

Experience Report on my research stay abroad

by Marlene Knapp

General impression of my research stay abroad

I have been to the United States from October until July, 2017 (10 months), in order to work on my Master's thesis project in a lab at Yale University, School of Medicine, in the department of Immunobiology. Since it was my first time studying abroad, I came there with a lot of anticipation and many expectations. I was excited, but at the same time very nervous because I did not know what expected me there.

However, my feelings of anxiousness quickly disappeared soon after I got introduced into the lab and started working there. During my stay abroad I spent almost all of my free time working in the lab. It was challenging but fun and I really enjoyed it.

All in all it was a great experience and I am really glad I was given the opportunity to do my research in such a great environment. Not only did I learn how to work in a lab, but due to the fact I was able to live in a foreign country by myself, I also matured as a person and gained more confidence.

Quality of the host institution

I was impressed by the facilities Richard Flavell's lab had to offer. The equipment was in top shape, all good experiments were funded, researchers were allowed to order any materials needed for their experiments. If the idea behind the experiment was good, there were no limitations on what you were allowed to do. At the research center where I was working (TAC - The Anlyan Center) at there was almost any piece of equipment one would need to perform experiments to solve immunological questions: fluorescence and confocal microscopes, machines for (next-generation) sequencing, a FACS machine, machines for developing films and much more equipment at every individual lab.

In the basement there was a huge facility housing thousands of mice for in vivo experiments, which were checked for diseases and kept clean on a daily basis by the technicians.

Although I was going to an „elite“ lab, well known for its accomplishments, I was surprised that everyone in the lab welcomed me friendly and quickly accepted me, despite me being just an exchange student. All lab members helped each other out by sharing tips and giving feedback on everyone's research projects. There was no competition within the lab group, only mutual support.

The supervisors cared about their students and even bragged about their

achievements among other lab members. I felt trusted by my mentor who gave me responsibility by letting me work on even delicate experiments independently, which made me feel as if I was an important member of the lab and not just some visiting outsider. I am mentioning this because I have heard from students who did their internships in Austria that they had rather bad experiences in that regard. Many Bachelor or Master's students are only used as lab technicians to do simple tasks, whereas during important experiments they are just allowed to stand by and watch because their supervisor is afraid they may ruin them. I never had this issue when I was working there.

Contacts within the host institution

- Manolis Roulis: emmanouil.roulis@yale.edu
my mentor and supervisor of my Master's thesis project
- Jonathan L. Alderman: jonathan.alderman@yale.edu
Flavell lab Manager/Senior Research Associate
- Caroline N Lieber: caroline.lieber@yale.edu
Richard Flavell's secretary, also in charge of handling organizational issues and entry of new students into the lab

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

The Yale School of Medicine houses many different departments and great research labs, offering a huge variety of potential research projects you can join. As long as you show that you are motivated and passionate about the project, you will certainly be welcomed, as it was in my case.

Contact E-mail

Please contact me at nachtschatten@nachtschatten.at if you have questions.