
Field Report

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies

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Host Institution

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies
Laboratory of Genetics
10010 N Torrey Pines Rd
La Jolla, CA 92037

Host Supervisors

Fred Gage, Ph.D.
Joseph Herdy

Home University

University of Innsbruck
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Home Supervisor

Asst. Prof. Jerome Mertens, Ph.D.

1 General Impression

I deem my stay as a research scholar at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies as an incredibly valuable experience and would like to thank the Marshall Plan Foundation, Dr. Gage and his lab at Salk as well as Dr. Mertens to have granted me this privilege.

Overall, the Salk Institute and biotech-savviness of San Diego gave me amazing new opportunities, regarding scientific research, education, and networking. Conducting research at a world-class establishment, such as Salk, allowed me to gain valuable learning opportunities from amazingly brilliant scientists, which are among the best in their field, and thus helped me a lot to refine my practical and theoretical research skills.

The high abundance of high-profile scientific events in San Diego gave me the chance to attend many interesting talks and workshops but was also a great opportunity to meet new scientists from all over the world and to learn about their work.

Besides the obvious scientific benefits, living in the United States has been valuable in many other ways. First, it helped me a lot to improve my English skills, which is a crucial (soft)-skill for a scientist and in general. However, I regard California's cultural diversity, and the ability to partake in the cultural exchange as the most important experience I made during my time there. I think meeting people from all over the world, and bonding with them is crucial for society to finally reject the divisive mentalities, which plagued mankind for so long, and to transition to a brighter future.

2 Quality of Host Institution

The Salk Institute for Biological Sciences provides excellent opportunities for eager students and scientists. The main laboratories are spacious, well organized, and well equipped.

Besides the main laboratories, Salk hosts many core facilities, which provide a great service, and are well equipped with modern and specialized tools to conduct research to the highest degree. Even more important is the general and practical knowledge, that one can inherit from such a high-class institution. Personally, I am very grateful to the staff of Dr. Gage's laboratory of genetics, the Stem Cell Core and the Advanced Biophotonics Core for their help with my projects, and how they helped me to further develop my skills. Additionally, Salk also provided further educational opportunities in the form of lectures, scientific events, and training courses, free of charge.

I could experience the same high degree of skill in Dr. Gage's lab; the staff was incredibly knowledgeable and always eager to help. I was very positively surprised, as I first had some concerns about joining such a large lab, but the kindness and helpfulness of the lab personnel left me with an incredibly pleasant

experience. I was warmly welcomed in the lab and could work in a friendly and comforting atmosphere.

Another privilege people at Salk can enjoy is the stunning view over the Pacific Ocean. Whenever, I finished late after a long session of cell culture or microscopy, experiencing a beautiful California sunset at the nearby Gliderport would make for a relaxing end of the day.

3 Recommendations for Future Marshall Plan Students and Fellows

I would recommend San Diego and Salk to everyone who wants to stay abroad to learn in a highly professional as well as a friendly environment while experiencing the sunny weather and beautiful beaches of Southern California. Some advice I deem as very important is: First, look for a good place to stay well in advance. Although it is not necessarily difficult to find housing, one should be aware of the very high living costs in California. Therefore I advise looking early to find an affordable stay. Second, I would highly recommend renting a car, or if not, to find a place near your host institution. For San Diego specifically, Westfield UTC strikes me as a perfect area for students abroad who want to attend Salk, University of California San Diego (UCSD), or Scripps, and do not want to rent a car. Westfield UTC is located near those institutions, has affordable housing, and is close to a large outdoor mall.

Furthermore, I strongly recommend checking if your credit/debit cards will work in the US. At least in California, it is very uncommon to pay in cash. Therefore, you ideally bring a credit card, although a debit usually also works; however, check if there will be additional fees to pay.

While in the US I can also advise taking an English language proficiency exam, as you will probably be at the peak of your language skill while residing in an English-speaking country.

Finally, you should take advantage of the many perks San Diego and *SoCal* has to offer. You have a beautiful coastline available to go surfing or swimming, plenty of hikes, and a large vivid city to explore. Although exploring San Diego alone would be more than enough you can easily reach LA, Las Vegas, or even Mexico. In the end, it is up to you, but I firmly believe San Diego offers something for everyone.