Major/Minor: Global Studies

Country: Egypt Program: American University in Cairo Term & Year Abroad: 2009-2010

Instructors
- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
  The professors at AUC are really helpful and I got to know them better than my professors at UCSB since the classes there are so much smaller. A lot of them are Americans and many are Egyptians or come from other parts of the Middle East and went to school in the states or Europe.

- Could you call them by their first names?
  I addressed all my professors by their last names.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
  I would say that it was about the same.

- Were they available for help during office hours?
  They were all more than willing to help you out during their office hours. The language professors, in particular, love just having students walk in to ask questions about homework or even just to practice Arabic.

Courses
- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
  The Modern Standard Arabic courses were a little tougher since I thought that they moved at a quicker pace than here at UCSB. I mostly took Polisci classes and I would say that the amount of work required is basically the same as at UCSB. Getting use to the semester system was a little strange, though, because it felt like we were moving at a much slower pace, in general.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
  They use the exact same grading system.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
  For most of my classes I had midterms, finals, and at least one paper. For the Arabic classes we had daily homework, quizzes, presentations, and written/oral finals. It was basically the same as at UCSB.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?
  For Arabic we had written/oral exams and for other classes we had written exams or big final papers. Unlike here at UCSB, multiple-choice exams aren’t very popular there.

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
My professors were willing to have international students take exams earlier, you just have to talk to them way ahead of time.

- What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?
  If I ever needed help I just went to office hours or spoke to my professors after class/through email.

- Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?
  I felt like my workload was manageable and my professors were really helpful so I don’t think I really had to put in any extra effort that I wouldn’t at UCSB.

- Was classroom participation expected?
  Since most classes there have only about 10-20 students it’s really difficult to hide. I had some professors who would call on students who didn’t talk that often and my Arabic classes were no larger than 8 people at the most so everyone was expected to participate a lot.

- How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?
  The courses at AUC were about the same at UCSB. The class sizes were significantly smaller so just be prepared to participate more. Also, I found that midterms/exams focused a lot more on lectures and not so much on the readings.

- Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?
  Most classes are about an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half long. Classes there are held on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Everyone gets Tuesday off.

- What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?
  It was normal to see kids walk in almost thirty minutes late or to be on their cellphones right in front of the professor. A lot of my professors ignored this but I had a couple who would actually ask students to leave.

Language
- In which languages were the courses offered?
  All classes are taught in English except, of course, for the Arabic classes.

- What language did you take your courses in?
  English
- If you took your courses in a foreign language, please provide info about your overall experience, difficulty of courses, language acquisition, placement exams, etc.

Host University
- How large is the university? Student enrollment and approx campus size (smaller than UCSB)? Is it an urban campus with many tall buildings or just a few building? The university is about a fourth of the size of UCSB… it’s really small! At first it’s a little difficult to navigate the campus since the main buildings have strange layouts. I would say that the undergrad class size is maybe a third of the undergrad size at UCSB. The New Campus is in the middle of the desert in “New Cairo.” There’s really nothing there except for new houses, construction sites, and the university, so there’s absolutely nothing to do in that part of town, except go to classes.

- Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?
  Most local students live at home.

- If not located in the city center,
  o How far or close is it to the city?
    45 minutes to an hour
  o What type of public transportation could you take – cost? There’s no metro in that part of the city so you would have to take the AUC buses if you wanted to go anywhere else in the city (you pay for the bus pass at the beginning of the semester, which I think was around $300)
  o Could students take cabs -cost? Taking cabs from campus to any other part of the city is really costly (60-80 Egyptian pounds)
  o How long would it take to get to the city center?
    45 minutes to an hour

- Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?
  There are a lot of clubs you can join and they usually table a couple of times a week right in front of the library.

- Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?
  There is a bookstore on campus and one right outside the Zamalek dorms. I got all my books from the campus bookstore.

- Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?
  There are a lot of computers in the library but they’re usually taken quickly, especially during the morning and in between classes. There are a couple of computer labs which aren’t as busy as the
library but if you know that you need to get work done you should bring your computer to campus since breaks between classes are usually really long and you don’t want to take the 45 minute bus ride to and from Zamalek again if you live in those dorms.

- What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)
  There’s really nothing around the university except for construction sites and new homes. Once you get to campus you won’t leave until you’re heading back to the Zamalek dorms or wherever else you live. There’s a McDonald’s, Subway, and other fastfood places on campus but the food isn’t that great and it can get pricey.

Housing
- What types of accommodations are available to UC students?
  You can live at the dorms at the New Campus or in Zamalek. I would recommend living in Zamalek despite the long commute to and from campus because it’s actually in the city and you meet more locals that way. There’s more to do and see in Zamalek while there’s absolute nothing at the New Campus. Most international students who stay for the whole school year usually move out of the dorms during the second semester and get apartments with a couple of other people.

- How close are they to campus?
  The Zamalek dorms are 45 minutes to an hour away from campus, depending on traffic.

