

Field Report

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General impression of the research stay abroad

For my Master's internship I spend twelve rewarding and challenging months from March 2019 to the end of February 2020 in the Department of Immunology of the University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine in Pennsylvania, USA. This opportunity allowed me to work on an incredibly interesting and understudied research project. I had the possibility to deepen my theoretical knowledge acquired at the University of Vienna, learned many new experimental techniques, received valuable input and was able to achieve much more than I thought I could. I am incredibly thankful to have gotten this opportunity and to have been able to spend one year as part of a great laboratory into which I fit scientifically but also personally. I got the opportunity to take part in different conferences and was introduced to people, experiences that will no doubt be very valuable in my future scientific career. This research stay abroad has no doubt been an experience that has deeply impacted me personally as well as scientifically.

Quality of the host institution

The University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine is ranked under the best medical schools as well as under the best grad schools for research in the United States. The campus is located in Oakland, a central neighborhood in Pittsburgh. It's surrounded by the oldest and most "European"-looking buildings in all of Pittsburgh, including the Carnegie Museum of Art and Natural History. The most prominent feature of the campus and probably all of Pittsburgh is the Cathedral of Learning, lovingly called Cathy. With a height of 163m it is the second tallest university building in the world. It has classrooms, a main hall reminiscent of Hogwarts, a cafeteria in the basement and 31 different nationality rooms, designed to celebrate different cultures. The view from the top floor of Cathy is one you won't soon forget. The campus is also close to Schenley Park, a gigantic quiet green space in the middle of the city that looks at times like a forest. The Department of Immunology is located within the greater complex of UPMC, one of the best hospitals in the US. It has been freshly renovated a few years prior and contains top of the art resources like the Flow cytometry core.

I was lucky enough to spend my internship in the laboratory of Dr. Reinhard Hinterleitner, an assistant professor of immunology, whose interest lies on the impact the microbiome has on the development of oral tolerance in food allergies and celiac disease. Collaboration within the laboratory and within different groups in the department was great and encouraged. This gave me the opportunity to also learn techniques not specifically needed for my work, which gave me further ideas about potential applications in my work.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

Before I even got to the US Tim McGann of the University of Pittsburgh contacted me and helped guide me through the visa application as well as apartment hunting process. He was also my contact person for any administrative question, he was always available and helped as best he could. Once in Pittsburgh, I was immediately included in both scientific and social events in the Department. I developed close ties and even friendships with colleagues. The Department organized a weekly seminar, where leading scientists from all over the world were invited to present their research. Additionally to the talk, a small group of interested students and post-docs, including myself, were given the opportunity to go to breakfast or take part in a question-and-answer hour with the speaker. A research in progress talk where students and post-docs presented the current state of their research was also a weekly occurrence. All of those events were open to me and provided me with a lot of new information and knowledge. I was also invited to the yearly scientific retreat, a joint two-day event of the Department of Immunology and the Department of Pediatrics of the University of Pittsburgh which provided me with the opportunity to present a poster and network with other scientists.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity that will provide you with so many new experiences and thoughts. Spending a year or however long abroad will definitely change you. Not only will this further your career outlooks, it will teach you a lot about yourself. It might be hard at times, you might feel overwhelmed, but it's worth to stick with it and see it through. Experiencing a different country and culture is something you will draw from your whole life. The United States have a lot to offer, there are a lot of incredible landscapes and cities, which I would definitely recommend to visit and experience it if you have the time. Some are no more than a few hours drive from Pittsburgh. The Marshall Plan Scholarship provides you with a lot of funding, but the flights and living in the US are pretty expensive and depending on how long the stay should be, I'd definitely recommend to have additional funding.

For the Pittsburgh area specifically:

- Get a bike. Public transport consists of buses that don't access every part of the city and only drive twice an hour. Also, especially if you live in the Oakland area, this will be helpful when you need to shop, as most grocery stores are further out in the residential areas.
- If you want to experience American college life, try to live in or close to Oakland, as that is where most of the students live. If that is not your thing, go for Squirrel Hill or Shadyside, beautiful neighborhoods a little further outside.
- Apartments, food, restaurants are expensive. Still, for American standards Pittsburgh is still considered a cheaper city to live in.
- Go to the parks. Both Schenley and Frick park are big and located within the city but still make it feel like you're far away.
- Talk to people. The American way of life might be a somehow abstract concept and it is definitely different to the Austrian "Idee vom guten Leben", but that doesn't make it any less worth experiencing.