

Advice for CUHK students going to study at UC-Berkeley, USA

(based on contributions from mentors and from CUHK students who have studied at UC-Berkeley)

(updated July 17, 2014)

Note: Though the contributions have been slightly edited, they remain the views of the contributors. They may be personal and/or subject to change over time. Readers should treat them with discretion. --- Paul Lee

1. Weather, Clothing

(Jan-May) Bring long-sleeved and short-sleeved clothing, sweater, and semi-formal dressing. No need to bring very thick clothing, unless you will go to some cold areas.

If you are going to live in I-House, do bring with you clothes for parties/balls as well as ethnic clothing (to be worn on Sunday Supper). You should bring a suit as there are always some occasions that you might need to have one, but it's hard to buy a fit size here. You should also bring some clothes for sports as people here go to gym very often. It is a good way to know more friends. I heard that I-House would organize a gathering to go on a cruise near the summer. You may consider bringing a swimming suit. Do bring a pair of sunglasses or a hat if you are to stay long under the sun. It gets quite cold in winter, especially at night. Sweaters are needed. The temperatures during day time and night time may vary significantly, so bring a coat with you when you go out at night. Even if you are going to UC-Berkeley in May-July, the weather can be quite cool. It is around 25° C during day time and it can drop to around 12° C at night. Be sure to take your sweater if you go to San Francisco. It is very windy and cool even in the day time and in the summer. (Note: Fahrenheit is used in the US. F to C is roughly 50 to 10 and 60 to 15 ...). The weather here is dry in summer and wet in winter.

I would suggest not to bring too many clothes. In USA, brands like A&F, Hollister, Nike, Calvin Klein,...are always in steep discount and clearance, I guess you might like to buy more clothes and bring them back to HK.

While people in California generally put on casual clothing, a set of clothing for more formal occasions may be helpful, particularly for those taking business courses.

2. Places to visit on or near Campus (UC-Berkeley)

- Sather Tower
- Valley Life Science Building (for T-Rex, the huge dinosaur skeleton)
- Botanical Garden, Hearst Memorial Mining Building (for the inner design)
- Kroeber Hall (fabulous art exhibition)
- Free Speech Movement (FSM, in memory of the origin of Berkeley's Library)
- South Hall (oldest building, design of elevator does not make it look like an elevator).
- The Big C (on the way to LBL) and Lawrence Hall of Science and Mathematical Science and Research Institute (MSRI) (Great View of Berkeley and its neighborhood, especially at night! You can even see downtown San Francisco and Golden Gate Bridge).
- Try to join more events from Berkeley or San Francisco. You can have more information of different kinds of events in www.eventbrite.com, do something that is not available in HK

3. Telephone use

Ultra-mobile, T-mobile (cheap family plan, suitable for 4 people)

You can go to this website: www.voipstunt.com and open trial accounts. It enables you to call any Hong Kong numbers (landline and mobile) free from your computer. Therefore, you need a microphone for that. Simply use a different email address to open another trial account once you have used up the trial limit. However, the maximum calling time is only 5 minutes per account.

- SIM card

(Recommended) Cheapest T-Mobile prepaid plan at (AT&T & T-mobile) store on Shattuck. \$0.1/min. There are monthly plans which are quite reasonable, with data included. For example, there is one which costs \$30 USD with 1500 calls or texts and 30mb data. Or \$50 USD with unlimited calls, texts and data.

Prepaid cards for AT&T charge at the same rate, and it is believed that AT&T has the strongest signal. However, neither AT&T nor T-Mobile has signals at Wada (Residence Hall Apartments) Unit 2. AT&T signal is not as strong as expected. AT&T has almost no signal on BART, however T-mobile has strong signals there. Though AT&T has slightly better coverage and signal, it is more expensive than T-mobile. T-mobile offers \$50 plan for unlimited call, text and data, while AT&T only has unlimited calls and text with the same amount. Or from stores in Chinatown in

Oakland...where you can buy a phone card that will give you 1000+ hrs at \$15.

Ultra mobile offers the cheapest and useful monthly plan. The basic plan is \$19/month, including 1,000 min talking, unlimited text, 100MB 4G data, and \$1.25 international calling credit (enough for calling back to Hong Kong or mainland). Check out the website <http://ultra.me/>

Try to bring a phone that is not iphone. Not everybody will help you to unlock and provide you with data. Android phone or other smart phone will be better.

