

Field Report

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Thanks to the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation financial support, I could spend three amazing months at the Department of Medicine and Cell Biology & Physiology, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, USA. My supervisors in the USA, Dr. Colin Nichols and Dr. Maria S. Remedi, have long standing interest and expertise not only in studying development and progression of diabetes, heart failure, pulmonary disease and epilepsy, but also in physiology of the pancreas and other organs in mice, and lately, in zebrafish as well. Last October they contacted us to express their interest in our optogenetic tools and for collaboration between our laboratories.

“No man is an island, entire of itself...” Though John Donne composed this well-known saying in 1624, it is especially relevant to scientific research today. With the development of each new technology, it becomes increasingly difficult for individual scientists to conduct groundbreaking research on their own. This new reality not only opens up the opportunity for scientific collaboration, it necessitates it. Therefore, a collaboration between our laboratories in Austria and in the USA, which was started within the framework of the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, is a great chance not just to share technical expertise with one another, but also to support each other’s research progress. In my opinion, researching abroad can establish a mutually beneficial collaboration for meaningful advancements. I also believe that an academic exchange program like my program funded by Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, provides students an excellent opportunity to carry their scientific experiences to a higher level.

My supervisors in the host institution, Colin Nichols and Maria S. Remedi, are not only excellent researchers in their fields, but also great supervisors. They have extensive collaborations both with other academic groups and with industrial partners, utilizing their expertise in electrophysiology as well as single molecule biophysics and animal physiology. Colin and Maria have both established very inspiring environments for their employees by providing an appropriate level of emotional and professional support. After spending 3 months in their laboratories, I feel

more capable and more confident not just in tackling a complex research project, but also in achieving my long-term goals and dreams.

My host institution, Washington University in St. Louis, fulfills its vision. This university is indeed a community where you can be an individual and achieve exceptional things. They are committed to learning and exploration, to discovery and impact. Washington University in St. Louis is a world leader in graduate, professional, and postdoctoral education - awarding hundreds of PhD, MD and master's degrees annually. St. Louis itself is a national hub for important research and business development, especially in the fields of biotechnology and plant science. Moreover, the city is lively and offers lots of free time activities including amazing restaurants, tennis, golf, canoeing, soccer, baseball, running in Forest Park and even hiking. The public transportation within the city center is well organized, but it is advised to take cab or uber (carpool) outside of the city center. Students can opt to live off campus in surrounding neighborhoods, including the Delmar Loop or share flats with other students along the MetroLink, the areas light rail system.

Finally, I want to specifically thank the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation for their financial support, which is what made this great experience possible in the first place. I would recommend all PhD and Master students to take this great chance to go abroad for at least 3 months (6 months would be even better) to improve their professional skills and more importantly, to meet amazing people, make friendships and establish new collaboration and cooperation that will benefit the entire field of science.