

UCL SCHOLARS PROGRAM PARTICIPANT COMMENTS FALL 2021 & 2021

2021 Comments

Eunice Yoon '22 – Mechanical Engineering Caltech & UCL

Studying abroad at UCL during the pandemic was a great opportunity to experience a different world under minimal restrictions. Since UCL essentially did a full return to campus for its students, this term has been fully in person with all facilities open. There haven't really been any social restrictions due to Covid-19 if you have been vaccinated.

One of my favorite aspects of studying abroad so far has been the people I've met in my accommodation and in classes. UCL is a very international school, so you can definitely expect to meet and become friends with students from all over the world. Additionally, you will meet people with different backgrounds, academic interests, and hobbies. I've found that some of the more popular majors here are law, architecture, and classics; majors you would never find at Caltech.

UCL offers a much larger variety of classes to choose from, both within and outside of your major. I am taking two mechanical engineering courses at UCL, one on instrumentation and one on manufacturing. While these are both fundamentals of mechanical engineering, Caltech does not teach concentrated classes on either topic, so it is very helpful that I am able to take these here at UCL. The classes aren't structured with weekly sets, midterm and final like most Caltech classes are. Classes here will have weekly lectures and tutorial sessions where TAs and students work through problems together. However, since nothing is due, your grades will largely depend on projects and assessments due at the end of the term. Although it takes getting used to, this class structure is very flexible, allowing you to pace yourself with the material.

I'm additionally taking a History of London Art and an Economics class. The London Art class is not really a 'class' at all; Every week we meet at different art museums/galleries in London to discuss paintings in relation to one topic. This class has essentially been an addition to exploring London with visits to Tate Britain, Tate Modern, the National Gallery, and more. The Economics class I'm taking is targeted towards non-economics majors, so the class has been helpful in getting introduced to economic terminology and concepts I would otherwise be unfamiliar with.

Due to the pandemic, UCL does require students to wear masks indoors in any academic building, although the city of London does not. We additionally are given free antigen lateral flow tests to take periodically and check our own results. Although travel to other countries is sometimes limited by the specific country's entry requirements, it hasn't been impossible. Throughout various weekends and UCL's Reading Week, I had the chance to travel to Italy, Ireland, Scotland and have plans for France and Hungary. Additionally, I am going on a 6-day skiing trip in the French Alps during Winter Break, organized by a UCL society!

I would more than encourage anyone considering a term abroad to apply and find out more about their programs. Studying abroad has a lot more to offer than it looks like on the surface, and I can easily see why it becomes everyone's favorite term at Caltech.

2019 Comments

Alexandra Bodrova '20 – Mechanical Engineering Caltech & UCL

As I am already an international student at Caltech, most of my friends found it bizarre that I wanted to engage in the Study Abroad program. But I was absolutely settled on not stopping exploring after I moved across the Ocean to Caltech, but rather broaden my horizons even more. And while I knew studying at UCL would be very different from Caltech, only when I arrived in London, did I realize it is completely different from anything I have ever experienced. And quickly, as if by a woosh of a magic wand, I loved it.

One of the most different things from Caltech that stood out to me right away were the teaching and learning approaches here. At UCL all of my lectures are two hours long and occur once a week for each subject, although if a subject is divided in two like Dynamics & Control, its two different lectures a week. The rest of your time is given to you to conduct deeper material study on your own or go through the covered material again. While you do not turn in problem sets here, it helps to still do them and then learn the correct answers at the next lecture or later on Moodle to keep track of your own understanding. Apart from taking engineering classes on both the undergraduate and master's levels, I decided to take two humanity courses to go as my electives. I picked History of Art courses in Architecture and in Modern and Contemporary Art. These classes are the most exiting ones I have ever had, and they were totally the right choice for me. During lecture time we go to different sites in London such as museums, galleries, and historic building, and the lectures are held right in front of the particular artwork or inside of the architectural site in question. That is almost like getting free tours around London with highly educated guides every week!

Furthermore, UCL's lecture schedule allows me to explore London and other European cities a lot while I am here. Almost every weekend I travel to a new city, and if I stay in London, there is so much to explore! I love the big city vibe and pace, and most of all I love walking through the city and just enjoy the Architecture, the parks, and my free time. The fact that UCL's campus is practically situated in central London helps so much with choosing the walking option instead of public transportation, which is also an easy way to get around if you prefer. I do wish I had even more weekends here to fit all of it in and not miss a thing. The trips to Europe have been incredibly bright and have made me the extremely happy I chose this path. I spent my weekend walking through beautiful cities like Copenhagen and Edinburgh, looking at little castles where absolutely regular people live. The architecture and the lifestyle are so different from Southern California that it feels like you are truly in a fairy tale when in Europe.

I could talk about UCL, London, and Europe in general for long and long pages, but no words can describe this experience in its fullest. That is why you've got to try it yourself! Your experience will likely vary a lot from mine since there are just so many options here. But one thing I can promise you is that you will not be disappointed.

Jade Livingston '19 – Biology and History Caltech & Biological Sciences UCL

My time at UCL has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my time in college. I've wanted to study abroad since before I came to college; it's one of the reasons I chose Caltech. Midway through sophomore year I realized that my schedule worked such that I could study abroad in London my senior year, and so I went for it, and I am so glad I did. Studying at UCL

is fundamentally different than studying at Caltech. I would say the biggest difference is the size. While studying at Caltech you can feasibly get to know everyone in your year, UCL has a student population the size of a small country (40,000+). There are always new people to meet, new things to do, and new places to see.

