Caltech/Computer Science UCL
Deciding to study at UCL for a term has been one of the best decisions I've made in my life. One of the biggest reasons I decided to come to UCL was because I wanted to experience city-living before I graduated. Growing up in a suburb in the Bay Area, I was familiar with San Francisco, but never truly knew what city-life was really like. I couldn't be happier with my experience in London. The transportation system within the city is amazing; you can get from point A to point B in many different ways involving the subway, buses, trains, or foot. This made it possible for me to explore areas all over the city starting from the standard tourist spots that everyone visits to quaint little coffee shops in lesser known regions of the city. In many ways, London was a European version of San Francisco. It had the same sorts of stores, restaurants, and public spaces, except with a slightly European twist to them. It's a city that I can honestly see myself living in further down the road.

Academically, UCL is a very different school from Caltech. Here, the classes are designed such that the major elements that determine your grade are completed at the end of the year, during an examination session. This means that a majority of the courses are self-paced and are somewhat sparse in what they teach you during lectures. In some cases, the classes will not even assign weekly homework assignments, so it is entirely your responsibility to make sure that you understand the material for the week. This makes for an interesting scenario, because if you are able to understand the material quickly, you will find yourself with a lot of free time, whereas if you take a bit longer to comprehend everything, you don't have to worry about falling behind on your problem sets.

Aside from academics, UCL has a lot to offer. There are a lot more students here, with many of them studying majors that aren't even offered at Caltech. Naturally, this means that there are tons of people to meet with backgrounds very different from the ones you typically find at Caltech. I felt like interacting with the students was one of the best aspects of studying at UCL; I have a much better understanding of disciplines outside of STEM and the aspirations of students who pursue careers in those fields. Additionally, the UCL student union does an amazing job of putting together events for all the students. There are student-run bars, fitness centers, and coffee shops on campus which are all interesting to visit. There are also numerous student-organized clubs to join if you have the spare time and interest.

Lastly, London is a great hub for travelling into Europe if that is something you'd like to do. There are a number of major airports surrounding the city with rather inexpensive flights throughout Europe, particularly if you book early. Regardless of what you decide to do and where you decide to go while here, studying abroad at UCL will be an exhilarating experience, one that you will surely remember for years to come.

Amanda Gao '17 – Computer Science Caltech/Computer Science UCL
The United States may be known as a "melting pot", but London gives its largest cities a good run for their money. Though Britain is infamous for its native cuisine, other cultural foods are easily accessible in London. The barista handing me a coffee speaks English, but with a discernible non-British accent. London's global nature extends to UCL, where forty percent of

the student population is international and half of my lecturers are not from the United Kingdom. As such, I have met people from numerous backgrounds, all with different opinions, something much appreciated after three years at a school with a relatively homogenous student population.

Caltech's amount of coursework seems orders of magnitude larger than that of UCL's upon first glance. However, this reflects the differences between the two universities' teaching styles. The weekly problem sets for each of my five or six classes at Caltech force me to learn – if I fail to do the problem sets, I will not pass my classes. The classes at UCL with sets assign them biweekly, and many do not formally grade them. As such, it is on me to go over the lectures again, read the textbook, and even do a little research on my course content. The disparity in learning styles is further reflected in the libraries. SFL is rarely full since students choose to work on and discuss problem sets in their dorm rooms. UCL's libraries, on the other hand, are always packed – I have struggled to find a seat at 5pm on a Wednesday. A closer glance at students reveals they are not working on a set, but taking extensive notes on course material.

That being said, I have more free time than I could have imagined while at university. UCL's central location within London means there are numerous ways to spend those free hours. UCL organizes many trips to the theatre to see plays at discounted prices – those willing to get up and queue early in the morning can get £25 tickets. For those who enjoy nature, nearby Regent's Park and Hyde Park are great places to run or read, while many farmers' markets and festivals await food lovers. Museums are some of my favorite attractions, with the world-famous British Museum less than a third of a mile away from campus. Others are a short tube journey away, and unlike American museums that charge $15 even for students, these museums are all free. Explorations are not limited to London, of course, as day trips are easy to plan and undertake. Bath, Bristol, Stonehenge, and Cambridge are a few examples of what England has to offer.

