

Name: Melanie Allram

Study programme: Molecular Biotechnology, Master

Host country and host university/institute: MA, USA. Harvard Medical School/ Boston Children's Hospital, Zon lab

Period of stay: from 03.02.2020 until 13.12.2020

### **General impression of your research stay abroad**

When I first came to Boston I kind of already felt at home- there's a reason it is known as the "most European city in the US". Everything is easy to reach, either by public transport or even walking. Boston is definitely a place to be for motivated students and professionals as it is home to many top-notch universities and institutes from various fields. The huge amount of highly potential people makes Boston unique and leaves a visiting student with fascination and grace to be part of this community. Besides its very attractive professional and educational opportunities, Boston has a lot to offer for leisure time activities- from strolling the inner city and shopping streets over walking/jogging next to Charles river to exploring the multicultural districts and their bars and restaurants. For a little get away, the neighbouring states Vermont and New Hampshire are great for outdoor activities like hiking and the nearby Cape Cod invites to relax at the beach.

### **Quality of the host institution**

I did my Masters project at the Zon lab at Boston Children's Hospital/ Harvard Medical School. Thematically, the research group is split into two subgroups giving a visiting student an even broader overview of recent topics and advances in medical biology. I attended the weekly lab meetings, subgroup meetings and various talks that were held by top-notch researchers at the Medical Center which were very inspiring. I got to experience a highly international and renown research lab and getting exposed to a lot of research topics and cutting-edge technologies for sure taught me a lot. As monetary aspects play a big role in research, Boston Children's Hospital and the Harvard Medical School are really the best landing spot a researcher can wish for. The lab was really well equipped providing a researcher with everything needed to do great science. The financial resources allowed me to explore and use latest methods and technologies. As Boston is a meeting place for various people in biotech- from research over start-ups to industries, one gets to see a lot of different perspectives from highly qualified and competent people.

### **Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization**

The atmosphere in the lab was very good. My supervisor Jeff Mito, a Post-Doc in the Zon lab, introduced me to the topic and methods and slowly handed over the project to me. He taught me a lot of technical skills but also various computational analysis tools. The research group leader Leonard Zon was always available and besides training students how to do great science, he is an amazing mentor. He really helped me shaping my future career and supported me with my future applications. The Zon lab is really a unique and great place to be as a researcher and all the other lab members were really supportive, from sharing materials to knowledge on methods. Before the pandemic we used to have lunch together which allowed to get to know the people on a more personal level and even during the lock down the lab organized a virtual get together.

### **Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows**

I definitely recommend a research stay at the Zon lab! Especially my research group leader Len Zon and supervisor Jeff Mito have taught me a lot on how to do great science and how to stay focused and happy in this competitive environment. Apart from the professional environment, Boston is really a great city which has a lot to offer for people with various backgrounds and interests.

For finding a suitable accommodation I would suggest joining online groups on Facebook like Harvard Housing where private people post their rooms/apartments or Craigslist. The latter is definitely a

little bit scatchy and one has to be careful to not get scammed, however, that's where I found my apartment and it's still the most common place where people find their places. It is also great if you want to look for used stuff (similar to the Austrian Willhaben).

I would recommend getting in touch with as many people as possible during the stay and to do extensive networking. There are so many highly potential people in Boston and at Harvard University and it is definitely helpful to have those connections in the future, besides making friends and exploring the country.

Finally, I would recommend students to not be deterred by the image of Boston as being one of the most expensive cities in the world. Of course, housing is very expensive but besides from rent, it is possible to live on a budget. Thanks to the generous support of associations like the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation it is doable and does not require an elitist background to get the full Harvard experience.