

MPS Narrative report

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General impression of my research stay abroad

From January 31st until April 30, 2018, I had the pleasure to be a visiting student researcher in the lab of Prof. Marc Feldman in the Department of Biology at Stanford University. Marc Feldman is a distinguished researcher in the field of theoretical population genetics and I was both honored and in awe for this opportunity. It was a great experience.

The contacting process and agreement on the time of my visit were extremely simple. All the formalities like visa and Stanford-specific requirements were addressed by Larry Bond, the secretary of Prof. Feldman. He sent me all the information I needed and was very patient and helpful with answering all my questions.

Quality of the host institution and Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

After my arrival, Prof. Feldman, led me to some of the very interesting seminar series about evolution that are open to anybody in Stanford. He also invited me to sit in in his course on theoretical population genetics for first year biology PhD-candidates. This was a very interesting and motivating experience. While I knew already most of the topics, his special focus on cultural evolution and the stories about personal encounters and further background information on important persons in population genetics like Fisher, Wright, Dobzhansky, Lewontin and many more, made this lecture course outstanding. In the first weeks, I had the opportunity to present three times prior work and current topics in the Feldman lab meeting. This sparked various discussions with the Professor but also other researchers who attended the meetings. One little project came from this discussions. However the results were not that promising and thus we returned to another idea which we had already in mind before my arrival. At least once a week, Prof. Feldman came by in my office to ask about the progress and he nearly always found time to help me when I approached him. This really was a very uncomplicated and free work environment. Less than a month after my start,

a one-day conference, the CEHG meeting, was organised by Prof. Feldman at Stanford. He asked me to give a talk there, which I, of course, accepted. There were distinguished invited speakers from all over the US and only a handful PhD students were given the opportunity to talk.

From the direct lab members, Oren Kolodny and Yoav Ram, two post-docs, were very kind by giving me advice both scientifically and about living in the bay area. More than once, we had very interesting and thought stimulating discussion during lunch. Since they both were about to start their own labs, it was very interesting to hear about the struggles, one faces in such a transition period. Through them, the eco-evo happy hour and the eco-evo seminar series, I also came in contact with many people from other labs. Especially the people from the Rosenberg and from the Petrov lab were welcoming and open to discuss their projects with me. Some also helped me with input on my project. The eco-evo community in Stanford seems to be very connected and supporting.

I was provided with an office on the same floor as the Professor and his postdocs. His PhD students are mostly co-advised and work thus mostly from other places. The building where we were located was one of three surrounding a common area very close to the center of the Stanford campus. I think most of the biology department is located in these three buildings. This has the very positive effect that it is very easy to access all kind of talks on all the subfields of biology. I think this is very beneficial to get a broader view and to get new ideas and input. It also lowers the hurdles for successful cooperations.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

All in all it was a very nice place to live as well as to do research and exceeded all my expectations. I also did not regret taking my little family with me, since Stanford has a very broad program for international visitors and their dependents. This would be also my advice for future Marshall plan students: If you have kids and/or wife girlfriend, take them with you if possible. There are many things to see and to experience such an adventure together. Stanford really does a lot to let everybody have a unforgettable stay there.