

Introduction

I had the great chance to spend the Fall Semester 2017 in Berkeley. As the most important information regarding the application procedure, the organizational part as well as the courses can be found in the Bonn-Mannheim Berkeley Guide as well in the Munich extension, I will in the following write more about my own experience and challenges. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact me (Contact through LMU Economics Exchange Office).

Application and Pre-Arrival

The application process is straight-forward and well explained in the Munich Extension to the Guide. I would recommend to meet with Prof. Sunde (who was the responsible Professor in 2017) beforehand to talk to him about the program.

Bear in mind, that spending one semester in Berkeley is not the cheapest thing to do. In Fall 2017, I spent about \$1,000 in fees (before the semester starts), \$9,000 in tuition (you have to pay \$750 for every unit you choose and you have to choose at least 12 units - but you can always attend seminars and lectures for free without being enrolled, these, however, are not graded and do not count towards your final score), \$1,000 for flights and about \$10,000 for costs of living which totals to about \$20,000-\$22,000. Therefore, it is advisable to start looking for scholarships way ahead. The deadline for the DAAD for example is one year before the program starts which is even half a year before the deadline for the application for the Berkeley Exchange Program. I got a scholarship from LMU PROSA which covered part of the costs of living and the travel expenses. In Berkeley I met other students from Bonn and Munich who were funded by Fulbright or the 'Studienstiftung' which could be alternatives. Those cover the tuition fees as well as part of the costs of living but again, plan ahead.

Despite the high costs I would say that spending one semester in Berkeley was an amazing experience and I would definitely do it again!

Studying In Berkeley

For the basic information, please have a look at the Munich Extension of the Bonn-Berkeley Guide. If you get accepted and did all the formalities you can move on to the core part - choosing the courses. You have basically two options: First-Year courses or Second/Third-Year courses (Note, that you are taking part in a PhD Program in Berkeley). If you decide to go for the First-Year courses, you have to take the 204 Math-Precourse which already starts in late July. This course is prerequisite for most of the First-Year courses including Micro, Macro and Econometrics. The content goes way beyond of what you have learned in the First-Year courses in Munich so it might be advisable for you to take First-Year courses if you wish to pursue an academic career. In those courses you will be studying together with all the new-admits which will make it easy for you to catch up with the other first-years. If you decide to go for Second-Year courses, which are more inspirational and a little less labor-intensive, it is a little harder to get into the already existing groups of Second/Third-years. I decided to go for the more inspirational Second/Third-Year courses and I didn't regret it at all.

Basically all lectures require you to solve problem sets in groups. Therefore, it is really important to get in touch with your classmates in the first weeks in order to form groups. That

way you will have way less work and you have others to discuss the problems with and from whom you will be able to learn a lot in discussions.

This leads me right to the next topic: workload. First-Year courses require you to work and study basically 24/7 (or a little less). If you decide to go for Second/Third-Year lectures, the workload is only a little less. From the first day of the semester you have to solve problem sets and prepare presentations depending on the lecture you choose. Don't underestimate the time these things require.

The great thing about Berkeley is, that there are constantly conferences related to economic fields where you can go to to discuss the most recent research in that field. In weekly seminars economists from around the world come to Berkeley to present their latest research. In addition to attending various conferences and panel discussions in Berkeley, I flew to the IMF Annual Research Conference in Washington DC together with a classmate. This was one of the greatest experiences throughout the semester! There you can meet the creme-de-la-creme of economic research. All in all, these conferences are great to do some networking so be sure to bring business cards.

If you want to get in touch with other Econ students, the GEA (Graduate Economics Association) organizes several events like a semester opening BBQ, Happy Hours in different bars throughout the semester or the Little Big Game (This is a sports tournament against the Stanford Econ Department which is really fun to participate in. Five different sports are played and by the way Berkeley won the last few times - Go Bears!). These activities are a lot of fun and a great opportunity to meet other students or even professors who might drop by for a beer. In general the interaction with professors is way less formal than in Germany.

Another thing to mention is the general structure of the program. You will enroll with Berkeley Extension, which is the International Program for all different kinds of subjects not only Economics, but you will be studying at the Econ Department in Evans Hall. Your main contact person at UC Berkeley Extension will be Olga Paly. She is great! She does a wonderful job and if you have any question regarding the enrollment, the health care plan or the payment, she will be happy to assist you. By the way, I managed to avoid the rather bad and costly health care plan from UC Berkeley by choosing Care Concept College. But you will have to discuss with Olga, whether it will be accepted and you get the waiver. For all Economics related questions and questions relating to the Economics Department, Patrick Allan will be your man.

