

## **Field report – Viola Bauernfeind**

Visiting Assistant in Research at Yale University, April 1 – August 31, 2020

### **General impression of my research stay abroad**

All extraordinary circumstances of the year 2020 aside, I appreciated my scientific exchange in the Sweeney Group at Yale University to the fullest. Despite missing out on living in New Haven, Connecticut, for five months, I had the chance to get a glimpse of what life is like in New Haven and how studying at Yale's gorgeous campus feels. Being confronted with a drastically changing world due to the covid-19 pandemic made my journey take a rough turn and overcoming the entailed challenges made me grow a lot personally. My research stay abroad turned into a research stay at home but this way gave me the chance to set off to new shores and learn skills I would never have tackled otherwise. Meaning I, an experimental physicist, spent my time entirely in front of a PC, running simulations of molecular systems, writing analysis scripts, advancing my programming skills, and preparing slides to share my results in the best way possible without in-person contact. Limiting personal and scientific exchange to virtual meetings is presumably a general take-away from 2020, and my project was no exception from this. The adaptations to the scientific content of my project and its implementation did of course alter my experience fundamentally, but definitely enriched my perception of what science can be like.

### **Quality of the host institution**

Yale is known as one of the world-leading universities, thus speaking of quality seems expendable at this point. From what I have seen during the very limited time on campus, I am left with confirming what rankings say and can nothing but recommend going there to conduct research projects and study. New laboratory space is available in the new Yale Science Building where I was supposed to work and newly-built spacious work stations are ready to be populated by new students. For the time I spent there, I was assigned one of these, and was astonished by the bottomless access to the latest equipment of any sort that is available for research groups at Yale.

### **Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization**

Communication with the host institution, the department leaders as well as the international office was very prompt and friendly. I had no troubles reaching the persons responsible for my requests and got clear and accommodating answers. Inclusion of international students would have been well-organized by the Office of International Students and Scholars well in advance, but for given reasons the foreseen events did not take place and thus I cannot provide information about that, unfortunately. Assoc. Prof. Alison Sweeney is a very caring and top scientific supervisor, as well as Irem Altan, PhD, is, and both worked hard to make my exchange enjoyable and fruitful.

## Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

For doing research on an interdisciplinary level combining physics and biology, the respective departments at Yale are top addresses to do so. I had the chance to participate in numerous online lectures and discussion sessions, where different groups working on biological or physics topics, either on the experimental or theoretical side, presented their results and ongoing work. PIs are welcoming and there appears to be a vivid student life under normal circumstances. Must do – take a walk on the huge campus, especially the college buildings are worth it!

Related to the exchange preparation and funding situation, Yale does support you getting a J1 visa, but at least 50% of the average cost (which is stated on their website) must be covered by non-private funding. Minding this threshold will save you lots of organizational issues. As a side note, you cannot obtain your student card a single day earlier than the official start date.

Regarding life in New Haven, as a Visiting Assistant in Research one basically has the student status, but is neither allowed to live in student dorms nor is Yale Health Insurance available. Though, there is a number of options to live in shared flats, of which I would recommend the East Rock neighborhood in terms of safety, vicinity to campus and livability. The big grocery stores are however at least half an hour walking away, therefore Yale offers a Yale shuttle each Saturday to go there and back.

If ever you have the chance to go to do a research exchange at Yale or another university in the US, take the opportunity - you will nothing but profit from this experience. The support of the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation paves the way for your scientific career jump, allows you to broaden your network, and to gain invaluable intercultural competencies.