Before I left for UCL, I spoke with some of my friends who had mentioned wanting to study abroad but never did. I asked why they chose not to and heard "too lazy" or "too hard" in response. Living in a new country is daunting, but I have quickly adapted and love London, even if I still cannot distinguish all of the coins. You have one opportunity to study abroad and likely only one opportunity to live a foreign country. Caltech is a bubble whereas UCL is a bustling campus in the middle of a huge city with much to offer. Though I am not even halfway done with it, studying abroad is one of the best decisions I have made at Caltech – I now have many great experiences and stories. Furthermore, I already know study abroad's impact on me is not limited to the three months I will be there. Studying abroad has given me perspective on life after Caltech, but has also made me appreciate what Caltech has to offer, two things easily forgotten in the midst of grueling weekly problem sets.

Won Jun Noh '17 – Bioengineering Caltech/Molecular Biosciences UCL
Choosing to study abroad was probably one of the best decisions I made while attending Caltech, and I would definitely encourage everyone to take advantage of this special opportunity. Going to a foreign country for vacation and actually living in it are two very different things, and you definitely learn and see a lot more by living in it.

The academics at UCL are pretty different from what we are used to at Caltech. Instead of being checked upon every week through problem sets, quizzes, or exams, most of the courses

at UCL focus on teaching throughout the term and expect students to know and understand the material by the end of the term. Students are expected to have more independence in reviewing the material by themselves. There are not as many lectures throughout the week, and none of my classes have problem sets. The tests here seem to be more focused on assessing whether you understand key concepts and are able to memorize some facts related to these concepts. I would also strongly recommend taking classes outside of your major. UCL is a big, diverse university that has several courses to offer. I am currently taking an introductory course in the History of Art department on London Architecture. The classes meet at museums or historical sites within London, and the instructor talks about the history and architecture associated with these places. Not only is this an interesting class that can only be taught in London, it is also a great way to learn more about the city.

Having more time available throughout the week, I have been able to attend several events that are offered through the clubs and societies within the UCL Union. The societies are much more active, and there is basically a club for anything that you can think of: dancing society, karting society, tea society, Harry Potter society. You name it, they have it. The events that they hold are not only fun, but they also are great chances to meet different people. UCL is truly "London's Global University," with people coming from different backgrounds, cultures, and countries. The student population at UCL is much bigger and much more diverse than at Caltech. I have met people from France, Italia, Spain, Denmark, Germany, Slovakia, Hong Kong, and the list just goes on and on. I've thoroughly enjoyed being able to meet and talk with so many interesting and nice people here.

Lastly, London is an amazing city in which to study abroad. UCL is located in the center of London so visiting places within London is very easy. It only takes about 10-15 minutes of walking to reach Soho or Regent Street, where you can find great shops, restaurants, pubs, and bars. You can reach most attractions within London by the Tube, and if you are a soccer (or football, as they would call it here in England) fan, you can catch a train to watch a home game at your favorite club. London has much to offer, so you might as well explore it when you get here.

Sarthak Sahu '17 – Computer Science Caltech/Computer Science UCL
Transitioning from a tiny, STEM focused school located in a suburb to a large, diverse university in the heart of one of the most happening cities in the world has been exactly the breath of fresh air my undergraduate studies needed. Don't get me wrong, I love Pasadena and Southern California will always have a place in my heart, but there is nothing like living in the middle of a huge metropolitan city. London has an extremely effective public transport system meaning pretty much anywhere in the city is only a hop, skip and a jump away. Traveling to countries outside the UK is also a breeze because of the cheap, frequent flights to all major European cities. At a large school like UCL, every day promises something new, something different which makes each day vivid and memorable.

Classes at UCL are quite different from classes at Caltech. At UCL courses are very much self-paced. Most do not have weekly problem sets and trust students to pursue their studies independently. This is liberating because it allows students to study however suits them best. Instead of sets, however, UCL seems to be quite writing intensive, as much of the coursework is comprised of essays. That being said, UCL is significantly less stressful than Caltech because, with some planning, it is difficult to fall behind. Additionally, with effective planning, it is

possible to make weekend trips to nearby countries to get a taste of European culture. UCL also has a week-long break during the middle of term for students to study, however, with diligent planning, that break can also be used to travel. Some friends and I are using this week to travel to Italy and go on a 7 night Mediterranean cruise.

UCL also offers extremely interesting classes that aren't available anywhere else in the world. For example, I'm currently taking a class called London Architecture that is essentially a walking tour of London. Another class I'm taking is Colonial History, which is fascinating because I can learn about the American Revolution from the British perspective. My computer science classes are very practical and project based so they are a nice break from the theory-heavy Caltech CS classes. Ultimately, even though it has only been around 5 weeks into my experience, study abroad has been one of the best decisions I've made while at Caltech—I can't recommend it enough!

