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Field Report

My general impression of my research stay abroad is positive. The pandemic has made it challenging, but getting the Marshall Plan scholarship was an amazing opportunity to experience life and the research world in the United States of America. UCLA is a huge, highly-ranked university where research is performed in all fields of science. The quality of research is of the highest standard.

Due to strict and important regulations, UCLA makes sure all researchers receive the appropriate training. In the beginning of my research stay I had to undergo a lot of training on lab safety, building access, ethics, code of conduct, and mice handling. Completing all the training takes some time. Unfortunately due to Covid-19, check-in processes and enrolling for training occur slower than usual.

The Ardehali lab is not very big which allowed me to closely get to know all my colleagues. Every week we had a lab meeting or journal club, this really helps to learn about new research and exchange of ideas. Everyone in the lab was friendly and helpful. My colleagues helped me in the lab with new techniques and also gave advice on where to go in Los Angeles or other questions I had. We also went out together for meals and celebrated birthdays.

My recommendation for future Marshall Plan students and fellows is to ask the prospective host institution supervisor many questions about the project and expectations. Ask many details about the project and do your own research, make sure you are very interested in it. It's best to know beforehand how much guidance you will be receiving during your research stay, whether you're expected to mostly work independently or there will be somebody helping

you in the lab every step of the way. This way you will be more prepared for the research stay. If possible, contact the lab members such as other graduate students or ask your supervisor if they can share their contacts. Ask those people about the culture of the lab and their experience there. This will give you a better understanding of where you're potentially going to work for months.

I recommend searching for accommodation on Facebook. There are groups created specifically by students of UCLA advertising rooms in shared apartments or houses as well as one bedroom apartments. I chose to live in Westwood where UCLA is located so that I could walk to work. It's also one of LA's safest neighborhoods and has everything you may need. There are buses and metro to get around LA, but due to the size of the city it can take some time to get from one neighborhood to another. There are many things to do and places to see in LA. Lots of places to go hiking and beautiful beaches. I recommend visiting the Griffith Observatory, Santa Monica pier, Downtown, and modern art museums. There are always many cool concerts for music lovers or sports games for sports fans. Whatever you're interested in, you won't get bored in LA. People in LA are very friendly and happy to help, although there are many homeless people so you have to be aware of your surroundings.