

Washington State University, Pullman

Marshall Plan Scholarship Field Report

Stefan Leitner (ste.leitner@student.tugraz.at)

March 1, 2016 - August 31, 2016

My six months research stay at Washington State University, Pullman, WA, USA was academically the best experience that I have made so far. As the target of my stay was the publication of the research, I was highly motivated and left no stone unturned to make the necessary progress. My advisor was very supportive and tolerant but at the same time he always made sure that a lot of progress was made. He integrated me into his research team and treated me no different than his phd students. I was provided a desk in the power electronics lab and was closely working with one of his phd students. I was also fortunate to get to know folks from the Iranian community in Pullman, who I became close friends with. Shout-out to them; because of them, I had a lot of fun during my stay.

Washington State University is located in Pullman, a city in the southeastern Washington state. The city is surrounded by the Palouse hills, which in summer become a sight for sore eyes. As these hills become green, they provide the perfect place to go for a run or walk. The scenery sometimes reminded me of the movie Lord of the Rings somewhat. Pullman is a small city with about 33,000 citizens, of which 20,000 are students. Because most of the people living there are students, in summer a large portion of them is spending their break back at home and Pullman seems a little empty. However, this immediately changes once the semester begins. There are a few bars and places to go out downtown and quite some places to eat as well. Pullman has several bus routes, which run very often during the semester. Over the summer break however, there's almost no public transportation. The university has several food courts. The most important one is called CUB, which is short for Compton Union Building. There's a panda express, a pizza place, a subway, a Mexican grill, a frozen yoghurt place, a burger place, and a Starbucks. The Starbucks is one of three in Pullman. Pullman also has several grocery stores and other places to go shopping like Walmart, Safeway, and Dismore's. However, as Pullman is rather spread out, like most cities in america, it is rather hard to get around without a car.

Pullman is situated near the border of the state of Idaho. The city of Moscow, which is home to the University of Idaho, is just 15min by car from Pullman. In Moscow, there is a shopping mall and quite some places to eat or go out. In summer, there's a farmers' market with all kind of different foods, fruits, and vegetables. Pullman and Moscow share

an airport right in the middle of both cities. If you are flying into or out of Pullman, the airport closely located to the city is very convenient. Flying into Spokane, which is a larger city 1.5h by car from Pullman, is much cheaper but you need someone to pick you up. Spokane is also worth visiting for a day trip. There's a big mall and nice restaurants. Not far away from Spokane, there's a city called Coeur d'Alen just across the border, in Idaho. They have a beautiful lake and a reasonably priced Brazilian steak house which I highly recommend checking out some time when in the area. I also went on vacation a few times. Before I got to Pullman, I stopped by Knoxville, Tennessee for a few nights, to visit old friends from my academic year 2014/15. During my research stay in Pullman, I visited Seattle which is highly recommended. I also went to LA and took a cruise to Catalina Island and down the coast of Mexico. A few friends and I took a road trip to Yellowstone National Park; also highly recommended but quite a drive.

It was rather difficult and time consuming to finally get all the documents necessary for the visa application. I was writing a lot of emails to different persons of the host department and international office and nobody seemed to really know how that works and who is responsible. That was really frustrating at first, since I couldn't book my flight until I had at least the visa appointment in Vienna. Also, purchasing adequate insurance for my stay and finding a place to live was up to me. I had to organize everything by myself. However, everybody was always super nice, be it the professors, students, or staff. Every now and then, they had free pizza or ice cream for the students. In general, the quality of the host institution was very high. The professor was highly motivated and encouraged the students to do well and make progress. Washington State University has a high faculty-to-students ratio; hence, classes are rather small. I attended a course several times without signing up for it and it was really interesting and of good quality. I stopped attending just because I had to leave Pullman already.

I would recommend and encourage future marshall plan students to join clubs or organizations. Unfortunately, I failed to do so. There's a lot of them and they offer all kinds of different stuff. It is also a good opportunity to get to know new people and make friends. Another must-have is the admission to the recreational center (REC). You can purchase a membership for a whole semester and there's also tickets for summer break. They also sell single day tickets which are 8 bucks. The facilities are awesome. They have gym equipment, swimming pools, volleyball and basketball courts, soccer fields, and all kind of other indoor or outdoor stuff. It is also possible to rent camping gear and many other things. I would also recommend matching the stay with the fall semester. For one thing, because all of the students are in town and for another thing, because of the football season. The Washington State Cougars, also called Cougs, are the athletic football team at Washington State University, playing in the Pac-12 Conference. It is totally worth watching them play in Martin Stadium located on campus. All in all, it was a great experience and I don't regret it at all. I grew both academically and personally and my stay at Washington State University, Pullman broadened my horizons in so many different ways. Go Cougs!