Greatest deal if you buy a phone at the same time. (\$40 for a beautiful phone and SIM card). (Summer students may not need this)

(Other companies: Sprint, Verizon.)

- IDD card

(Easiest and cheapest w/o connection fee) 旺旺卡. Go to cybercalling.com and purchase online; or try I house RSC, a store on Durant

- Fixed phone in each room

Free with all numbers beginning with area code 510.

- A cheaper way to make phone calls to HK is using Skype (Monthly unlimited call to HK only costs USD \$7.

Check out <http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/prices/pay-monthly-extra#HK> for more details.

- For those using iphone 4, you can call your friends using MacBook, iPad2, iPod Touch freely through 'facetime'.

[Overall Strategy: use fixed phone whenever you can, use 旺旺卡 as much as possible, and make every effort to avoid using your mobile.]

As smart phones are getting popular, you can use the application Viber or Line to call back to Hong Kong, which are free and accessible if you have Wifi connection.

e.g. Viber, Skype, Facetime will do good

If you are using iphone, as iphones are locked in US and AT&T has contract with Apple, AT&T can refuse to sell you the sim card if they know you are going to use it in non AT&T iphone. Just go to another store if the one that you have gone to refuses to sell you the sim card. After you get the sim card, you may not be able to get data service as AT&T constantly scan and block iphones that are not using their iphone plan which is a 2-year contract (i.e. your phone card). You need some modification on your iphone setting before you can use data service with phone card. You can search

online with keywords "AT&T", "go-phone card" and "iphone" before you come and be prepared. There are some methods online but you use at your own risk. Verizon is another iphone vendor in US but their network is CDMA which is not compatible with iphones bought in HK.

What some students do is to buy a prepaid sim card in AT & T for local use (which is \$100 for 1,000 minutes) and use IDD card to call Hong Kong (\$4 per card, for about 250 minutes. You can buy it from Ranch 99 in Pacific East Plaza.

4. Transportation

Means: AC Transit (Free with bus pass), Bart(Train), Greyhound (Coach--bus), find friends with private car, Lyft (Rent private car), Learn driving and rent a car

Bus

Learn to take AC transit, which is free with Cal 1 Card (student card from UCB). Actually you can travel around most of the Bay area by bus (of course you need to get familiar with the lines through the maps first). Bus information is available at actransit.org (Always check and get updated schedule/line information)

Please get a map for Berkeley/Alameda County.

Major lines, #

1 to Downtown Oakland, Oakland Chinatown

51A to Safeway, Oakland Chinatown

25 to Ranch 99

52 around campus

F to San Francisco

51B, 52 --- I House < > Shattuck/Downtown Berkeley BART station

50 to Oakland Airport

BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit); Clipper card (something similar to Octopus card in Hong Kong) can be purchased at Walgreen. It requires a minimum balance of \$2 in order to be usable on BART.

Go to bart.org for schedule and fare. Good for the Bay Area, SF Airport, Oakland Airport.

Bear Transit

It is free for everyone. There are many bus stops around the campus. It is a good choice to take it especially during night time (for safety, and there aren't many buses at night). Remember to check the routes in advance.

MUNI (Municipal Railway)

SF transportation. Ask for (or you may be given) a transfer and keep it. Normally all the bus fare transfers can be reused for unlimited transfers within around 2.5 hours. The transfer would only be issued if you are paying by cash (\$2). If you are using clipper for payment, the transfer time limit would be 2 hours (very exact) after the first payment.

Major lines, #

38 (24 hours): Along Geary, pass by Union Square, Japantown, Van Ness, Lands End (extremely beautiful view of the Pacific Ocean).

5 (24 hours): Along Fulton, pass by Westfield, Van Ness, Golden Gate Park.

Trip planning

511.org provides a powerful tool for trip planning in Bay Area.

maps.google.com is also useful.

NextBus mobile application allows you to know the real-time departure of the bus. (sometimes the buses are not very punctual so don't only rely on Google Map for the bus departure time).

Try to bring with you the local driver license to USA as drive is the best means of transport in States.

