

Charles Stokell: University of California, San Diego (Semester 1, 2010)

UQ Program: Bachelor of Chemical and Biological Engineering

I attended the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) for the Winter and Spring quarters this year as a Junior (third year) Chemical and Biological Engineering undergraduate. UCSD was an easy pick – academically because of its high rankings as an undergraduate University in the US, its world-class Jacobs School of Engineering, and because the courses offered were fairly equivalent to the ones at UQ. Just as importantly, it is a fabulous campus, situated just off the beach, and amongst a Eucalyptus plantation that will keep you from feeling homesick.

The style of teaching was quite the shock right from the beginning. The quarter system is a fast-paced and intensive version of a UQ semester. If you fall behind, there is no catching up with absolutely no breaks! No mid-semester break (or rather mid-quarter), no SWOTVAC, and very few, if any accepted public holidays. But having to only enrol in 3 courses per semester with much less than half the usual contact hours at UQ, there is ample time to keep the weekends free...and one or two of the weekdays if a few lectures must be sacrificed. Although take note – there is no such thing as Lectopia! (I learnt this the hard way). The class sizes were much smaller than at UQ, with about 50 students for most of my classes. As a result, they were much more intimate, with the Professor often forming a very close and personal bond with the students. The use of Blackboards seemed an almost backward step at first, but I found that you take in more when you see your lecturer working through problems rather than hitting 'Next' button on a PowerPoint that they have simply recycled over the last couple of years.

To break up the study, there were a lot of different events on almost every week on campus from free BBQ's, Bear Garden's, Spirit Nights, to the Junkyard Derby where Engineering students race go-carts made from, (quite true to its name), junk. Sun God Festival in Winter quarter was by far the most avidly attended and best night of all on campus. The University way of things was halted for most of the week (and for the preceding days for recovery) as each and every student, almost 30,000 of them, came out and celebrated with a big all-day concert featuring some great bands and dance groups. Black's Beach that is 10 minutes walk from campus is the best beach to chill after a day at Uni. The hike down is a bit of a trek, but it is well worth it, and you might even be in for a few nude surprises.

On campus there is an Outback Adventures group which organises cheap outdoor type trips during the semester. Through them I went on a week-long kayak down the Green River in Utah, explored the Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, went rock climbing at mission gorge, and a few other hikes and kayaks around San Diego. The trips were awesome and a great place to meet a lot of American and International students.

The ideal location of the campus means that there are some great places to travel. San Diego offers beautiful beaches, sweet places to walk around and chill out, Sea World, and the San Diego Zoo which is absolutely phenomenal. Approximately 2-3 hours drive is Big Bear Mountain, which is the best place for skiing and snowboarding close to the campus. About the same distance are Disneyland and the California Adventure Park. On my exchange I also visited San Francisco, New York and Washington D.C.

All in all, my time abroad has been one of the best and most fulfilling experiences of my life. I have learnt a lot about myself, become more independent, self sufficient and much stronger as a person. I definitely caught the travellers' bug and straight after my exchange I travelled to Thailand to volunteer in a rural village teaching English in schools. Written on the floor of a bar over there was the quote "The world is like a book, and those who do not travel read only one page". I thought this was very true to the point when I first read it. I would highly recommend going on a student exchange. It isn't only a great excuse to travel without taking a break from your University studies, but gives you time to immerse yourself in another culture and in an environment where you grow so

much as a person. Now that I am back at UQ, the withdrawal symptoms are certainly kicking in. UCSD will always remain as much apart as me as UQ. Go the Tritons!

Photos:



Flying high along the Green River in Utah.



Delicate Arch at Arches National Park, Utah. Left to right: Lillian (American Chemical Engineering Student), George (International Student from Cyprus), Myself, and Alan (International Student from Hong Kong).



Myself at the UCSD entrance

Five Top Tips (plus a few extra):

1. The best accommodation for exchange students is the I-House (International House). This has an earlier accommodation request deadline than the other accommodation facilities so keep checking on this.
2. Get involved with UCSD Outback Adventures! The shop is right next to the centre of the campus (by Geisel Library) and offers a lot of fun trips at very cheap rates for university students. You can go rock climbing, hiking, kayaking, snorkelling, and surfing day expeditions, and 3 day to week long expeditions. It is a really great way to meet other students at UCSD.
3. The University offers a wide range of cheap quarterly sporting, arty and other extra curricula activities, from yoga, to dance, to water polo and soccer, to glass working and crafty type things. Would recommend getting involved in one of the activities per quarter to break up the study and partying!
4. Sun God Festival occurs in Winter Quarter every year. It is free for undergraduate students at UCSD to attend (including exchange students) and is definitely a must do! The entire campus comes out and parties on this day long festival with great music and dancing.
5. About 10 minutes walk from the campus is Black's Beach. It is a really nice place to chill with friends after a long day at Uni or on the weekend, and watch the sunset or walk along the beach.
6. The campus is rather large, and it might help to invest in a cheap second hand bike while you are there to get around to your classes.
7. When you pick up your UCSD ID card, ask for the Metro Bus sticker. This gives you free bus rides for the Quarter on a wide range of bus routes and will help you get around the county.
8. Definitely visit the San Diego Zoo and Sea World whilst you are there. There are some good markets on Friday and the weekend in San Diego City, but not much else is there in the city. Also go to Big Bear for great skiing/snow boarding that is not too far of a drive away.
9. Peets coffee which is on campus is by far the best place to get coffee for those early morning starts! Definitely try the White Choc Mocha!
10. Friday lunchtime, the International Centre at UCSD puts on a \$5 lunch for international students. This is a great place to hang out with some other international students.