

I cite the semester (Jan 4 – Jun 11 2010) I spent studying at UCI as some of the best months of my life...

Upon completion of high school I deferred a year and worked before travelling overseas, I guess this was when I caught the bug. I am currently in my third year of studying mechanical engineering at UQ and had always wanted to spend a semester abroad. Although it took a lot of effort and countless forms I knew as soon as I arrived it had all been worth it.

The first day I started at 8am, it was cold and the campus was empty. Beautiful, I thought, I've come to a dud university. The professor let us out at 9.30 and I looked out the door to see thousands of people setting up booths and handing out flyers for various Greek organisations, sporting teams and clubs. The UQ exchange advisors had urged us to immerse ourselves as deeply as possible into our new cultures and as a result I decided to join a fraternity. The experience was not as close to what we see in the movies as I had thought. I was not used to wearing formal attire so often and had not realised the amount of effort they put into philanthropies, networking and education. In saying this, they did not need a lesson in how to party.

A couple of my old housemates who studied at UBC had told me to look into joining the ski and board club as they had found this to be a great outlet for meeting people and having loads of fun. I heeded their advice and ended up travelling with the UCI boardclub up to Norcal a couple of times where they meet up with all the other UC schools for a few massive weekends a year. The price of going to the snow in America was far cheaper than I could have ever imagined. I found that for roughly USD\$200 you get accommodation, food, booze, lift pass and a ride from uni.

Classes were not too dissimilar from UQ. The main differences I found were the interaction between lecturers and students. In engineering I noticed all of my lecturers knew almost everyone in the classes' names which had up to 150 enrolled students. The workload was quite a lot lighter and the exams were often bell curved up with both dynamic vibrations and turbulent/compressive flows both having average grades below 50% which yielded a B-.

Despite applying to live in the International Village in the Arroyo Vista Themed Housing I was placed in the CampusWide Honors Program House. I wasn't impressed when finding this out but it turned out to be quite convenient. It was never difficult to find some fun in the international and transfer houses but staying 100m further down the road in a quiet house allowed for sleeping and studying in peace whenever required. If I had my time again I would consider living on or near campus for my first quarter and living in Newport for any subsequent quarters as there are many more non uni related things to do near the beach.

In the two months leading up to spring break the international students starting buzzing about spring break and their plans. After a lot of deliberation 14 of us flew out of LAX en route to Cancun. The week that followed was everything you could imagine plus more. There are many amazing options for trips over this time but I highly suggest following wherever your friends (local or international) go.

A car was something I had put high on my list of priorities for having in America. I had been told it would make my time a lot more productive especially living in Orange County. This was very true. Although parking was \$80 a month and fines were even steeper, it allowed me and anyone else who was keen to go food shopping at Costco™ and travel with ease down to Newport Beach and get away on weekends. With so many cities and fun places to visit within one, two or three hours drive it's a great investment to split between a few people.

Thomas O'Neill



A clear day looking over Lake Tahoe, 10th deepest lake in the world.



Australians re-uniting at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in 48°C heat.



Inter-fraternal/sororital toboggan races and snow fight in the middle of Aldrich Park in the centre of UCI.



The Irish and Australians enjoying a delicious ice cream cone and a sensational day at Disneyland