

Making the Most of Being a Student at UCL Economics Department

By: Daniel Rogger, UCL PhD candidate and 2001-4 UCL Undergraduate

“Any university in a capital city is a university squared” *Head of History, UCL*

Studying at the UCL Economics department is rewarding in itself. It is one of only four economics departments in the UK to achieve the top 5* rating in the most recent national Research Assessment Exercise, and was given full marks for the quality of its teaching. It is one of the finest economic departments in Europe.

However, having studied here as an undergraduate myself, I know that there are a huge variety of opportunities to enrich that experience across the university and throughout the local area. Whilst I hope to avoid covering familiar ground about the joy of extra-curricular activities, here are a few thoughts on how to make the most of being a student at the UCL Economics Department.

1. Go to More Lectures

When you arrive at UCL, you don't realise that you are actually arriving in the university quarter of London. Not only does UCL have its own public events (www.ucl.ac.uk/news/events), but so do many of the other universities in the area:

- London School of Economics (www.lse.ac.uk/collections/LSEPublicLecturesAndEvents);
- School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, www.soas.ac.uk/events);
- Institute for the Study of the Americas (<http://americas.sas.ac.uk/events>)
- British Museum (www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/events_and_activities.aspx);
- Birkbeck University (www.bbk.ac.uk/about/news/lectures).

It would be a great shame to leave Bloomsbury having never developed your interests by going to some of these lectures, many of which are with world famous academics.

2. Go Library Mad!

When UCL advertises itself, it really should say more about the fact that its nearest off campus library (the British Library) contains *every single English language book ever published*. Beat that. So what about these:

- The British Library has every English language book you could ever want (www.bl.uk);
- SOAS university library is one of the world's most important academic libraries for the study of Africa, Asia and the Middle East (www.soas.ac.uk/library);
- Just over the road from the department is the Wellcome Trust Library (<http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/>) for those interested in Health Economics;
- Check out a comprehensive list of all the libraries in the University of London at www.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/other/libsinlon.asp.

3. Get out into the Open Air

London is a much friendlier place to be in than it seems on the surface. A third of it is green space, and there is more history to explore here than almost any other city in the World. Try the following:

- Running through, playing sport in or studying at Regents Park, ten minutes walk away (www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/regents_park);
- Walking round London on some of the carefully designed walks, such as the Jubilee walkway (www.jubileewalkway.org.uk);
- Learn more about Economics on the UCL Econometrics World Congress Economics Walks (www.econ.ucl.ac.uk/eswc2005/walks.php);
- Want some free guided tours of London? Try www.londonwalks.libsyn.com which are free mp3 tracks of guided tours around London;
- One of my favourite breaks from study is walking along the Regents section of the Grand Union Canal (e.g. walk from little Venice to just behind Kings Cross, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regent's_Canal).

4. Build Your C.V.

It looks good for your C.V. if you involve yourself with the Union, such as being a member of the Union Executive team, or writing for Equilibrium. However, go beyond the Union and use the incredible opportunities across London to make yourself more marketable:

- Do summer internships for the Bank of England (www.jobsatthebank.co.uk), or any of the big finance institutions such as Goldman Sachs (www2.goldmansachs.com);
- Work for an economic think tank, such as the Institute for Public Policy Research (www.ippr.org) or the Adam Smith Institute (www.adamsmith.org). The fact that I could use STATA got me a job at the National Institute for Economic and Social Research - www.niesr.ac.uk;
- Work for a charity on an issue that you feel strongly about. I worked one summer at Action for Southern Africa - www.actsa.org;
- Get to the UCL Careers Service in your first year and not only in your last (www.ucl.ac.uk/careers). Start planning from day one! Get on some of their skills development trainings (www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/current-students/skills-development.htm);
- Do something totally random with your time. I worked for a comedy club in my first year - www.amusedmoose.com – it was hilarious!

5. Explore the Night Life

Don't just stick to one or two clubs or bars your entire time at UCL. London has one of the most cosmopolitan night lives of any city in the World. Have you been to any of the following (all within walking distance of the department)?

- Fridays or Saturdays at 'Fabric' in Angel are some of the most enjoyable nights you can have out (www.fabriclondon.com);
- 'The End' is one of London's finest modern music establishments (www.endclub.com/news/index.php);
- The 'National Theatre' is a world class venue for plays, music and off-key events and it has lots of free or heavily discounted options for students (www.nationaltheatre.org.uk);
- The Royal Academy for Dramatic Art's cheap or often free performances just up the road (www.rada.org/foyer.html), as is UCL's 'Bloomsbury Theatre' (www.thebloomsbury.com);
- Late night opening (till 10pm) at Tate Modern art gallery on Friday and Saturday (www.tate.org.uk/modern).

6. DO NOT go to the Odeon

London probably has the finest range of Cinema's in the world. Every time you go to the Odeon, you are missing out on a chance to try one of them out. Again, many of them are within walking distance of the department.

- Curzon Soho – One of the coolest cinema's in the world, and host to some very big celebrities (www.curzoncinemas.com/flash/venues/soho);
- Renoir – A totally artsy and low key gem hidden behind Russell Square (www.curzoncinemas.com/flash/venues/renoir);
- Prince Charles – Films for GBP1.50, and on Leicester Square! (www.princecharlescinema.com);
- Electric Cinema – Leather seats, footstools, and GBP5 on Mondays (www.electricensema.co.uk);
- The Barbican - "London's most diverse cinema" (www.barbican.org.uk/film);
- Finally, the daddy of them all, the British Film Institute (www.bfi.org.uk) who are giving out free student tickets on morning showings during the 51st London Film Festival (till November 1st; www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/lff)

7. Do NOT Miss 'Secret' London

There are hundreds of things to do in London that you would never really hear about. If you want stories about your time in London, then check out the following:

- Time Out's '100 things to do before you leave London' (www.timeout.com/london/features/2253.html);
- Read 'London: The Biography' by Peter Ackroyd (www.amazon.com/London-Biography-Peter-Ackroyd/dp/0385497709) and visit some of the places of interest he mentions;
- Take the tube to Hampstead and walk to the 'Secret Garden' on Hampstead Heath (search for 'Pergola' at www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/living_environment/open_spaces/hampstead_heath.htm).

And if nothing here tickles your fancy, look at the resources in box 1 or e-mail me for more individual tips on areas of interest you might have. I am happy to share what I know. My e-mail address is danrogger@hotmail.com.

Whilst a UCL degree is hard work, you can still get the best grades and enjoy London life. Coming to London is a great move on your part, but only if you use what it has to offer! Good luck.

Box .1. Resources to Get the Most Out of London

Careers

The UK's official graduate careers website (www.prospects.ac.uk) will give you tips on what experience to get whilst at university. Do not forget to go to the London Graduate Recruitment Fair (www.londongradfair.co.uk/autumn) on Monday 22nd October.

London Life

Don't miss out on that killer event, check out www.londontown.com and the print and internet editions of Time Out (www.timeout.com/london) regularly. www.londononline.co.uk/events has lots of options if you run out of ideas. And if you really want to learn more about London, get on the tourist bus (www.theoriginaltour.com).

London Chill

Learn all about the Royal Parks at www.royalparks.org.uk. Or get out of work mode for an entire day, and find a day out through www.english-heritage.org.uk, www.daysoutguide.co.uk, or www.visitlondon.com.