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Institution Abroad: University of California Berkeley

### General impression of the research stay abroad:

Overall, my stay at UC Berkeley was a great experience and I would recommend it to everyone who is interested. Berkeley is a vibrant place, where one has the opportunity to meet amazing people of all backgrounds. I was fortunate that the research group I stayed in was very inclusive and helped each other out a lot. From a scientific perspective, I definitely learned a lot of things and gained a better understanding of what it means to do research. The bay area is an unique place, which provides the opportunity to dive deep in different subcultures. Of course, not everything was perfect and especially in the beginning it was tiresome to get things done as one had to know the right people. However, the pros definitely outweigh the cons.

### Quality of the host institution

UC Berkeley has a reputation of being one of the top research institutions in the field of chemistry. While the quality of PIs as well as the general quality of publications is insane the facilities and instrumentation is not that much different of the ones in my home institution. Surprisingly, it was to have group specific instruments, which only group members had access to and that sometimes made life difficult. However, I never encountered that somebody denied a request to use a specific instrument. Collaborations within groups was a big topic during my stay and I attended every week a meeting, where graduate students and PIs of four groups presented and shared collaboration results.

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

From the first moment I joined the research group I was treated equally to all other graduate students. In the department I had the same possibilities to take trainings and therefore use instruments, which were available to all other PhD students. There was great sense of collaboration at my host institution. UC Berkeley also tries to get together the people of the huge chemistry department, which made life as a non-official graduate student easier. In the time of high COVID cases these events were canceled. The size of the department still made it hard to get to know people who knew about the exact problem one was having. However, one could always ask members of other groups to share their domain specific knowledge. Most of the time they would readily help one. As a visiting student I was also part of the VSPA (Visiting Student and Post-doc Organization), which held monthly events and was a great source to get to know people.

## Organization/Study Site

My host PI as well as the organizational team at UC Berkeley always helped me out. From the first moment I decided to join his group we started the visa and onboarding process. I was considered a visiting graduate student and therefore didn't have any special onboarding process or social events. There was however the monthly VSPA events, which I could join.

Berkely as a city is very suburban and dominated by students. One can always take a train, which takes you to downtown San Francisco in 30 minutes. Berkeley is surrounded by hills, which is a great source of recreation. The weather was surprisingly cold but consistent. There was never the need to check the weather report.

## Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

Studying for a semester abroad is in any case an enriching experience. UC Berkeley is a world-renowned research institute in a vibrant area. I would however check carefully which group to join. As one most probably is spending a lot of time working it is essential to make this decision carefully. I was fortunate that my group was really welcoming, and I always had a good time. However, I have heard horror stories of other PIs at UC Berkeley. Therefore, definitely try to contact current or former group members. They will be definitely be willing to share their experiences, especially if they weren't that good.