

Wong Tit-shing Student Exchange Scholarship

Exchange Learning Report



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Department: EIE

Country: USA

Host Institution: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Exchange Period: 18 Jan 2022 – 13 May 2022

Learning experience on this trip

The Electrical and Computer Engineering and Computer Science departments at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC) are recognised as one of the top departments in their fields not only in the US but in the whole world. To be honest, the workload brought by my three officially registered subjects was almost the same as that of seven subjects at PolyU. At universities in the US, we had assignments every week where we needed to review the knowledge taught that week and looked up extra resources regarding the homework questions. So, it did take me a long time and effort to get used to this kind of study mode.

The laboratory exercises and other kinds of projects were also quite different from that at PolyU. Most time, we needed to design and figure out the way to accomplish the goal of the lab or project, where the professor only told us the goal and little hint. I was involved in a group project on a Maths subject during the semester. The leader was quite kind and responsible. She distributed the tasks among us and took extra care of me since she knew I was new to the American-style projects. The tasks were not easy, but we managed to complete them successfully.



Career aspiration

There are a variety of labs in every engineering department at UIUC with different research areas and focuses. Many students at UIUC have been proactive even from their first year of study to approach professors to ask for opportunities to work in the research groups. I should have got a similar chance before, but it was lost because of the sudden coronavirus outbreak. As life is gradually getting normal and after I saw the dedication of some of my friends that were working at the labs, I make up my mind to pursue a research master's or even PhD degree after graduating from PolyU. I have secured an assistant job with a professor I know at PolyU to work during the summer after my exchange programme ends, to prepare myself for FYP and postgraduate studies.



Views on other culture

UIUC offered an orientation subject for us exchange students to understand the US cultures better. We learnt about its cultures like some of the famous festivals and their customs and the dos and don'ts when talking to Americans. We also learnt about its education system, which is quite different from that of the education systems in Mainland China,

Hong Kong and Taiwan which I am more familiar. I used to think that I know much about the US education system, but during the class, I found that I was wrong. Even in the US, there are a lot of differences in different places, and the duration of each period of study can vary.

Champaign County, where UIUC lies, is a typical US city, but when I first arrived in the “city”, I thought this was just a small town with a poor public transportation system and nearly no skyscrapers. Later I understood that I was wrong, Champaign could characterise American cities, while big cities like San Francisco, Chicago or New York are less “American” to American people.

As one of the freest countries in the world, everyone has their lifestyle, and everyone can choose their ways of life. Unlike PolyU where we usually have a routine to finish our four-year studies, students at UIUC usually have little limitation in choosing their subjects. They have much freedom to choose, explore the possible routes and take the classes they find most interesting. That may be one of the reasons why most of the top scientists and engineers in the world graduate from US universities.



Detailed study schedule in the exchange-out institution

Class Schedule for Spring 2022 - Urbana-Champaign					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
10					
11	✓ Deep Learning for Compt Visn		✓ Deep Learning for Compt Visn		
12					
13		✓ Digital Signal Lab	✓ Machine Learning	✓ Machine Learning	
14					
15	✓ Digital Signal Processing		✓ Digital Signal Processing		✓ Digital Signal Processing
16	✓ Grainger Engr. Design Your Exc		✓ Grainger Engr. Design Your Exc		
17		✓ Stochastic Processes & Applic		✓ Stochastic Processes & Applic	
18					

I officially registered for two major-specific subjects with Labs (one for Major and one for Minor studies) and audited another two CS subjects as these two couldn't be transferred during the semester. I also registered for another unsynchronised General Education subject which is not displayed in the timetable and an orientation subject designed for exchange students. Some insights gained from the above subjects have been mentioned in the previous parts of the reports. As the coronavirus outbreak continued, the lecturers at UIUC could decide the teaching modes by themselves, so I took most of the classes face-to-face and the rest online. After class, I needed to review the knowledge and complete the assignments for each of the subjects before having little time to rest.

To conclude, I appreciate the opportunity to study at UIUC for a semester and experience life at one of the top engineering schools in the world. Thank PolyU and Ir Dr Wong for providing and subsidizing the trip!