Tara Shankar '18 – Computer Science Caltech/Computer Science UCL
Studying abroad at UCL has been one of the most valuable experiences I've had during my time in college. Living in London has complemented my experience at Tech in almost every single way (socially, academically and culturally). I'm in love with London, and it's not up to question that UCL is in one of the best locations in the city.

Nightlife is the core of the social scene here, and UCL itself hosts several club nights during ISOP and Fresher's Week (and even has a karaoke bar in the student union). The presence of international students has a significant effect on the campus culture, and on London in general. In attending a "global" university in London, I've been exposed to cultures from around the world, on top of experiencing the English lifestyle. With a little bit of effort, I've made friends from all around the world—Spain, Japan, Russia, Sweden, Slovakia and France, to name a few—who I know I will be staying in touch with. It's also worth mentioning that most of my friends here are not in majoring in STEM, which has lent me an even broader perspective. You will be making the majority of your friends during the first two weeks, and I highly recommend attending as many events as you can to meet as many people as possible.

One of the best things about studying in London is the ease with which you can travel. Because the academic schedule at UCL is significantly less stringent than that at Tech, I've had a lot more free time and have been able to do day trips around England to places like Oxford, Cambridge, Canterbury and the Cotswolds. The EuroStar train is convenient for getting to Paris, Amsterdam, or Brussels in about 2 hours. Tip: if you work hard and are thrifty during the week, you can afford to splurge and relax on weekends!

I should also mention UCL (and England for that matter) is very bureaucratic. Decisions can take ages to be made and rules will not be bent even for seemingly small and unimportant things. This can be very frustrating at times and to be on the safe side, I wouldn't recommend 'winging it' for most situations. However, what England lacks in administrative flexibility is made up for in student life. A lighter courseload combined with the freedom to cook for myself, and an active social scene has made it easy for me to lead a balanced life and has given me a better taste of what it's like to be independent.

Bottom line: there's everything to be gained from studying abroad. It's been an amazing experience so far and the only thing I'm disappointed with is that I can't be here longer.

Evan Sloan '17 – Mechanical Engineering Caltech and UCL
If you're reading this because you're trying to decide if you should study abroad or not, stop. Go apply now. You'll thank me later.

In all seriousness, studying abroad has been one of the greatest experiences I've had in the last 4 years. My first few years at Caltech I never thought I would be able to study abroad for a number of reasons. Once the time came to apply for this year's program, I realized I was almost done with my requirements at Caltech, so I thought to myself: "Why not?"

After having ruled out reasons to not study abroad, I was able to start thinking about reasons I should go abroad. One thing that really attracted me to the program was that I have wanted to live in Europe for years now, and this was a relatively low-commitment way of trying that out. Especially being in London at UCL, I am being immersed right in the core of British city life. London is a wonderful city, and although I have not liked many of the large cities I've been to, I could definitely see myself living in London in the future. It truly is an amazing city with many different people and cultures all culminating in a vibrant, lively city (although the weather may not always cooperate). The ease with which one can walk around historic parts of the city, or go to world-class museums, or attend fantastic live music and theater performances is new to me, and I have been loving every minute of it.

Aside from the wonderful aspect of being located in the heart of London, UCL is a world-class institution. Much like at Caltech, many of the professors here are experts at the forefronts their respective fields. It is great to experience a different way of approaching teaching compared to Caltech. At UCL, the focus is much more on the students to be self-motivated and diligent about their studies, and as such, there are no weekly problem sets as there are at Caltech. This leads to a lot more flexibility in your schedule, although you do still have to work outside of class to keep up with the course material. Academically, UCL is on par with Caltech, and socially I would say UCL has the advantage.

Since Caltech is such a small school, it is easy to get stuck in a rut doing the same things and interacting with the same few people. Studying abroad is a great way to break out of that loop and force yourself into new, unknown situations. And at a large school like UCL, with students from all around the world, there are plenty of opportunities for new experiences. Many of my friends that I have made here are from many different places in Europe (France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Belgium to name a few), which I think is fantastic. The proximity to the rest of Europe is also great because it is so easy to travel on weekends and during reading week. I am going to Italy, Spain, and France for reading week (a week of no classes in the middle of term), and I am planning other trips for later in the term as well. Traveling around Europe is something I have always wanted to do, and being in London makes it about as easy as I could have hoped.