By the way, with exchange lasting for only one semester, students are not advised to learn driving, as the law requires one to stay at least half a year to have the license transferred back to Hong Kong.

5.Food

Restaurants:

Asian Ghetto(Gypsy), Lotus House, Pieology, CU sushi, Purple Kow, Sheung Kee

There is a 'canteen' (Crossroads) on the Hearst Avenue where you can have relatively cheaper lunch. There are Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Thai restaurants and Top Dog in that Canteen.

If you prepare your own lunch, you can use the microwave outside the Terrance Café (near Davis Hall) to heat up your food.

There are many choices nearby. The most popular place is Asian Ghetto. There is one on Durant Avenue. You can find Japanese (sushi is tasty), Korean, Vietnamese (tastes not good), Thai and Italian (tastes good), and Chinese food as well (i.e. Lotus House and Mandarin House).

Opposite to it is Top Dog that opens until 2am. Another Asian Ghetto is on the other side of campus opposite to Cory Hall and next to Goldman School of Politics. There are some restaurants on Telegraph Avenue and many others on University Avenue. The Desi Dog near ASUC (student union) tastes good and it offers special discount from 5-8pm Monday-Friday. One of the most famous restaurants around is Cheese Board, which is at the same time one of the least costly choice for food.

If you like coffee, you should definitely try Peet's Coffee and Tea. For the one next to the Crossroads, meal points (for residence hall residents only) can be used there. It is worth mentioning that Starbuck actually originated from Peet's!

A popular online food guide is Yelp. You can find many reviews on it.

If you are not living in a campus hostel, you may still join the Meal Plan. This is one of the most money-and-time-saving option. There are several dining halls that accept Meal Plan. They all offer buffet (all you can eat) for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There is a wide range of food choices, from Mexican to Chinese to Italian to American. Food quality is good in general, and the best benefit is that eating is unlimited. The best dining halls are Crossroads and Café 3, located on the south of the campus. Another one is Foothill, located on the northeast side of the campus.

If you choose the Blue meal plan, you pay \$600 per semester, and get 650 points. Lunch costs 7 points, and dinner costs 9 points. If you spend all 650 points on lunch, you can enjoy 92 meals per semester, which is roughly 6 lunches per week.

6. Accommodation

I-house: Very expensive, a lot of functions, can meet a lot of friends from different countries, near Haas School, with meal plan

Co-op: Cheaper than I-house, need to do little housework

Residential Hall: Cheaper than I-house, more difficult to get a place

Rent outside: Craigslist, Berkeley House facebook group, much cheaper, uncertain and high risk

It is better to live in the dorm, as the atmosphere there is better, depending on what kind of roommate one has.

However, be prepared to encounter some roommate issues. They happen all the time. Common examples include but not limited to partying in the room, mismatch of sleeping hours, and even being kicked out of the room.

I-House is relatively more expensive. Meal plan is compulsory and it includes at least 210-240 meal points each semester. Residents usually have many meal points left at the end of the semester. For your interest, the food is terrible (it's a nightmare to have I-house food for a semester) and gets worse and worse along the semester. However, there are many programs that are fun and worth joining, many of which are exclusive for residents.

For Dorm, I would suggest Unit 3, it is the closest to the campus and to the gym. Triple rooms in Unit 1, 2, 3 apartments at Wada and I-House are the cheapest on-campus living options. They cost around \$1100-1500 per month (meal plan included except Wada.) Living off campus is probably the cheapest. Housing on Telegraph Ave is only about \$400 to 500 a month. There are some housing options around \$900 along Euclid Avenue. (Examples above are single rooms). Off-campus housing can be physically closer to campus than Unit 1, 2, 3 and I-house.

For more details, please refer to <http://www.housing.berkeley.edu/livingatcal/installments.pdf>.

Coop and I-house would be a good way to know more foreigners.

Another choice is Co-op but there is a culture in every Co-op and it can be quite annoying if you do not like the culture. They may not provide food but one can buy a meal contract. The rent may be around \$2500. Co-op website: www.bsc.coop.

Most international students would choose International House for their accommodation. This is very reasonable and wise. The major purpose of us coming here is to enhance international exposure including learning how to deal with people with differently ethnic, religious and academic backgrounds both in formal and informal settings. In addition, learning to perfect one's spoken English should be given very high priority as well. In addition, international students are easier to form into groups and do various activities. Despite the high cost and low quality food, I-house is definitely a good choice. (If you are coming for the summer sessions, I-house is recommended as the WIFI reception is much better and its location is better.)

