

Field report

General impression of your research stay abroad

The general impression of my research stay was very good and I would do it again anytime! At this point I want to express my gratitude to the Marshall Plan Foundation. With this Scholarship a unique opportunity was given to me that not only affected my professional career as a chemist, but also allowed me to grow personally. In my opinion, personality and character can only develop outside the comfort zone. Living in different country for several months, getting to know its culture, people's beliefs and their way of living was certainly a vital experience.

Quality of the host institution

The quality of the host institution, the California Institute of Technology is outstanding for several reasons.

1. The staff:

Professors of absolute world class are working in a fruitful and very cooperative environment, eg. Professor Brian Stoltz, Sarah Reisman and Nobel Laureate Professor Robert Grubbs just to mention a few. Every one of the three above mentioned always had an open door, as well as an open ear when one was facing synthetic problems.

Additionally, their lectures are well structured, presented with a lot of enthusiasm and they never fail to make sure everyone is able to follow the topics presented. Therefore, the quality of teaching produces well educated students (graduate and undergraduate) in a very short period of time.

2. The equipment

The manifold of equipment the institute has to offer is astonishing. Some selected examples are given:

CalTech owns almost countless NMR (Nuclear Magnetic Resonance) machines.

The Stoltz group owns its own HRMS (High Resolution Mass Spectrometer) capable HPLC (High performance liquid chromatography) - a necessary analytical tool required to characterize compound that are going to be published. This is located in the laboratory, making it readily available. Same goes for the polarimeter, the IR (infrared) spectrometer, absolute solvent system technology as well as a glove box. This infrastructure makes it pure heaven for PhD students to perform top-notch chemistry.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

Contact within the institution was easily established with all the Stoltz group members. Everyone was not only friendly but also welcoming. As the research group of Sarah Reisman was located across the hall, also contacts were established with her group. This exchange with other PhD students from all across the US as well as some postdocs (US-American and European) made the stay not only pleasant but also gave insight in how other research think about and tackle certain challenges. From day one, I got assigned duties in the laboratory (as everyone else) giving me the feeling to belong to the team from early on.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

I can highly recommend doing time abroad, it is an exceptional experience. But apart from encouragements some tips and tricks:

For housing:

Check out places4students.com

Don't get nervous when you can't find a room 3-4 months in advance. Things are very different in the US. For example, I found my room 20 days before (as the landlords don't put it online earlier).

The university:

I enjoyed my stay at Caltech, Pasadena very much, as it is quite a small town and almost everything is in reaching distance by bicycle. In some places one might have to either buy/rent a car or will simply miss a lot of things as public transportation (at least in California) does not meet Austrian standards.

Additionally, as the Scholarship is always the same amount, no matter where one is staying, the choice of university is crucial. As in my case for example, a small room in a house with 3 housemates cost almost 1000\$/month. Compared to other cities, this is a rather expensive place, only topped by some east coast cities or other parts of California (eg. San Francisco).