Kisha Thayapran '18 - Biology Caltech/Biological Sciences UCL
Studying abroad is a truly life-changing experience, and so far my time at UCL has been incredible. In terms of academic excellence and reputation, UCL is very much on par with Caltech. But it is also very different from Caltech, which makes studying here all the more exciting. Situated in the heart of London, UCL has a huge, sprawling campus and truly global student body. For the students who have only experienced the small, tight-knit community of Caltech, studying at UCL would be a once-in-a-life time opportunity.

The academics at UCL are quite different from Caltech, in that we spend less time in lecture (about two hours a week per class, and tutorials and labs every couple of weeks), and don't get weekly problem sets. The material is also covered at a less rapid pace. All of this allows for a more independent, individual-driven approach to learning, which I have been enjoying a lot. I feel that I have more breathing room, and the ability to go over and digest the material at a pace I feel more comfortable with. It's also common for classes to have many lecturers for the course rather than one for the entire course, where experts on each subtopic give lectures. This adds a lot of variety and exposure to different teaching styles, which I've enjoyed. Exams are held at the end of the term, and for my classes these will either be papers or finals.

In terms of social activities, it is literally impossible to not find something to do! First, UCL has hundreds of clubs and societies, many more than Caltech, and you are bound to find at least two or three clubs of interest. I've joined the Sci-Fi and Fantasy Society, the Tamil Society, the Anime Society, the American Society, and the LGBT+ Society. Through these I've attended screenings, game nights, meet ups at pubs, and exciting trips such as MCM London Comic Con. Societies and clubs are an excellent way to make friends and find people with similar interests, and I've met a lot of great people through them.

Outside of clubs, the opportunities to explore are infinite. A great way to plan trips within London and England is UCLU's "Give it a Go" program, which organizes wonderful trips and tours. There's walking tours given close to the start of term, and they arrange trips to see plays and musicals and visit attractions. So far through the program I've visited Stonehenge and Salisbury, and am planning on a trip to Cambridge. It's also very easy to plan outings by yourself; I've explored a lot of the area around UCL by foot, gone shopping on Oxford Street, and met with family and relatives in many different types of restaurants. I've also planned trips to places like the Globe, Oxford, and the Harry Potter exhibition. With so many great attractions within walking distance or a ride on London's underground, you'll never be bored.

The prospect of studying abroad can be nerve-wracking, but it is without a doubt one of the best decisions I have made in college. I strongly encourage anyone who is considering studying abroad, whether at UCL or any other locations Caltech offers, to definitely apply. It's an amazing opportunity to travel, meet new people, experience new things, become independent, mature and grow, and still get an excellent education.

Narmada Thayapran, '17 – Biology Caltech/Biological Sciences UCL
I'm really glad I decided to study abroad at UCL. It's a nice break from the very stressful environment at Caltech without losing out on learning. While at Caltech, students must constantly churn out your problem sets, but I have no problem sets at UCL. All the work done in my courses involves reading papers and discussing them in my tutorials. Also, classes are taught at a much more manageable pace, allowing students more time to process and work through the concepts presented to us, provided you're willing to read around the subjects to get the whole picture – you still of course need to work if you want to do well in your classes.

With the extra time, I was able to participate in UCL's societies. The range of societies to join is far more extensive and diverse than that of the clubs at Caltech. From the more typical ones like basketball or music societies, to more unique ones like the Chocolate Society or the (Be)Yoncé Appreciation Society (Abbreviated Y. A. S.). I joined both the Anime Society, the

American Society, and the Sci-Fi and Fantasy Society, but I've also thought of joining the Parkour Club, the Kendo Club, the Judo Club, and several others.

I have also gotten a chance to go on several day trips, one in particular being Stonehenge. Sure, you may think it's just a fancy pile of rocks, but it really is incredibly grand in person (the gift shop was great too). I also visited the Salisbury Cathedral, a phenomenal work of architecture that also houses the Magna Carta. But if tourism of that kind is not what you're interested in, there are definitely a lot of fun things to do in London alone. It's very easy to navigate, though the Tube, the Overground buses, or even just on foot. There are quite a few lovely restaurants nearby (the croissants are amazing in practically every café), and there's also Reagent's Park and Hyde Park. My personal favorite is Oxford Street, with over 300 shops – from Debenhams to the nice cart vendor who sells delicious crepes.

UCL really is a global university – there are so many students from all over the world, not just North America, and Europe like you might expect. It's an opportunity to see the world from so many different perspectives, while simultaneously seeing how similar we all really are. If you're on the fence about studying abroad, I say you should just do it. Even if you don't want to do it you should do it anyway. Whether you're someone who's extremely outgoing and loves to do whatever you get your hands on, or even if you're the more reclusive type like I am, you're bound to find something you'll enjoy.