Instructors

- What were they like when compared to UCSB instructors?
They were all really nice and very interested in us as international students. The one really big difference that I noticed is that they don’t encourage questions during lecture to the extent that UCSB professors do. I would often ask questions during class time and often they were quite thrown by it. Once I asked a question and the professor got flustered because he obviously didn’t know the answer. In the next lecture he addressed the topic that I had brought up and apologized for getting flustered, he had just never had so many questions during class before. Singaporeans never speak up in class.

- Could you call them by their first names?
Never, it would be a mark of extreme disrespect. Some of the TAs you could call by their first names, but only if that is how they introduced themselves to you.

- Was the student/instructor relationship more formal than at UCSB?
In some ways yes, I feel there is more of a gap between the student and instructor. I feel that at UCSB we can relate to our professors more than they do in Singapore. I think this may be because many Singaporeans still live at home while in University and in some ways they seem very young. The professors are all really nice and easy to approach; they are just often not approached by students.

- Were they available for help during office hours?
Yes, or by appointment.

Courses

- Were the courses more difficult when compared to UCSB courses?
They are on the semester system which means that there is much more information covered and in more depth. You have to learn to study in a different way as they expect you to know all the information in much greater detail than at UCSB. Also, many more of the exams are in essay format than we are used to.

- Was the grading system similar to UCSB?
It wasn’t quite as clear how I was doing as it is at UCSB. You won’t really know what grade you are going to get in a class until the end.

- How did the course structure differ? Ex) did you have many assignments or just finals?
I am a Psychology major so am used to mostly just midterms and finals. In Singapore, I was expected to write essays during the term for my classes which I wasn’t used to. There were many more assignments that I’m used to.

- Did you have oral and/or written exams?
All written exams, except in my mandarin class where we had both.

- Was the final exam schedule flexible or inflexible?
Very inflexible, you had to be in the exam on the day scheduled.
- **What kind of academic support, if any, did you receive?**
A lot from our EAP advisor, Daisy- she provides moral and academic support. She will help you with anything you need while abroad, really cares about us, and becomes almost like your Mom while abroad.

- **Did you find you needed to be more independent and take more initiative abroad?**
Yes, I didn’t have the same support base there that I do here. You have to be sure that if you have questions you go out and find someone to answer them. However, Daisy, our advisor that I mentioned above will help you out with whatever you need, although in order to get her help you have to ask for it.

- **Was classroom participation expected?**
Singaporeans are horrible at class participation. They are very shy, and consequently most Californians find themselves participating in class more than they ever would at home. In many classes, participation once or twice a semester in discussion (they call it tutorial) was required but it is nothing to worry about. You will find yourself participating more than ever before purely because you feel sorry for the poor TA standing at the front of the class asking a question and having no one respond.

- **How were the host university courses different than UCSB courses?**
They covered more information, which is to be expected as they are on the semester system. Also, you are expected to know the information in much more depth than at UCSB, I was questioned on small details I would never have studied at UCSB. It’s all a matter of learning how to study for the classes over there. You have to learn new tactics.

- **Were classes usually on certain days/times and for how long?**
Classes were all once a week for 2 hours with a tutorial (discussion) every other week for two hours.

- **What is the class culture like? How important was it to be punctual? Could you eat/drink in class?**
In general there is a huge respect for elders in Singapore, however, I was shocked by how the classes were abroad. People would come in half way through lecture and would be talking to each other and on their cell phones during class. It was really distracting and, I thought, rather rude.

**Language**
- **In which languages were the courses offered?**
All in English.

- **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?**
There are about 30,000 students at NUS so it is pretty large and the campus is quite a lot larger than UCSB, but much more compact. By that, I mean that the buildings are much closer together. You can get most everywhere by walking through other buildings. It is an urban campus and you can see the city from it as it is built on a hill.

- **Do the local students live on campus, at home, or off campus?**
  Most local students live at home, a few live in the dorms but many say their parents will not let them live anywhere but at home. For many of them, their parents still take them to and from school everyday.

- **If not located in the city center,**
  - **How far or close is it to the city?** Very close, depending where in the city you want to go, nothing is too far away in Singapore
  - **What type of public transportation could you take – cost?** You could take a bus, the MRT (mass rapid transit, like a subway train), or a taxi. A bus or MRT will cost you about S$1-3, which you can use your ezlink card for, it is a card that you can top up with money that makes everything much more convenient. Taxis are also quite cheap. To get into the center you will probably be paying about S$15-20, which when shared between people is really cheap, sometimes even cheaper than taking public transport.
  - **Could students take cabs -cost?** See above
  - **How long would it take to get to the city center?** If you wanted to go to the clubs/restaurants, about 20mins in a cab, 40mins on public transport. There isn’t really one center though, there are many different places to go

- **Are there student clubs on campus that UC students could join?**
  Yes, many of them, from sports teams to outdoor clubs.

- **Is there a bookstore on campus? Where did you get your books?**
  Yes, but it is tiny compared to the UCSB bookstore. Getting books in Singapore can be a pain but in general you should get them from the NUS bookstore. Don’t wait though, they sell out fast!!

- **Is there a computer lab on campus? Or, should students bring laptops?**
  You should bring a laptop if you have one, but there are many computer labs located across campus.