However, no kitchen is available in residence hall. I think there is a small kitchen in Unit 3, but it is pretty small. There is one very small kitchen in the I-house but reservation is needed if you want to use it.

If you want cheaper housing and to do your own cooking, you can rent a room in an apartment. You can find the information in craigslist.sf or subscribe to the bessa mailing list from which you can find numerous posts each day. It is considered by many to surpass I-House due to the lower cost and better privacy.

Strong recommendation: Oxford Property (2150 Oxford Street) is very near campus, and it is reasonably cheap if you are willing to share room with others (around 700 per month, you can make it 400 if shared by two).

7. Cost of Living

It really depends. If you cook food sometimes by yourselves, it will save you quite a lot, since you don't need to pay tax or tips compared with dining out. There are cheap stores for food and clothing etc around.

8. Learning: facilities, departments, courses, professors....

If you are not a Hass Student and you don't have your printing quota, the cheapest way to print the lecture notes and readings on campus is to use the undergraduate printing center on the 1st floor in the Moffitt Library. You have to add money to your student ID card before using it. You can use your debit card or check to add money to your student ID card. Never use the printing service in other libraries. They are too expensive. Some courses have printing quotas for their won students like MATH 128A. You can ask friends for username and password and print stuff at emf of Evans Hall. The amount allowable is so large that you don't need to worry about using them all. If you are staying at I-house, you can buy a printing card which costs \$5, \$10 or \$20. The price per page is \$0.08, which is cheaper compared to that in library.

Hass provides its students with \$200 print quota.

9. Public libraries

There is a comprehensive set of libraries on campus including libraries such as Main Library and Moffitt Undergraduate Library and lots of specialty libraries such as business, law and biology. They are usually accessible by students from any majors while the computer facilities in the specialty libraries are usually only accessible by students of specific majors.

There is no point bringing heavy loads of books. You may get them from the library or on a loan system from bookshops. It may be advisable to consult your own professors in Hong Kong what some of the major references will be in the subjects you may be studying in California. Then make early reservations if you want to consider making use of the loan system.

Moffitt Library has a large media center in the first floor (like pi chiu in CUHK). And actually the main library and Moffitt are connected by the main stack. So if you have time, try to explore it by yourself. It is really an amazing design!

10.Bookshops

Buying text books in US is incredibly expensive. The very same book can be charged three times more here. It is wise to buy your text books, if you need them, in advance in HK. Borrowing books from library is another option, and it is quite common that you can hold the book till the end of the semester as long as the text book is not for a super-popular course. Amazon is a decent option. Usually buying textbooks from Amazon would be cheaper than buying from the Cal Bookstore. The delivery is fast too, usually within one week. If one buys too many books, he/she risks exceeding weight limit when travelling back to Hong Kong!

You can try to resell the second-hand book on Amazon at the end of the semester. What I did is to download ebooks (you can try to find most of textbooks on the cal library system). You may also rent a book at a cheaper price at the Studenta Union store (ASUC), which you have to return to the store at the end of the term.

I have managed to meet some friends and borrow their textbooks. I would say: one shouldn't buy textbook too early unless you are very interested. Try to ask and search for a cheaper way to buy textbooks, and many locals here know a lot about how to buy a cheap textbook. I remember there is a day people put all of the old edition textbook in front of the Sproul Hall and everybody can get some textbooks for free, I am not sure whether it is a regular event or not.

11.Shopping

There is a big department store called Macy's in San Francisco. Cheesecake Factory is located on the highest floor and the cheesecakes taste great. There is another shopping place called Emeryville Villa. You can take the F bus. Get off when you see many highways and a big IKEA on your right. The shops are next to IKEA. Shops offer

discounts after holidays.

For everyday life necessities, we can do some shopping in the residential store located in each hostel, a small superstore on Telegraph Avenue, Ross Store and Walgreen Store on Shattuck Avenue. There are also cell phone stores on Shattuck Avenue and Telegraph Avenue.

