

Experience Report

Research Stay at UT Austin

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1 General Impression

I spent a little more than four months at the University of Texas at Austin to collaborate with Dr. Marijn Heule, who is an expert on automated reasoning. When I arrived in Austin, I received a very warm welcome by my collaborator who showed me around the campus and introduced me to other members of his group; this made it easy for me to adapt quickly to the new circumstances. Marijn Heule is an extremely productive researcher who is also a very likeable person, which made our collaboration particularly enjoyable and productive: We basically started our joint research on day one.

Over the course of my stay, we wrote two research papers. For one of these papers, we received the *best paper award* of the 26th International Conference on Automated Deduction (CADE-26) and the other paper has been accepted for publication in the proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Theory and Applications of Satisfiability Testing (SAT 2017). Both conferences are considered top-level venues in the field of automated reasoning. We also wrote an extended abstract which has been accepted for publication in the proceedings of the 1st ARCADE workshop.

Apart from our research, my collaborator and I spent a lot of our free time together: We regularly had dinner together with other friends, went to the movies or concerts, and did other activities on the weekends. This made my stay very enjoyable and it was a major reason why our collaboration has been so productive. Moreover, I believe that the scholarship of the Marshall Plan Foundation had a crucial impact on my productivity: Because of the scholarship, I didn't need to worry about financial issues and so I could focus on the research. To conclude, I consider my stay abroad an unqualified success, both professionally and personally.

2 Quality of UT Austin

The University of Texas at Austin is an excellent research institution which employs several well-known computer scientists such as the famous J Strother Moore, Scott Aaronson, or Vladimir Lifschitz. As an official *staff member*, I was also allowed to use the university's sports facilities for only 29 dollars a month; this included an indoor and an outdoor pool, a gym, volleyball courts, squash courts, and other nice facilities.

3 Contacts Within UT Austin

As already mentioned, I received a very warm welcome by my collaborator Marijn Heule who also introduced me to other group members. I therefore soon felt like a normal group member who could chat with many nice colleagues whenever we met. The other PhD students were very friendly and there was also a weekly group meeting where group members presented their current research to the others. I was invited to give a talk in this meeting soon after my arrival in Austin so that people knew what my research interests were. I also want to highlight the secretary of the group, Lindy Aleshire, who was extremely helpful. She assisted me with searching for an accommodation, my visa, and all the other organizational issues. Moreover, she and her husband showed me around Austin and places nearby that are hardly reachable without a car. I not only found great colleagues in Austin, I also found good friends.

4 Organization/City

The organization of my stay was unproblematic as I received great support from UT Austin. I stayed in Austin with a J-1 Visa which requires a so-called *DS-2019 form* filled out by the guest university and the visitor. As also suggested by the International Office of TU Wien, I recommend to plan enough time for the whole visa-application process. To find an accommodation, UT Austin suggested using airBnB, which worked out well. The city of Austin is a wonderful city that has just recently been named the *U.S. News Best Place To Live*. Austin seems to be quite different from the rest of Texas—people told me that “if you want to leave Texas, you should go to Austin.” It is a very liberal city with a popular music scene, many great restaurants, and many IT companies. The city is constantly growing and I generally felt that most of its people are very optimistic. The weather in Austin is very warm and there are people wearing shorts even in January, which is supposed to be the coldest month of the year.

5 Recommendations for Future Marshall Plan Students

This might seem like an insignificant thing but before I went to the United States, I found out that my debit card has some security mechanism that prevents withdrawals from the United States. I therefore had to call my bank to deactivate this security mechanism so I could withdraw money during my stay. I therefore recommend to check whether your debit card also uses such a security mechanism before you go to the United States.