- How did you find your housing?
  Living in the dorms was a little difficult because everytime you entered the dorms the guards would search your bags. They’re really strict at the dorms and guys and girls are separated.

- Where did you live and with whom?
  During the first semester I lived at the Zamalek dorms and roomed with an Egyptian girl. During the second semester two of my friends (who were also international students) and I got an apartment which was about a five minute walk away from the dorms.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?
  It was easy for my roommates and I to find an apartment because we knew girls who were moving out and their landlord was perfectly fine with us taking over the lease when our friends left. We also had one of our really good Egyptian friends there when we signed the lease to make sure both sides understood each other. Our other friends who looked for apartments usually went through a “finder” (semsar), but the only bad thing about that is you have to pay a fee, which varies (some ask for a set amount while others want a certain percentage of the first month’s rent).

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?
  The dorm rooms were just as nice as the UCSB dorms. Living in an apartment was great because everyone got their own rooms.
- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars? Living in an apartment in Cairo was much cheaper than living in I.V. There were three of us in our apartment and we each had our own rooms. The rent was about $275/month.

- How/who did you pay for housing? We paid the landlord for the whole semester’s rent plus a deposit when we signed the lease. He only took cash so we had to run around to different ATMs/banks a lot.

Food
- What was the food like? The food was pretty good and is really cheap if you stick to buying from vendors and small cafes.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc? My friends and I usually ate at small local cafés because they were cheaper, the food was pretty good, and you met some pretty interesting people.

- How much was an average meal? If you eat at a local place you shouldn’t be spending more than $2 or $3.

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner? Same as here in the states.

- Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals? A lot of my friends who are vegetarian said that eating in Egypt was difficult because vegetables aren’t really a big part of everyday meals there. You could buy vegetables at the local grocery store but they weren’t the best quality.

Travel/Safety
- If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city? Public transportation was really cheap but also really crowded. I never took the public buses but I loved the metro. A metro ticket was one pound (including transfers) which is about
twenty cents. There’s a women’s car in the metro which is really convenient if you aren’t traveling with guys.

- Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?
  It was really easy to travel to other countries. You could take a plane if you wanted to spend that money but you could also take the bus to Taba, Egypt and take the ferry to Jordan and then from there travel to other countries in the Middle East.

Host City/Country
- What was the weather like?
  August-November/March-May- very hot; have lots of thin, breathable shirts
  December-March- a light sweater will be fine

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?
  Cairo is noisy, congested, and polluted. I’ve never been to a city quite like it before. It can be a little overwhelming at first but you learn to love it quickly. The only really annoying thing is the traffic.

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
  One of the best experiences I had was watching the World Cup qualifier game between Egypt and Algeria at a local shisha bar. The place was packed with Egyptians of all ages and walks of life and it was exciting to see how passionate everyone is about the game. Sadly, Egypt lost.
  Coptic Cairo is also really interesting because this part of the city is home to mosques, synagogues, and churches that literally sit side by side.
  Going to al-Azhar and the Citadel was amazing because you get the best view of city from there.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?
  You bump into tourists/ex-pats everywhere you go in Cairo, but especially if you live in the Zamalek dorms because the neighborhood is home to a lot of the foreign embassies. There are a lot of international school in the city and billboards for companies from all over the world.

Culture
- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  ○ Time & punctuality
    Being on time there for anything is really rare so get used to waiting around for a while if you like to show up to things early.

  ○ Eye contact & staring
It’s really not a big deal if females make eye-contact with men.

- **Relationships**
  People don’t really hold hands or are very public about their relationships.

- **More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**
  Women should wear loose shirts with sleeves. If you’re going to wear a tank top make sure you cover up with a thin shawl or scarf.

- **Alcohol consumption**
  Getting drunk in public is not a good idea. You usually drink at bars or a friend’s apartment but not to the point where you’re totally wasted.

- **What culture shock did you go through?**
  Girls will have to get used to a lot of unwanted attention from men (staring, whistling, etc). Cairo isn’t the cleanest or most animal-friendly city, so you’ll have to get used to walking in extremely dirty streets and seeing stray and dead animals a lot.

- **Other?**

**Banking**

- **Were credit cards widely accepted?**
  You should always carry cash with you because most of the time when you do go out to eat or shop you’ll be going to small local places that don’t accept credit cards. The only time you’ll be using credit to pay for something is if you go out for a meal at one of the bigger restaurants, which, at least for me, happened only a handful of times throughout the year.

- **Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
  I didn’t open a local bank account and the majority of the international students I knew didn’t either.

- **If you did not open a local bank account, was it easy to withdraw money from the ATM? Which banks were popular & had low ATM fees?**
  The most popular banks were CIB and HSBC. However, you can withdraw money from any ATM. I have a bank account with Wells Fargo and they would charge me $5 everytime I withdrew money from a non-Wells Fargo ATM, but the banks themselves would not charge an extra fee. Most of the time when I went to the ATM I withdrew large amounts to avoid going so often and racking up fees from Wells Fargo.

- **Were there ATMs on campus?**
  There are two ATMs on campus.