Corey studied at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts during the Fall 2015 quarter. He learned so much from this experience that he wants to share his experience with any MATE contemplating study abroad.

To Freshmen Interested in Studying Abroad

Your first year at Cal Poly is easily the most important year of your college experience because of the connections you make. You meet students from all around America who share similar interests, as well as unique backgrounds and viewpoints. Living and studying in Switzerland was just as essential to my learning experience because of the connections I made while learning in a new environment. I experienced the same enthusiasm of WOW every week, while meeting over 100 students from 22 countries. I truly now have friends all around the world! When you travel half way across the world, your time is more valuable than money.

Things to Keep In Mind

Money: Switzerland is one of the richest countries in the world and you will be living among the richest cities in the world, so don’t be surprised when a Whopper costs more than $15. But if you shop smart, learn to cook, or eat with friends, you can make it on less than $4 a meal. However, with the inflated prices here, you want to be sure to pack everything you need or look for cheaper prices in Germany or Italy.

Transportation: It’s very convenient and efficient! You’ll most likely take a bus, train or cable car every day – and you will want to do so as easily and inexpensively as possible. On Day 1, buy these two passes: the Half-Fare Card (granting you half price on trains, buses, ferries, trams, and gondolas – you’ll make your money back within the first month) and the Zone Pass for unlimited travel within Lucerne and the surrounding cities. (If you buy a bike and use it in Lucerne, you might not need the Zone Pass.) The Gleis 7 provides unlimited travel from 7pm to 5am. This pays for itself if you plan on traveling to the larger cities in Switzerland like Geneva for a day, buying a supersaver ticket there with the half-fare card, and coming back at night.

Phone: I brought an unlocked iPhone with me and bought a local SIM card. I wanted to have data available no matter where I was, and it’s rather affordable for 15 CHF per 1 GB per month.

Passport, Visa, and Resident Permit: If you don’t already have a passport, get it as soon as possible. The Student Visa application process can be lengthy and will require you to fill out and dig up a lot of documentation. However, the longest part of the process is the six to eight week waiting period between submitting the documentation and receiving your visa. Submit paperwork three months in advance and request an in-person meeting at the Swiss Embassy in San Francisco (see their website). These appointments need to be made at least six weeks in advance. This way you get your visa directly, as opposed to having to send your passport in and wait an additional two to three weeks.
After you arrive in Switzerland, you’ll apply for your Resident Permit. The appropriate papers are included in a packet before your departure; take them to one of the migration offices in Lucerne and pay a 30 CHF fee. Two to three weeks later, you’ll be summoned to have your biometric data taken (and pay 242 CHF). Then you’ll receive your resident permit and be done with all the legalities.

Living Accommodations: The Gerliswilstrasse 6 apartments in Emmenbrucke are great with 5 floors of shared flats, your own kitchen, two bathrooms, and single rooms larger than you have at Cal Poly. These fill up fast! Gerliswilstrasse 6 is an eight-minute train ride from Lucerne and conveniently located across the street from a Subway (all-you-can eat Monday-Wednesday) and the cheapest grocery store Lidl.

I stayed with Cal Poly students at Hotel Central. Hopefully starting Fall 2016, Hotel Central will be a more affordable option. Hotel Central is a block from the main train station and is in the center of the city life. Another living accommodation which was available to us was the Student Mentor housing, which are studio apartments shared between four people in a very nice complex and neighborhood.

The School: The Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, ("the engineering school"), is located in Horw (pronounced “horb”). It’s a six-minute train ride from Lucerne and a three-minute walk to the school. The school has a cafeteria, a small library, and several labs – including one with more materials analysis hardware than we have in some of our labs. The required Swissness course teaches you about the Swiss culture and include at least three excursions around Switzerland!

Before you go to Switzerland, consult a Cal Poly Academic Advisor to see if German A1 can qualify for GE or C2 credit.

Languages: Switzerland has four national languages: German, Italian, French, and Romanche. Though English isn't one of these, it is the third most popular language and most everyone can speak it. Lucerne is in the German part of Switzerland, so it is very helpful to learn as much Duolingo or German as you can. No matter what you language you speak, you’ll encounter language barriers (even with students who speak more than five languages), so have fun with it!

Weather: I thought it would be much colder in a country known for amazing Alpine skiing, but September and October are relatively warm, averaging mid-60s. Every other day was sunny, blue skies. It does rain frequently. Mid-October seems to be the turning point for the colder, cloudy weather. Snow isn't expected until at least the end of November.

Traveling: See as much as you can while you can! Enjoy the nice weather, and see the many beautiful cities this country has to offer. I traveled to Bern, Engelberg, Geneva, and Zurich, and hiked two of the most spectacular mountains. Make plans to travel with groups of students, and don't be afraid to spend a day by yourself taking in the sights.