

1. General Impression of Research Period Abroad

It was always a big dream of mine to spend some time of my academic education abroad. Having missed this opportunity in the early stages of my studies, my goal was to realize my dream in the course of my PhD-program. The greatest challenge in the organization of my research period abroad was to find a proper host institution. The plan was actually simple: Look for a prestigious research group that is able to provide the scientific input needed to promote your own research. In short, I was searching for an esteemed international research group in the field of polymer processing. At the beginning, I struggled with my own lack of information. I was literally overwhelmed with finding the perfect place for my stay, considering the huge number of universities and colleges available. It took me almost six months to come to a final decision. I applied for a position as a visiting scholar at the Polymer Engineering Center (PEC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since I knew the head of the research group, Prof. Tim A. Osswald, from international conferences, I took the telephone receiver and initiated the contact.

It was a long journey from my first contacting to the start of my research stay on June 13, 2017. This intense period of planning has helped me to learn how to deal with visa applications, apply for scholarships, and organize life in advance. My main findings of this instructive time are: Do not shy away from challenges! A lot of things can be done if you put in the work needed to accomplish your goals. Starting as an inexperienced student, I spent a lot of time in the organization of my stay to make it the project I have always dreamed of. The most difficult step was to leave my family, escape my own comfort zone, and move to the U.S. I remember well when I first arrived in Madison and was welcomed by Mr. Hoffman, the landlord of my residence. He is one of the friendliest characters I have ever met. His serious care helped me to quickly remove all initial barriers and get used to the new environment. On my third day, I was introduced to my new colleagues at the PEC. The research team consists of students and researchers from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. Looking back, the start of my research stay could not have been better.

Choosing Madison – the state capital of Wisconsin – as the place for my research stay was the right decision. The city is surrounded by three big lakes that offer many sports activities like sailing or kayaking. In contrast to metropolises like New York, the city's architecture is governed by many small buildings and large green areas. One taller building rises up in the flat skyline of the city: the Wisconsin State Capitol with a height of 85 m. If I had to describe the city with two adjectives, I would definitely say: clean and lively. The city simply has its own magic and I can definitely recommend the place for further students.

At work, I collaborated directly with Prof. Tim A. Osswald on my research topic. His great experience and innovative ideas contributed significantly to my scientific work progress. I also want to point out his open-door policy and continuous support, which can't be taken for granted given his huge number of responsibilities. Besides the interesting talks with my supervisor, I regularly received valuable feedback from my colleagues. It is my strong desire to stay in contact with the entire research group. A special highlight of campus life in Madison is a visit of the Camp Randall Stadium, which is the home of the university's football team, the Wisconsin Badgers. More than 80,000 people regularly go to the stadium to cheer on their team.

My research stay in Madison passed quickly. During the six months from June to December I rapidly made progress in my research work – and even more important – the period has promoted my personal development. I learned many things for life as e.g., how to live life and handle challenges far away from family or how to interact with people from different cultures. Sharing my apartment with two Americans, I considerably improved my English skills. Moreover, I made many new friendships and I explored the beauty of a variety of cities including Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans or Miami. I want to truly thank the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation for granting me a scholarship. Without this financial support, I could not have afforded my research stay and therefore I would have missed the experience of my life.

2. Quality of the Host Institution

The Polymer Engineering Center in Madison is an internationally recognized research institution in the field of polymer engineering. The research group is headed by Prof. Tim A. Osswald, who was my supervisor at the time. Prof. Osswald teaches polymer engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is among the leading scientists in the said research field. He has written several books and more than one hundred publications. Working at the PEC has been a great pleasure for me. The institution is equipped with all the tools needed to conduct research on the highest-level. I also want to point out the great cultural diversity of the research group. It is part of the team's tradition that visiting scholars from all over the world join the institution to work on their research topic.

3. Contacts within Host Institution

Supervisor: Prof. Tim A. Osswald

Chief Engineer: Alec Redmann

Visiting Scholar Coordinator: Sara Simon

4. Recommendation for Future Marshall Plan Students

Take the opportunity and challenge yourself! Planning and completing a research period abroad is not an easy task, but it is definitely a life experience. By escaping your own comfort zone, you will contribute to your personal development. You will enjoy many great moments that can't be taken away from you.