

**Travel report – Visiting Student Researcher at the Center for the Study of Law and Society,  
University of California at Berkeley**  
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Thanks in no small part to a generous grant from Pembroke College, I had the opportunity to spend the period from January to May 2012 as a visiting student researcher at the Center for the Study of Law and Society, which is a research institute situated within the Law School of the University of California at Berkeley. My stay at Berkeley coincided with the middle of my third and final year as a PhD student at Cambridge. My research is broadly concerned with the conceptual problems of national legal systems in the context of globalisation. As such, I am often compelled to work at the intersection of various disciplines, most notably very theoretical and speculative disciplines such as legal and political philosophy on the one hand, and more empirically oriented, social sciences such as economics and sociology on the other.

The CSLS is one of the most reputable institutions within the “Law & Society” movement (in many ways, it was instrumental to its initial founding and subsequent proliferation), which is a broad movement of scholars who attempt to study legal issues in a wider societal (i.e. not just in the context of courts and legislatures) by means of social scientific empirical research. For a variety of reasons, much legal academic work tends to avoid such empirical research, focusing instead on more legal sources in a more narrow sense, such as legal doctrine, case-law and legislative analysis. My intent was to expose the themes of my PhD, and my own developing lines of research, to the research community at Berkeley to obtain a fresh, more empirically oriented perspective on the issues that I work on. In addition, I was very keen to benefit from the wider context of Berkeley, itself well known for its strength in the area of the humanities and the social sciences, and particularly for its sustained practical engagement with wider social issues.

On all these counts my time at Berkeley did not disappoint. Shortly after arriving, I was inducted into the centre, who kindly provided me with ample office space a short distance away from the campus. The CSLS itself is housed in its own building (incidentally a rather charming, period house on the Campus grounds formerly a ‘frat house’, as it is known in the local vernacular), and its activities are plenty and various. Apart from serving as a central hub in a physical sense (with library facilities, several offices, a seminar room and a workshop area), it is the social nexus both for researchers from the Law school as well as from the broader humanities departments at Berkeley. The main forum for interaction was the weekly CSLS seminar, which I always attended with pleasure and from which I acquired many unexpected suggestions and ideas for my own work. In addition, the CSLS visiting scholar community is quite large and constituted an active group on campus, with regular lunches, meetings and coffees during which many fruitful exchanges were had. Finally, the CSLS acted as a conduit with the wider Berkeley community, and provided visiting scholars with many opportunities to seek out workshops, seminars and conferences both in Berkeley as well as in neighbouring Stanford.

Looking back, I would have to say that the ‘general atmosphere’ and the extensive, proverbial water-cool talk - intangible as such factors are - was the biggest benefit from of my stay. Two thirds of the way into a PhD is a good time to withdraw from your comfort zone and to ‘test drive’ your ideas in front of a fresh audience, which is exactly what I did. I noticed a great productivity gain, partly as a result of the simple fact that being thrust into a new environment is in itself a strong motivating force, particularly an environment as vibrant and lively as Berkeley. I met with many faculty members while at Berkeley to discuss my work, each of which was incredibly generous with their time and feedback. I now have a research paper under consideration with a peer-reviewed journal, one of the main products of my time at Berkeley. Having just returned to Cambridge, I have a very clear picture of the work that remains to be done to complete my dissertation and I feel that the substance of my ideas has been significantly enhanced due to my time abroad.

In sum, I am grateful to my supervisor and faculty for granting me leave to work away for such a significant amount of time, and I am particularly indebted to Pembroke for their generous financial support for my stay. The costs turned out to be somewhat more significant than I had anticipated, particularly with regards to securing the necessary visas, travel permissions and health care requirements, all of which would have made my stay prohibitively expensive were it not for the support from college.