

Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation - Field Report

My stay in Innsbruck, Austria was filled with life-long advantages and exceeded expectations. My objectives prior to traveling to Austria and studying at the University of Innsbruck (UIBK) were to complete a research assignment within the Civil Engineering field. Thankfully, Marcus Maier, a civil engineering faculty member at UIBK, was aware of a geotechnical engineering project in which a student's collaboration was possible. The geotechnical engineering field forms an elemental practice in the civil engineering field, which made it the ideal opportunity for me. Mr. Maier and the program directors at the University of New Orleans helped me prepare to take on this assignment and facilitated the process to apply for the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation. Because of the plentiful support offered to me by the Marshall Plan, I had the privilege to work on a research assignment within my field of study, complete the course load required by my home university's Academic Year Abroad program, and become immersed with the Austrian culture.

The laboratory facilities at UIBK are located in the 'Technik', or the college of technology, where the science and the engineering departments and facilities are found. The Technik is approximately 10-15 minutes away by bus from the Internationales Studentenhaus, the name of the student residence where I had the pleasure to live in during the time frame of the assignment. The engineering laboratories are fully equipped with all of the materials necessary to conduct all the general types of engineering experiments. The university's laboratory facilities include the Geotechnical and Tunneling Engineering lab, the Fluids/Hydraulics lab, the Wood shop, the Steel shop, and other material shops/labs fully staffed and generally open until late afternoons. Upon my arrival, I met with the head of the Geotechnical and Tunneling Engineering Unit, Dr. Barbara Schneider-Muntau, who was pursuing additional work on a former master thesis project called "The Critical State Line of Soils". This research assignment allowed me to have a full hands-on experience within the geotechnical engineering field and allowed me to be fully engaged in a regular Austrian work environment.

Dr. Barbara Schneider-Muntau explained the work required to be performed in the geotechnical laboratory and how it would apply to the master thesis' theoretical approach. During my first laboratory visit, I was introduced to Mr. Stefan Tilg, UIBK's geotechnical laboratory assistant. Mr. Stefan Tilg was available in the lab at all times during his office hours. Because the research assignment was a complex concept that required both laboratory performance and data analysis, other geotechnical faculty members were available to assist me. Initially, Mr. Tilg explained the precautions necessary to work in the geotechnical lab and was always around to supervise my work. Mr. Tilg taught me the full step-by-step procedure of a triaxial experiment, the name of the experiment used to conduct the research. The triaxial test is a common laboratory experiment used in soil mechanics, and in this particular assignment, it generates the most relevant data used for the Critical State Line concept. I also had the opportunity to collaborate with Fabian Schranz and Iman Bathaeian, who helped me produce the graphical results required for the analysis of the Critical State Line assignment. On my final report I demonstrated in depth the laboratory procedures performed and the data generated.

I strongly recommend fulfilling a research assignment with the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation to a student who is enrolled in a STEM-based major and is interested in becoming globally involved. It was a great opportunity to approach my career in the perspective of a non-American institution, which has undoubtedly impacted and influenced my future. I had a very comfortable stay at the student residence in Innsbruck and an excellent experience taking classes at UIBK. I was also privileged to work with a team of resourceful professionals who helped me in any way they could. Ultimately, I had the opportunity to share my accomplishments with my home university, where many students and faculty were able to hear about my personal experience abroad and learn about my fresh research findings.