

Field Report Marshall Plan Foundation

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay at the Research Institute for Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna, Austria. The IMP is part of the Vienna BioCenter (VBC), a campus consisting of several research institutes and biotechnology companies. I worked in the lab of Dr. Elly Tanaka, PhD, supervised by Dr. Pietro Tardivo, MD, a PhD student in the lab. Pietro hails from Italy and became one of my closest friends at the IMP. He generously took me under his wing to teach me various molecular biology techniques. I got to know many of the PhD students, postdocs and PI's that make up the international research community of Vienna. Everyone was welcoming, kind and inclusive. The diversity at the institute is really remarkable, with scientists coming from all over the world to pursue research at the highest level. To address the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMP offered twice-weekly, free, in-house PCR testing to all its employees. Additionally, we all wore masks within the buildings, except when eating.

Every Monday, the VBC holds "Monday Seminar," where three PhD students or postdocs present their research. It's a nice opportunity to learn what other scientists are working on and how their research may apply to yours. On Wednesdays, the Tanaka lab has group meeting, where one lab member gives a short chalk-talk (5-10 minutes) and another gives a longer presentation (60-90 minutes). These group meetings often last over two hours, as lab members debate possible takeaways from newly acquired data. Everyone is encouraged to ask questions, even the undergraduate and masters students working in the lab. I presented my research in a long talk format and found it to be a great opportunity to get advice from the whole lab on ongoing and future experiments. On Fridays, the Tanaka lab holds journal club, where a lab member presents a paper, or a series of papers, on a topic relevant to their research or the lab as a whole. Frequently these meetings are geared towards new technologies that may benefit the lab, such as sample clearing methods or new genetic knockout strategies. I found the Tanaka lab work environment to be warm, collaborative and highly inspiring. Asking for help or clarification was not stigmatized, but rather encouraged. Dr. Tanaka has a demanding schedule, but she still finds time to meet with each scientist one-on-one weekly. I had meetings with Dr. Tanaka and Pietro every

Wednesday after group meeting, where I presented any new data and discussed ongoing experiments.

The services provided by the IMP are really great. As my project involved a lot of imaging, I got to know the in-house BioOptics team quite well. I received professional training for the Z1 light sheet microscope (Zeiss) and LSM 880 point-scanning confocal microscope (Zeiss) from Pawel Pasierbek and Tobias Müller, respectively. If any problems arose with the hardware or software, technicians were readily available to provide support within minutes. I also appreciated the in-house molecular biology services (MBS) provided by the IMP. The MBS team offers unlimited Sanger DNA Sequencing, with results typically returned within 24 hours. The IT team loaned me a MacBook Pro to use for work for the duration of my stay. If any software problems arose, the IT team typically responded within hours. I ate breakfast and lunch every day in the IMP cafeteria, which serves Austrian specialties at a discounted price for scientists—I typically spent only 5 Euros on lunch.

The Marshall Plan Foundation has set up academic exchange agreements with a number of host universities in Austria. However, since the IMP is not a university institution, it does not qualify for this collaboration agreement. In order to comply with the Marshall Plan Scholarship requirements, I became a temporary international student at the University of Innsbruck for the duration of my stay in Vienna. Dr. Frank Edenhofer, a professor at the University of Innsbruck, generously offered to act as my host university supervisor.

I cannot recommend the IMP enough to prospective Marshall Plan Scholarship recipients. Vienna is a beautiful city with an exciting history and rich culture. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, concerts, restaurants and bars were off-limits for most of my stay. I will have to return to Vienna in the near future, after the pandemic subsides, to fully experience the night life and live music scene.