

Participating in the exchange program at the University of Chicago was truly an fantastic experience. I was able to witness firsthand the immense resources of American higher education, the spirit of bold innovation in U.S. academia, the beauty of Gothic-style campus architecture, the striking skyline blending old and new urban buildings, the perfect weather, and the breezy summer beaches along Lake Michigan. All of these elements wove together into a wonderful three-month research exchange that I will never forget. Below, I'll share my experience in several parts:

Program Application

The most challenging part of the application was finding a professor willing to host you as a summer research student. The program website provides a list of potential PIs, but you can also search for professors directly on UChicago's official website. If you reach out to professors outside the list, you need to clearly explain how the program works and obtain a letter from them confirming they are willing to host you.

Initially, I contacted several professors from the official list but received no replies. Eventually, I found a professor outside the list who agreed to host me. Many of my peers also found their host professors this way, so it's definitely a viable option. Once you clear this most difficult step, the rest of the process is fairly straightforward.

Campus Safety

The university is located in Hyde Park, a neighborhood in the southern part of Chicago, which is known to have higher crime rates. That said, there's no need to worry excessively—the university invests significant resources to maintain safety around campus. There's a free point-to-point shuttle service for students from 5 p.m. to 3 a.m., along with frequent security patrols. As long as you walk in groups at night and use the shuttle service wisely, you'll be just fine on campus.

Ironically, the subway in downtown Chicago can feel less safe at times. Occasionally you may encounter people yelling, smoking, or using marijuana in train cars. In such cases, it's best to quietly move away and avoid confrontation.

Campus Housing

Most students in this program stay in the Campus North Residential Commons, a modern dormitory with shared double rooms. It's usually possible to room with another student from Taiwan in the program if you prefer similar living habits, but you can also request to live with someone from another country for a different cultural experience.

The dorms are very new and clean, with common areas including lounges, piano rooms, pool and ping pong tables, shared kitchens, and laundry rooms. Its location is central, making it convenient to access most academic buildings, and there's a bus stop right outside that goes directly to the subway station.

Our UCTS cohort had about 30 exchange students, so we often cooked dinner together, chatted over meals, or played games in the evenings. These shared moments brought a sense of warmth and fun to our busy weekdays. I'm deeply grateful to have met such an amazing group of people at UChicago—they made this summer one of the happiest and most unforgettable periods of my life.

Campus Life

Students in the UCTS program have free access to the university gym, swimming pool, and various sports facilities. Most campus buildings are in Gothic style, and many dining halls or libraries look like something straight out of Hogwarts—classic and stunning. At the center of campus, there's a beautiful lawn with chairs where students relax in the gentle summer breeze and warm sunshine. Reading or daydreaming on the grass under perfect weather was one of my favorite daily routines, and I find myself missing it every day now that I'm back in Taiwan.

Research Experience

I joined Prof. Amanchukwu's lab, which focuses on battery electrolytes in the field of electrochemistry. Because the experiments involve avoiding oxygen and moisture, most of the work had to be done inside a glovebox. It took me a few days to get used to it since it was my first time working in one—it's surprisingly difficult to maneuver your hands inside and it gets quite warm—but it was a very interesting experience.

I was deeply impressed by the abundant research resources at American universities: spacious labs, comprehensive analytical equipment, and easy access to high-value instruments. Each student is assigned a mentor in the lab. I was fortunate to be paired with a Taiwanese Ph.D. student who also graduated from NTU. She took great care of me, both in the lab and in daily life, making my time in Chicago incredibly enjoyable. I'm truly grateful for her guidance throughout the three months.

Beyond technical skills, I also observed cultural differences between U.S. and Taiwanese research environments. For example, the professor-student relationship in the U.S. tends to be more egalitarian. At first, it felt a bit strange to address professors by their first names, but it was a fun cultural shift to experience.

This program takes place during UChicago's summer quarter, so we didn't take classes—we focused entirely on research. While I regret not being able to experience American undergraduate classes, the upside was gaining a deeper understanding of graduate research life in the U.S. This experience also helps strengthen our CVs and often leads to strong recommendation letters from UChicago professors, which are valuable for future Ph.D. applications. If you're considering graduate studies abroad, I highly recommend this program—it's an excellent stepping stone both academically and professionally.

Activities Outside Campus

Chicago is the third largest city in the U.S., after New York and Los Angeles, and the largest in the Midwest. What makes Chicago especially attractive, in my opinion, are three things:

1. The harmonious blend of old and new architectural styles,
2. The city's proximity to Lake Michigan, and
3. The Chicago River running through downtown.

These features make Chicago a visually stunning city. In the summer, it's lovely to stroll along the river, watching yachts glide past the skyscrapers that shape the city's iconic skyline. Picnicking or barbecuing by the lakeshore is equally magical. The summer weather is comfortable, averaging around 23 °C, and the city is full of events—many of them free. From the annual Air Show featuring military aircraft to various music festivals, there's always something happening on weekends. You'll never feel bored or overwhelmed by heat—it's a city I truly fell in love with.

Conclusion

Before this program, my impressions of the U.S. came mostly from movies, TV shows, and social media. Sometimes it looked dreamy, but the news and online chatter often portrayed it as chaotic and dangerous. After living there for over three months, I realized the reality is much more nuanced—and to my surprise, I grew quite fond of it.

Some things can only be understood through personal experience. So if you're reading this, I encourage you to take the leap and apply for this program. Not only will your summer be enriching, but you'll also gain valuable research skills and unforgettable memories. If you're passionate about research and lab work, you'll thrive and enjoy every moment.

For more information, visit the [UCTS Program Website](#). If you have any questions, feel free to look up my name (Ryan) and message me on Facebook—I'll be happy to help whenever I can.

Wishing you the best of luck with your application and future studies!