If shopping for stuff such as clothes and luxuries, the place I am familiar with is that in San Francisco. Simply take BART and get off at Powell Station. Shopping malls like Nordstrom, Westfield and Bloomingdale are directly accessible from the station. Macy's is around that area about two minute's walk. There are other very good stores around as well.

Outlets would be a good choice for buying cheap items (e.g. Coach handbag). Go search Livermore and Gilroy outlets.

There is crazy sale during Thanksgiving (Black Friday). Remember to save the day to go to the outlets that day.

Shopping tips :

- Shattuck (Berkeley downtown)

Cheapest: Ross (caution: clothes may have been used! Go back and wash them before putting on)

Shoes: Hip-hoppy: Hot Spot

Berkeley-themed clothing: Bancroft Clothing Co, Sather's (Durant)

Cool: Urban Outfitter (Bancroft), Hot Topic (Telegraph).

Normal: Crossroads (Shattuck)

Bags: Luggage Center (Shattuck)

- San Francisco

Union Square: Macy's for decent clothes. Levi's (cheap). Luxury stores if you think affordable.

Market Street: Men's Warehouse. San Francisco shopping center (cool and expensive)

Chinatown (Oakland and San Francisco): buy Chinese stuff and good places to eat.

- Grocery

Berkeley Bowl (amazing choice of agricultural products)

Walgreen and CVS (Shattuck)

Safeway (take bus 51 going north, and you will see it on your left)

- Stoneridge near W. Dublin BART station
- Shops in Emeryville (town next to Berkeley)
- Outlets at Great Mall (to Fremont BART station then change bus #180/181)

Online shopping is a very good way to shop in USA, try that. A&F, Nike, Addidas or many other brands have cheaper price and more choices on Internet.

12.Festivals

You can get a book about Berkeley in I-House. There is a calendar of events that will take place around Berkeley in the coming year. Prepare your costumes for Halloween (end of Oct). During Thanksgiving (Nov), X'mas and New Year holidays, I-House organizes trips. Sometimes there are free tickets for I-House residents to go to festival performances. Pay attention to the notice board. Some are first-come-first-served, some need to draw lots.

Interesting events on Campus: BIG Game (need to buy tickets in September) preceded by a Bon-fire; Berkeley Band Show around the campus; Student Streakers during the dead week (The week between the end of instruction and the beginning of finals. During this period and through the end of finals some facilities such as the library are open twenty four hours a day); noon concert (usually every Wednesday, sometimes Friday too) at Hertz Hall... Cal Performances offer 50% discount for UCB students in their amazing concerts, like performance by Vienna Philharmonic.

For other local activities and celebrations, check ktsf.com.

13.Education System

Make use of office hours. Both GSI's (TA) and professors are open to any questions during office hours. You can even ask how to solve homework problems.

Plan the course earlier, it's very difficult to change course afterwards. There are a lot of students but limited classes. Plan earlier and don't miss the registration time. The course registration time is in US time, you will have to stay late for that.

14.Further studies

It is very common for undergraduates to do research projects, which is definitely beneficial for those who intend to pursue further studies. You can try to approach professors working in your field of interest early in the semester.

If you want, make your own plan before you come here. It is a great advantage to apply for summer research opportunities with the title of “Cal student”.

15. Work opportunities in general; for exchange students in particular

Work opportunities in general:

There is a program called Washington DC Program that provides internship opportunities in Washington DC. There are always many postings for internship or part time on the career center website. You can also apply to be a helper at I-House (Program coordinator).

My roommate has tried several cold calls and won a summer internship in a boutique investment bank. Joining the student societies (say business societies) is of great help.

16. Airport reception, departure arrangements

Check out http://www.flysfo.com/web/page/as_airportmaps.htm to see which terminal you should go to if you fly from SFO airport. Check in at least one and a half hours before the departure time if you are flying domestic and two to two and a half hours if you are flying international because there are always lines to get through the security checking.

17. Tourist spots and tours

Try to take Monday or Friday your day off, so that one can join a 3-day or 4-day trip.