My favorite part of studying at UCL has definitely been the societies. I have joined several societies and gone to events hosted by many others. Just in the first week I went to a West End Production of *Waitress* with the Musical Theatre society, toured old London with the Harry Potter society, played D&D for the first time with the Sci-Fi and Fantasy Society, practiced pole dancing with the Pole Fitness society, and went on a river cruise of the Thames hosted by the student council. In the first few weeks all the societies have "Give It A Go" events where they allow anyone to participate in activities that they might have never tried before, from kickboxing to hang-gliding. Beyond their weekly events (be they board game nights, dance practices, film screenings, or what have you based on the society), societies will host socials which can be anything from fancy dinners to pub crawls. I'm lucky enough to have joined a production of *American Idiot* that will happen in November. Between the numerous societies, the local clubs, and the pubs on and off campus, the social scene at UCL is far more active than at Caltech, and meeting new people is incredibly easy.

I was a little worried about the food when coming to UCL because I had an image in my head of London food just being forms of boiled meats. To my delight, there is a plethora of excellent food options close to, and even on campus. Every day at lunchtime there is a selection of street food vendors in the heart of campus that sell bao, halloumi wraps, jerk chicken, falafel, and more, and there are more street food options 5 minutes away. Additionally, every Thursday there is a farmer's market on campus that sells everything from steak pies to freshmade Italian pasta. That's not even addressing the amazing food available further from campus in Camden or in Soho. Suffice to say, we eat well.

Classes at UCL are different from Caltech, with far less work per week and essays taking up the majority of the grade in the Biological Sciences. Grades are very different from what I am used to, as a 70% is considered an A, and a grade above 80 or 90 is unattainable, being reserved for work that ought to be immediately published. For my two biology courses, I am taking Life on Earth and Vertebrate Life and Evolution. Life on Earth focuses on the origins of life and how life as we know it developed. It is taught by a rotating selection of UCL professors, some of whom are celebrities in the field of biology. Starting the class, I was worried I would find it elementary, but the lecturers have been fantastic, presenting recent results and interesting topics with clear enthusiasm and interest in the students' understanding. One of the lectures in particular, on the origin of eukaryotic life, was one of the best lectures I have ever been to. Vertebrate Life and Evolution is a project-based course that takes a more specialized look at vertebrate life, in which our final assignment is to identify the species of origin of an unlabeled bone we were given, and then present that information to the public at the Grant Museum of Zoology. My humanities classes have been similarly interesting, focusing on medieval history and modern art and taking me all around London to the British Museum, Tate Britain, the British Library, the Stuart Hall Library, and many more places. The lighter workload has given me a chance to meet new people and try new things, but the classes are still some of the most interesting and well-taught classes I've taken.

Sierra Lopezalles '20 – Biology and History Caltech & Biological Sciences UCL

Study abroad is the chance to experience something new: a new city, a new school, a new set of professors and classes, new clubs.

UCL is a very different school in comparison to Caltech. Though the campus is still pretty small, the undergraduate population is massive (about 40,000 students). This leads to a much greater diversity in professors and classes offered. At UCL I was able to take classes that are not offered at Caltech – like beginner Latin and vertebrate evolution. This access to more diverse classes is great for learning things that might be outside of the scope of what is offered at Caltech due to the limited size of the faculty in comparison.

On top of this, UCL has a different class structure. Most classes have only 2-3 hours of lecture per week and most of the focus is on self-driven readings that you are expected to do outside of class. This means that I have more time to study the material at my own pace, which is relaxing, but requires me to be on top my readings. Few of my classes have any projects or practicals (labs) and the final grade is entirely based on a final essay – even my biology classes. (Many classes have final exams.)

So far, I've really enjoyed all of my classes as UCL. In one of my classes we were given an unknown animal bone specimen and have needed to conduct research in order to determine the species. At the end of the term we will even be presenting our findings to the public at the Grant Museum of Zoology! (UCL has several of their own museums on campus such as the well-known Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.)

Another large part of the culture is societies. UCL has over 300 different clubs and societies and they are a great way to meet people that share similar interests, make friends, and get involved. I wouldn't recommend joining more than 2 or 3, because there really isn't enough time to go that many activities, but I do think it helps to be a part of one group with regular meetings to pull me away from schoolwork. Most clubs have a weekly pub night where everyone hangs out together in one of the UCL bars. My favorite society is the Stage Crew Society which does all the backstage technical work for plays, musicals, concerts, and other events at UCL. Not only have I learned a lot and gotten to participate in a lot of really cool shows, but I also met a lot of my closest friends there.

Beyond school, UCL is right in the middle in the middle of London and very close to so many cool attractions and historical sites. The public transit in London also makes it very easy to get around. All of the museums in London have free entry and I've already been to the Natural History Museum and the British Library, both of which were great experiences. Shakespeare's Globe Theater is also in London and definitely one of my favorite places to go so far.

Lastly, living in London gives you to chance to experience new weather. Rather than sunshine every day, the leaves actually change color in the Fall, it gets cold, and rains pretty much all the time. Which brings me to my greatest piece of advice: if you're going to London – bring an umbrella.