

Field report for the Marshall Plan Scholarship

By Sophie Bromberger, MSc

I performed the research internship for my Master's Thesis at the Laboratory of Wolfgang Junger, at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in cooperation with Harvard Medical School in Boston. I stayed there for 7 months (from February to August 2018) and got to experience the many aspects of this wonderful city. Due to its many prestigious universities like Harvard or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston is filled with young and intelligent people. I met a lot of exchange students from all over the world, and it was really easy to meet new people because many students are just staying there for a few months abroad. Boston and the surrounding areas offer many activities like outdoor and indoor sports, museums, city events, as well as many bars and restaurants to explore. Living in Boston is very expensive, even when having a shared apartment in the suburbs. That's why I would suggest looking for a room as early as possible, to increase the chances of finding a good offer. Additionally to the rent, living costs like groceries and going out are pricy as well. I highly recommend buying a bike, because cycling is faster and cheaper than the public transportation most of the time. The Marshall Plan Scholarship helped me immensely to be able to see all the exciting things that Boston has to offer. I greatly enjoyed this city throughout the seasons, as there is always something new to do. Its geographical position makes it easy to plan weekend trips to New York City, Washington DC, Canada and many other places.

Regarding the laboratory, I had the pleasure to work with a great multicultural team that provided guidance and support for my research project. The primary investigator, Wolfgang Junger, was very demanding, but he also appreciated my own thoughts and ideas for the project. I valued this type of independence and it helped me to improve my confidence. The rest of the team was always nice and included me immediately into group conversations and activities. I could use all of the equipment independently and therefore got to know several new techniques that will be useful in my further research career. Especially the weekly journal clubs with the whole lab showed me that everyone makes an effort to stay up-to-date on the topic of purinergic signaling and its numerous aspects and applications. It was a memorable experience to work in a lab that is affiliated with a prestigious institution as the Harvard Medical School, as well as the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, which has been a pioneer in the field of Immunology for a long time. I was eager to find out what distinguishes such world-renowned institutions from others, and was surprised that the actual work is not very different from previous laboratories I have worked in. I realized, however, that the mindset of people working at Harvard is different – they are clearly focused on the goal to publish in high-quality

journals and they keep their experiments and projects very structured, which increases the efficiency of their work. At least for me, that was very different from other research laboratories I have seen. Additionally, I also realized that great research work is not necessarily dependent on having the newest and most expensive equipment, but what matters most is the integrity and curiosity of scientists. One aspect I particularly enjoyed was that I was a part of the team right from the beginning. I could participate in lab meetings, journal clubs and other talks and events hosted by the Junger Lab. What I missed, however, was the contact to neighboring lab groups as I did not meet many people aside from my own colleagues. I would have loved to attend congresses or other events to get to know more people from the institution.

For my project itself, I was expecting to have long working hours every day, including weekends. However, I was surprised how a good management of time and resources could avoid spending the entire seven months of my stay in the lab. Naturally, there were some weeks where I had to work longer, but I rarely had to come in on the weekends, so I still had plenty of free time to explore the city with my friends. The topic of my project was changed and adjusted frequently while I worked on it, but I think that it's quite normal in research to modify your research questions if the results lead you in another direction. This type of flexibility was just one of the many things I have learned at this lab. Before performing my Master's internship at the Junger lab, I wasn't entirely sure if I wanted to stay in research after my graduation, but now I know that I want to further my career in academia by doing a PhD – maybe even abroad. Personally, I am very grateful for the opportunity to go to the United States and get to know other cultures, and I am sure it will greatly help me in the future.



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