

My name is Marina Jecmenica, I am a molecular biology student at the University of Vienna and received the Marshall Plan Scholarship for a research stay at the Joint Bioenergy Institute (JEBI), Emeryville California in February 2018.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

I chose to apply for working at the Microbial and Enzyme Discovery Group of Dr. Steven Singer, together with one of his PhD scholars (Raphael Gabriel, MSc). Finding a host institution is required prior to applying to the Marshall Plan Foundation. Two months after the application deadline, I learned that I was granted the scholarship for a research period of 6.5 months. Two and a half months later, I officially started my internship at JEBI and received the first part of my scholarship.

During the visa application process, the host institution was very helpful in processing my data and setting up my contract, which, among many other documents, was asked by the U.S. embassy for a J-1 student's visa. I was very grateful to receive all the important documents in time and therefore, I did not have any problems applying for the visa. Mr. Benjamin Ortega was my main contact during this time and answered my endless questions concerning the different steps of the visa application process patiently.

Quality of the host institution

After getting through all the organisation of my research stay abroad, I was very happy to finally arrive in California and visit my host institution. Before I could start working in the laboratory, I had to complete various online safety courses and exams to ensure a safe working environment. Also, shortly after my arrival I got a tour through the building by the lab managers, during which I received many practical information for my daily lab work. In addition, all new employees of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories had to attend an obligatory talk, where they got important information on their visa conditions and requirements. I was amazed by how well-structured and organized my first couple of days were and also by how much help I was offered during the first weeks. The institute itself was well-equipped and the laboratories were very modern.

General impression of my research stay

After receiving my employee badge, I was finally able to start my work and from this time on, I got introduced to all my new co-workers and colleagues during weekly lab meetings, lunches or coffee breaks. Everybody was very helpful in finding a place to stay for me, the right phone

contract, the best super markets and all those other things one has to deal with when moving to a new country. I got my own laboratory bench, my own office desk together with a working computer and a lot of support from different people. The host institution provided everything I needed for a successful working day and once again, I was very grateful for the nice start into a completely new environment.

Days passed by quickly, and I found myself in a daily routine after a short while already. I met many people from all around the world and spend my free time exploring San Francisco, the Bay Area and the rest of beautiful California. After my work officially ended, I was able to travel and explore different parts of the west coast together with my new friends.

Throughout my stay in California, I was very lucky to mostly make positive experiences and I cannot express how grateful I am for this opportunity, which the Marshall Plan Foundation provided me by granting the scholarship.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

I can highly recommend everybody who always wanted to go abroad, to look for opportunities in the U.S. It was by far my most exciting experience and looking back, the hardest part was to actually take the first step towards a semester abroad. Finding a host institution of my interest, applying for the scholarship, and the organisation of the trip were tasks I grew into step by step as I was approaching them.

Marina