The week before the semester officially starts, you can pick up your Cal1Card (student ID). Make sure to ask for the Clipper Card, when you pick it up. The Clipper Card is the public transport ticket with which you can use all buses in Berkeley and Oakland for free. The BART is not for free but you can load money onto your Clipper Card and use it with the BART. The Cal1Card is also your entrance ticket to the gym. Yes, you can use all sports facilities (including tennis courts, swimming pools, yoga courses and so on) for free. Moreover you can load money onto your Cal1Card and use it to pay for on-campus services or at the cafes on campus and it is your library card as well.

Living In Berkeley

You can either apply for the i-House or decide to look for shared flats in the city. If you want to apply for the i-House, the application period starts in March/April. Be sure to be quick otherwise you will only make it on the waiting list and probably never get a spot. I decided to look for a shared flat and found a nice one with great roommates not far from campus in North Berkeley. I paid \$970 per month for my rather small room - but this is normal.

The cheapest option for a SIM Card at the time I was there was MintSim. You could choose different plans starting around \$15 per month including unlimited calls, texts and data.

If you live off campus, it is useful to bike an old bike when you arrive. Be sure to buy a strong U-lock as well, as a lot of bikes get stolen.

This unfortunately brings me to another important point: safety. As every American city, Berkeley is not the safest place as soon as it gets dark. You will see a lot of poor and homeless people in the streets and in addition to that, there is also gang criminality. Once you are enrolled, you will receive emails by the UC Berkeley Police (yes, UC Berkeley has its own police department) with timely warnings about robberies with or without strong weapons, attempted robberies, gun shootings and assaults. I do not want to scare you off, but I want to make you sensible for that topic. I would not advise you to walk alone after dark. If you are in a group you are fine. But if you have to walk alone, rather get an uber or lyft. These rides are inexpensive and you will arrive at your destination safely. If you have a bike your fine anyways - at least nothing ever happened to me or anyone I knew on my bike.

Berkeley itself is not the most beautiful city. There are a few bars where you can go to like Triple Rock on Thursdays (when they serve their famous Monkey Head Beer), Starry Plough (where they have free funk nights in Thursdays) or Raleigh's to mention a few. Especially in the beginning of the semester, there are quite a lot of frat parties which are a thing to experience once you are there. If you want to go clubbing, San Francisco is the only real possibility. But it is quite expensive to get there and especially back in the night. Usually clubs charge \$20-\$30 at the door. Another great place to go to in Berkeley is Ashkenaz. It is a meeting place for alternative music lovers. Bands and artists of all different kinds of genres get on stage there. The cover is \$15-\$20 but it is worth every single cent!

If you can take a weekend off (which might not be very easy) there are plenty of things, apart from San Francisco, that you can do around Berkeley. I went to Napa Valley, one of the wine regions, drove the Pacific Coast Highway and went to Lake Tahoe, the Sierra Nevada and Yosemite National Park - and all that with a motorcycle. One of the greatest experiences. However, you can do all that with a rental car as well. If you are 25 and over, renting a car is super cheap, starting at \$35 per day. If you are below 25, additional fees will be charged.

The End

Last but not least a few words on the end of the semester. If you are about to book your flights and want to know, when the last exam will probably be, have a look at the academic calendar of UC Berkeley. Usually the final exams are in the last week of the semester - the Final Examination week (the name was not chosen accidentally). Some professors, however, decide to have their finals in the reading week one week before. During that week, there are usually no more classes and you can focus on studying for the exams. The safe option is to book the returning flight starting from the week after the final examinations. You can stay up to 60 days in the US after the program ends.

Usually, Munich students only stay for one semester but I have met former Munich students (which are now doing their PhD at UC Berkeley) which managed to stay for longer by asking professors whether they can work as research assistant for them. This, however, requires you to get in touch with the professor of your choice very early in the semester to show him/her, that you are the right person as this essentially means that he/she is funding you during that time.

To sum it all up: I had a great time in Berkeley! Not only did I learn a lot in the lectures and seminars but also by attending the various conferences. Although it is quite a lot of money that has to be invested, I would say that building up your human capital at UC Berkeley is one of the best things you can do! That's why I encourage you to apply for the program - you won't regret it. Good luck!