San Francisco: Fishermen’s Wharf (try the Clam Chowder in Sour Dough), Coit Tower, Chinatown, Japan Town (tasty Japanese food), Golden Gate Bridge (you can rent a bicycle at Fishermen’s Wharf and cycle here, allow the whole afternoon for this), Golden Gate Park (Academy of Sciences, Japanese Tea Garden, Botanical Garden, some lakes, two Holland windmills), Alcatraz (take a boat trip from Fishermen’s Wharf or the dorms may organize tours, remember to buy tickets at least one week in advance), Twin Peaks, Union Square, Castro (gay bars), Ferry Plaza (sometimes there is Farmer’s market), Angel Island, Tiburon, North Beach (Little Italy), Baker Beach (a good view of the Golden Gate Bridge) You have to buy tickets separately for most of the attractions. The Cliff House is a good place (watch sunset).

Berkeley: Berkeley Marina, 4th Street.

Oakland: close to Berkeley and you can find cheap and tasty Chinese food at Chinatown, Jack London Square, Lake Merritt.

Lake Tahoe: may consider skiing during Thanksgiving holiday (Nov). It is in Reno, where there are small casinos.

Yellowstone Park: you can go online and join a tour (try www.lassentours.com/ or Joy Holiday, there are many Chinese travel agents that offer very similar tours but Lassen Tours seems the best).

Yosemite National Park: the scenery is beautiful, but difficult to get there. You may join a local tour or try to book everything like transportation and accommodation in advance.

LA: Universal Studio (you can go there free if you can get an annual pass from students in UCLA), Hollywood, Disneyland, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Griffith Observatory, UCLA, the Grove, 3rd Street Promenade. Venice Beach at Santa Monica of Los Angeles. UCLA (beautiful campus),

Las Vegas: Grand Canyon (book a tour online), magic shows, extremely beautiful hotels, cheap buffets.

Monterey Bay: 17-mile, Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Santa Cruz: The Natural Bridge State Beach (late October to early February). The monarch butterfly there is fabulous; b. San Diego: Sea World, Pacific Beach.

Seattle: pike place market, University of Washington, space needle, downtown Seattle.
Sacramento: Old Sacramento, Capitol Museum and Capitol Park, many other museums.

Santa Rosa: Snoopy Museum, Lavender Garden (remember to check the blooming season first).

18.Chinatown

There are Chinatowns in San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. The closest one is in Oakland, reachable by bus or BART.

19. Mentorship and orientation at the University

Register and everything else totally by luck.

20. Mentorship and orientation provided by OAA-CUHK

The CUHK Alumni Association here in Northern California has a group of mentors who are prepared to help CUHK students studying in Northern California basically on non-academic matters. Occasionally they organize activities during the summer and during the semester. All CUHK students (exchange or summer) are invited to participate. Be active in contacting and responding to the mentors.

21. Parties and social life

In I-House, there are several balls in a semester. There are floor parties which you can interact with people living on the same floor. There are ice-cream socials, which you can eat a lot of ice cream free while chatting with other residents. (These activities do not take place during summer.) Every week there is a coffee hour providing free coffee and snacks. Usually students from the same country will come together and organize special coffee hours during which they introduce their country, their food and their culture to you. In the dining hall, people chat with whoever is sitting beside them, whether they know one another before or not.

22. Religious life

It might help enrich your weekend life if you are a Christian. I have a friend who becomes Christian after he has come here. Then he was able to join many activities during the weekends, he even got help to take the driving test here! You can find a lot of churches of different Christian beliefs around Berkeley. You may also find people inviting you to join the bible groups around the campus.

23. Politics and political system

It might be worth spending some time to get to know something about the system of democracy and how it works, including elections, government at different levels, participation of citizens in public affairs etc.

24. Economy and economic system

There are many homeless people around the area. The economy is not very good. People say it happens as the homeless don't want to work and they can get benefits from the government as homeless. It is good to know a little about capitalism as practiced in the US, and the relationship between the economic and welfare systems.

25.Science and technology

If there is a chance it will be interesting to pay a visit to Silicon Valley where the hi-tech headquarters (like Cisco, Google...) are situated.

26.Research

If you are interested in finding a research project during the semester, you can apply for the Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program (URAP) (research.berkeley.edu/urap). You can even receive stipend from it but it is quite competitive. You may be asked to attend an interview in order to be selected. However, they are usually routine and ad-hoc and you cannot conduct original research through them.

If you want to stay over the summer for the research project, you can approach the professors or researchers directly to see if they need help. If they do, you can apply for DS2019 extension at BIO so that your visa status is extended.

