

Field Report

Research stay at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

MPS Fellow 2020

General impression of my research stay abroad

The initial plan for my visit abroad at MIT in Cambridge was to arrive at the end of February and stay until end of August. Due to the pandemic however, all labs were shut down in March and therefore I had to fly back to Austria and work remotely. Nonetheless, the first impressions I could gather from this short time were very positive. Since I have never applied for an exchange semester during my studies before, I was a bit nervous about living and studying independently in a foreign country. The warm welcome and hospitality of my working group and flat mates however, soon made me forget about these initial worries. In the future I definitely plan on applying again for a research stay in the Boston area to make up for the missed time.

Quality of host institution

Although the overall application process was very extensive and sometimes a bit overwhelming, I always felt very supported by the International Office at MIT. Everyone there was always quick to respond and eager to help no matter the questions or problems. When I first visited MIT I was blown away by the sheer size of the campus and the countless activities they provided for all students. At this point I would really like to thank Prof. Yet-Ming Chiang as well as the whole working group - you guys really helped me accommodate within the first days and took me in right away. It really wouldn't have been such a nice few weeks without you! One disadvantage when applying at MIT as a visiting student however is the fact that you are not allowed to attend courses.

Contacts with host institution and inclusion in organisation

After my return to Austria, at first it was difficult to arrange a new research plan as it was not certain when TU Graz would open its gates again for researchers. Since my topic is concentrated in the field of electrochemistry, access to lab equipment is a necessary prerequisite for me. It took until July, before I could get started again with my experiments. After a few bumpy weeks, weekly meetings with the whole MIT working group were introduced, which allowed not only updates of my own work but also insights into other projects and working methods of my colleagues.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

I think the most important aspect when visiting a university in the Boston area is to find the right accommodation. MIT itself does provide housing at a comparably low price. This way, you are directly on campus and also need not worry about much except for the monthly rent. A catalogue of available rooms is updated weekly, but unfortunately does not allow you to meet your room-mates in advance. Therefore, I decided to first try my luck in a few Facebook groups. Looking for apartments on your own can be very tricky, as a lot of landlords will only

except the application of a non-US citizen if another US citizen will take liability for you. In addition, a lot of posts found on Facebook or other sites contain scams so make sure you meet with the people in advance and get to see the place prior to renting. In my case, I got lucky and found a group of girls on Facebook with an empty room in a house in Somerville (as I found out later this is a very popular region among Harvard and MIT students as housing is comparably cheap).

I would also recommend asking for the contact of a working group member prior to the scientific stay, who can already give you advice on your arrival or other important aspects that might be specific to your host institute.

If you are a future MPS-student or fellow i hope these few tips help to ease your prearrangements. In case you are struggling and don't know where to ask for some advice definitely don't hesitate to contact me via email (see header) - I'd be happy to share my insights!

Best regards,
Verena Reisecker