- **What types of establishments are in the university’s neighborhood? (cafes, stores, etc)**
  While you are in classes you will be eating on campus. There are many canteens (similar to a food court) where they sell Thai, Chinese, Malay, Indian and other foods. There is also a Subway on campus and a coffee shop (the best one by far is in the admin building!). Also, there are small convenience stores (called cheers), as well as a Burger King and a McDonalds.

**Housing**
- **What types of accommodations are available to UC students?**
  Most UC students live in dorms.

- **How close are they to campus?**
  On campus
- How did you find your housing?
When I arrived at the airport I took a cab and had a map of where I wanted to go. All the cab drivers will know where NUS is, you just need a map of campus to show them where on campus your dorm is, they may not know the exact one.

- Where did you live and with whom?
In Prince George’s Park dorms, I had my own room on a hall with 15 girls with a shared bathroom and kitchen.

- If you lived off campus, was it difficult to find an apartment and roommate?
N/A

- Were the rooms nicer or not than I.V./UCSB dorms?
Not nicer, they were worse. Housing is the one not so great thing about Singapore. I didn’t have air conditioning, which took a lot of getting used to. When you get to Singapore if you are assigned a non A/C room ask them for an A/C one, they are often a bit difficult to get, but I wish I had persevered.

- Was it more expensive than living in I.V.? How much was a typical rent cost in US dollars?
Much cheaper! This is the great thing about it, esp the non A/C rooms, we only paid about $200 a month!

- How/who did you pay for housing?
You pay the housing people at the beginning of the semester in the housing office.

Food
- What was the food like?
Very different from home, all Asian food, I ate rice or noodles for every meal. Some of it was great, some not so much. Towards the end of the year I started to make my own meals occasionally, though this is actually more expensive than just buying food in the canteen.

- Where did you eat most of your meals? Cafeterias, restaurants, street vendors, etc?
Cafeteria (they call it canteen)

- How much was an average meal?
S$2, about US$1.50!!

- What time of day did people eat lunch/dinner?
Similar times to when we eat in the states

- Would it be difficult for vegetarians to find meals?
No, they have vegetarian food stalls.

Travel/Safety
- If not discussed above, describe the public transportation system around your host university/city?
- Did you feel safe in your host city? Are there tips you would offer future students?
I felt completely safe always. Singapore is an extremely safe city, I could be out late alone in the city center and feel comfortable.

- Describe the public transportation in your host country?
It’s very clean and reliable though can get busy during peak times. It is quite convenient

- Was it difficult/easy to travel to neighboring countries?
Easy, flights are cheap and you can go pretty much anywhere from the airport in Singapore. Also, you can take regular buses to Malaysia or boats to Indonesia.

**Host City/Country**
- What was the weather like?
Very hot and humid

- Describe your host city…which California/US city is it similar to (if any)?
It’s not really similar to any city here, but then also similar to all of them. It’s very cosmopolitan and there are many business people there. I loved it because you could go to really ritzy expensive areas or to cheap areas and see different people. There is the business section but also Chinatown, Little India, Arab Street and the Malay quarter. Everywhere is different and there are always new places to explore!!

- What were some interesting/fun things that you did in the host city?
We spent a lot of time on Arab Street eating Arabic food, smoking sheesha and drinking beer. Often we would get towers of beer and share with lots of people; it was really relaxing and there’s an amazing atmosphere. The clubbing was also fun and quite cheap- on Wednesday nights it was ladies night and girls got in free and got free drinks. At some clubs on Wednesdays, guys would just pay a cover and then they could get free drinks also.

- How international was your host city in terms of tourism, cultural diversity, and international businesses?
Very, very international, there were people there from everywhere.

**Culture**
- Describe the cultural differences that you observed/encountered.
  - **Time & punctuality**
    I thought they were going to be incredibly punctual, they’re not! If you are having a group meeting expect them to be 10-15mins late, the same in class.

  - **Eye contact & staring**
    People don’t stare or really make eye contact with new people

  - **Relationships**
    Singaporeans attend university to meet someone and get married; many of them cannot leave home until they are married. Many are looking for very serious relationships.

  - **More formal dress in general, for women, for school, etc?**
    Yes, due to wanting to find a life partner. Women, especially dress up a lot for school. Often they would wear dresses that I would only ever wear out at night.

  - **Alcohol consumption**
Most NUS students look down upon those who drink alcohol, except for the international students, I think they assume we will drink. However, they have negative stereotypes about Singaporeans who drink/party.

- **What culture shock did you go through?**
  The heat is a major thing to get used to, we didn’t have air conditioning. Before you leave they tell you it is hot, I didn’t realize quite how true this was.

- **Other?**
  One thing

**Banking**

**Were credit cards widely accepted?**
They were accepted at most major restaurants and shops, but all the small food stalls in the canteens on campus don’t accept them; you have to carry cash with you.

**Did you open a local bank account? Was it easy?**
Yes, it was really easy- we just went into a branch and opened it. We opened one with DBS- they had a program where students could get better deals. Some of the other accounts require you to always have a certain amount of money in the account.

**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?**
When I used my US bank cards, I could use any ATM. I didn’t really notice that one was cheaper than another. They have a lot of HSBC banks over there. HSBC is worldwide and you don’t have to pay fees to withdraw money. If you can open an HSBC account, that would be a great idea.

**Were there ATMs on campus?**
Yes, they were all over the place, finding somewhere to take out money is never a problem. Also, if you live in PGP (Prince George’s Park) there is an ATM inside one of the science park buildings right behind where you will be living.