

Field Report

Stephanie Walcher
Wyss Institute, Harvard Medical School

March 29, 2017

1 General Impression of Stay abroad

I consider Boston *America light*, because it is the U.S. but still very European. There are many internationals, so the city is adapted to foreigners. It's okay to not speak perfect English and there are easy ways to open a bank account, buy a phone contract, used furniture, or a used bike. There is the possibility to eat traditional American food (burgers, lobster rolls, texmex etc.), but there are many healthy choices available too, such as fresh vegetables in the supermarket, whole grain rice or a generally living on a vegetarian diet. Of course the city is rather expensive, so you have to be mindful of how much you are willing to spend. I was very fortunate to be supported by the Marshall Plan Foundation.

Boston has lots to offer in terms of music: I went to multiple concerts, which are rather inexpensive compared to Austria, and stand up comedy clubs. New York is close-by (5h, 18-30 dollars by bus one way) so it's worth a visit. There are many gyms and if you live close to the Charles River you can go running there. Due to the high percentage of international students it's easy to make friends and to meet outside of work.

2 Quality of Host Institution

Around the Wyss Institute there are some hospitals, the Harvard Med School, and various institutes, so it is common to move between institutes and have collaborations with other labs. I occasionally spent time at Harvard Med School or at the Longwood Center to use equipment that is not available in the Wyss or to work on a collaboration with another group. Whenever I wanted to use an instrument I was trained by an expert. At the same time as a master student I was given the freedom to plan and perform my own experiments. Of course there were group- and subgroup meetings where we discussed challenges, but in general I was the responsible person for a specific part of the project. In other labs was also expected of master students to train undergrad students, but I didn't have the chance to make that experience in my internship. Generally, people were friendly and ready to help if I had any questions. In summery I consider the work environment stimulating, challenging, and at the same time friendly and approachable.

3 Inclusion into Institute

The Wyss is a vibrant Institute with lots of conferences, platform meetings, and some work shops. I had the choice to attend talks of well known scientists from various fields and I could even take part in a class. It was encouraged to attend talks and symposiums and to participate in the discussions afterwards.

The Wyss organizes social activities as well: we have a beer-hour every week on Friday, a Christmas party, a summer retreat, and activities like yoga bi-weekly.

4 Recommendations for Future Students and Fellows

Concerning the living situation in Boston, I highly recommend searching for an apartment after having arrived in Boston. In September university starts in Boston so lots of people are looking for an apartment in late summer and early fall. If you rent an Air BNB place for a week or two and then talk to people in the lab or personally visit Craigslist places it is much easier to find a nice, affordable place (affordable meaning 700-1000 dollars depending on the area and size of the room in a shared apartment).

A recommendation for laboratory work: Even though it is a good idea to take advice from superiors, it is also important to do your own thinking. Oftentimes only you can make an educated decision about what is best. So instead of relying on opinions of superiors it may be more recommendable to do internet research, then consult with other members of the lab, and then make a conclusive choice.

Lastly, it is important to remember to also have fun in Boston. Try to make sure you see the rest of Boston as well and not just the Wyss Institute.

5 Contact Information post completion

Name: Stephanie Walcher

University: IMC FH Krems, Krems/Donau, 3500 AT

E-mail address: st.walcher2015@gmail.com