27.Interesting Student Organizations: Tie1, Tie2

CABS Berkeley Consulting

28.How local people generally look at race, ethnicity, age, marriage, sex, peace, war, work, rest, quality of life, animals, environment, money, privacy, social etiquette

Of course, discrimination does exist. As long as we can act confidently and do not care, race and ethnicity problems do not matter. Other problems do not actually exist while I am willing to share my thoughts and my experience is quite important. One thing I want to comment on is social etiquette. There are lots of greetings and small talks going on during everyday life. We should get used to them and make good use of them in order to make as many friends or even good friends as possible.

People are open to talking about anything. They even put them into action.

Do not scream when seeing naked people.

People may talk about anything involving sex, like homosexuality, sexual acts, condoms etc. They will talk over sensitive topics ranging from Tibet, election, Iraq, to anything available.

There are Asians everywhere. Try speaking Cantonese to them.

Do not feel being discriminated against. Nobody would bother to discriminate against you.

People do not care about finding jobs, careers, GPAs, internships. It is not like Hong Kong. They care more about enjoying life.(not really!)

You may find many people less smart, but they are much better than you in some other way.(true!)

Americans like to think that they need to rule everything. Empathize with them.

Discrimination against the disabled, the fat and the homosexual, or racism will make you look stupid.

Try not to mix only with Chinese. Make more friends of different ethnic origins. Come prepared with a good knowledge of Hong Kong/China so you have much to share with the local students as well as other international students.

29.Banking

I personally think it is more convenient to open an account in Berkeley. There are Wells Fargo Bank, Bank of America and Citi-Bank around. I choose Bank of America because they have many ATM machines on the campus. There is even one in Haas Business School, which is 5 minutes' walk from International House.

You can use your debit card for all online purchases (like booking airlines and hotels, buying books, and all other stuff) in America as long as they accept visa (even though they said they accept visa credit cards). Don't use credit card unless necessary because you may be charged a 3% service charge. You can check this out first.

Debit card is really convenient. Try to open your account as soon as possible, since you need to pay for the insurance fee upon your arrival (so that you can get your Cal ID card).

30.Dos and Don'ts

Safety: Safety can be a matter of concern particularly at night. Traveling in pairs may help. Try to keep walking on streets with much traffic and /or many pedestrians, or with shops that still have lights on. Avoid talking or making eye contact with strangers even when they stare at you or talk with you. Walk away from them.

If you are walking alone in campus at night (e.g. after studying in a library at late night), it is always good to call BearWalk. It is a free service for students, providing a person to accompany you to go back home. Do not walk alone at night.

Additional points:

- 1) Have in mind what you want to get through the exchange program before you come.
- 2) Make plans. (say if you are here for travel, then make traveling plans ahead of time; or you come to have some better understanding of the university to prepare for your graduate study, then get to know professors in your department, and the course you are going to take)
- 3) Don't waste time here. Exchange time is really short and precious. So take the time to do what you have planned to do.
- 4) Never hesitate to ask questions.
- 5) Take good care of your computer. It is really expensive to repair the computer here.

31.Driver License and Car Rental

If you are here for a semester or a year, driving during the semester break is the most convenient way to enjoy traveling. California rental companies accept Chinese driver licenses, even without a translation. An international driver's permit (which is just a translation document for the original driving license) is helpful. Some companies or states do not accept a Chinese driver license without translation. The situation depends.

[License]

It is very easy and fast to obtain a California driving license, even you have no driving experience before! The drivers' test consists of writing and driving parts. The writing part is just a memory test, which is easy for a smart student like you. The driving part is a bit challenging. You will need a professional driving instructor to teach you driving. The cost ranges from \$70 to \$120 every lesson (two hours). In general four lessons will be enough. That means the total cost is around \$310, much cheaper than in Hong Kong.

I will recommend Universal Driving School, which offers the lowest price possible. The instructor Joseph is especially experienced with teaching international students.

Check out <http://www.yelp.com/biz/universal-driving-school-oakland>.

[Car rental]

If you use the rental company Enterprise, you can enjoy its special discount for UCB students. Visit the website www.enterprise.com and enter “ucbgen” in the coupon/customer code column. Then enter the PIN code “ucb”. You will see the discounted price.