

Field Report for the Marshall Plan Foundation

This report is a summary of my general impressions and experience participating in the Marshall Plan Foundation's fellowship at the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (CUAS). Prior to detailing my experiences, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Gernot Paulus, his research assistants, and the staff in the International Office at CUAS. Dr. Paulus is an outstanding researcher and project coordinator, and he was instrumental in helping me feel at home in Austria. His research assistants, especially Christoph and Melanie Erlacher were friendly, welcoming, and invited me to participate in many extra-curricular activities. Finally, the International Office staff were helpful in the preparations to move abroad, and receptive to some concerns I had once arrived.

General Impressions

Austria and particularly Carinthia, are beautiful. The mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes are unlike anything I had ever seen. When I initially arrived, I was awestruck. From a visual perspective and an active lifestyle, I could imagine no better place to spend three months conducting research. CUAS is located along the Drau, which has a fantastic bicycle path and easy transportation options to Villach and Klagenfurt. There are also two nearby lakes which I frequented for swimming: Silbersee and Woerthersee. Silbersee was great for swimming in June and July, and Woerthersee has some amazing beaches and piers for lounging and swimming throughout the summer. The staff in the International Office at CUAS recommended I purchase a Vorteilskarte from OeBB, and this made it remarkably affordable to visit nearby places like Salzburg, and places a bit further away such as Vienna.

Villach definitely has a 'small town' feel to it. The architecture of the homes, shops, and churches near the town center is impressive and induces feelings of nostalgia. I thought the outdoor football events for Euro Cup 2016 were fun and provided a great opportunity to socialize. I would say that three months is almost, but not quite, enough time to get to know Villach; it would have been enjoyable to stay longer.

CUAS

The CUAS is a very interesting campus, and it has some remarkable qualities. First, I will describe the campus' location, and then describe my experience at CUAS.

CUAS is located near the base of some gigantic, beautiful mountains, and directly along the Drau river. The mountains around CUAS fall along the borders to Slovenia and Italy. CUAS is also located approximately 5km from the center of Villach, in an agricultural/rural area. This means the area around the campus is generally quiet, and there is very little light pollution at night, meaning the stars can often be seen clearly. The one downside to the rural location of CUAS is that, if you live in the student dormitory across from CUAS, it can be difficult to do any 'quick' trips for food/groceries/supplies. The International Office helped substantially with this problem by providing a loaned bicycle. Prior to being loaned the bicycle, grocery shopping meant approximately a 10km roundtrip walk. Another alternative to the trip into Villach from CUAS was to eat at the campus cafeteria on weekdays. The food served at the cafeteria is

generally authentic Austrian food, and it is consistently delicious with a constantly changing menu.

The computer lab at CUAS was superior to the one I used at the University of New Mexico. The computers had better and newer hardware and all the software applications I needed for my research. Because my research involves very large volumes of data with intense processing requirements, I used the stable and fast internet at CUAS to transfer data as needed to faster processing machines. The lab is also air-conditioned, making it an ideal escape from the sometimes humid and hot dormitory.

My research involved the use of an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) which requires special considerations. There is an ideally situated model aircraft park near CUAS, which, when unoccupied, is perfect for UAV flights. The particular UAV at CUAS is a high-end fixed-wing aircraft with a built-in precision positioning receiver. It was outstanding that CUAS had two pilots fully-trained and experienced in flying the UAV. Their experience made the need to coordinate flight schedules less of a concern, because there was dependably less of a chance of a problem with the equipment and/or flight plans.

As I mentioned, Dr. Paulus, Christoph and Melanie were instrumental in including me in activities outside the research/academic setting. Dr. Paulus gave myself and another Marshall Plan Foundation scholar a tour of Vienna, and took us hiking. Christoph and Melanie frequently invited me to their weekend Barbeques, where I socialized and met other people from Villach. My favorite experience, however, was the invitation from Christoph to join him and his friends at the four-day Nova Rock concert on the Hungarian border. Without these interactions and inclusions, I might have found the location of CUAS to be isolating... instead, I have made some genuine friendships.

Recommendations

There are some recommendations I would like to offer to future students and fellows who are maybe considering studying at CUAS. First and foremost, I highly recommend CUAS as the place to conduct any geographic-based research that uses UAV's or cutting-edge geographic systems tools. They have the facilities, equipment, and people necessary to conduct some really great research. That said, prior to and after moving to Villach, I would consider the following carefully:

1. Where to live: The StuWo (dormitory) is inexpensive, but I had mixed experiences with the management. I found it to generally be very quiet, and not a great place to meet any local Austrian students.
2. How to travel: Ask the International Office for a loaner bicycle. Unless you can afford to rent a car, a bicycle is the single best way to get around Villach and to/from CUAS. The bicycle paths are beautiful and even when it can seem like a chore to ride to town for groceries, the beauty of the ride makes up for the inconvenience.
3. Bring or be prepared to purchase: umbrella, raincoat, unlocked cell phone with an Austrian sim-card.