

Field report – Marshall Plan Scholarship

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Host university: University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

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Staying in a foreign place is always an amazing experience, specifically in an area such as Santa Barbara, which has a lot to offer, academically as well as off-campus. The campus at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) is rather huge and diverse compared to the small campus I am used to in Leoben. They offer a broad spectrum of subjects from languages or arts to physics or materials science, just to name a few. As my focus lies on materials science and electron microscopy, I was stationed at the Californian NanoSystems Institute (CNSI) within the campus, where I got the warmest welcome from colleagues and staff members alike. The access to experimental equipment as well as scientific expertise is highly focused there, which makes it unparalleled to anything I've seen before. It was rather encouraging to just 'drop in' for a coffee and discuss science or talk about life with all the people around. Due to their unique transmission electron microscopy setup for mechanical testing, I was able to make quite a leap in my research on interface fracture of microelectronic devices.

The city of Santa Barbara itself is a 40-minute bus ride away from UCSB, but definitely worth visiting a couple of times. The city centre has a Spanish feel to it (they don't call it the American Riviera for no reason) and is filled with an immense amount of theatres, restaurants, microbreweries and wineries. Santa Barbara is also uniquely located to visit any of the national parks in California – Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Big Sur and various others are only a couple of hours' drive away. Given the fact, that my day to day view in Austria is woods and mountains, visiting such remote and desert-like places, was something truly special.

A couple of recommendations for interested applicants are:

Search accommodations early – I had quite a hard time searching for accommodations as none of the student homes take you in without being officially inscribed at UCSB. I searched for rooms on craigslist without success and finally found something through the Coral Group (www.coralgroupsb.com), which provides housing

specifically for international students. However, they have only a limited number of accommodations available.

Get a bike – American ‘short distances’ are usually half an hour by car, which means getting anywhere on foot is quite challenging. However, Santa Barbara is known for having a quite extended bike path system, getting you from UCSB all the way to downtown in under an hour. There is usually a second hand bike sale on campus in spring and fall, but there are also enough bike stores as well as craigslist (santabarbara.craigslist.org) to find something to get around.

Travel around – UCSB is 10 minutes (half an hour on foot – yes, that’s walkable) away from Santa Barbara Airport, which gives you the closest opportunity to rent a car for a day or two, or even fly to, *e.g.* San Francisco for a daytrip.

Based on my experience, I can only highly recommend to take the opportunity and apply for a Marshall Plan Scholarship to broaden your horizon by visiting an US institution. To work on cutting-edge scientific equipment, addressing advanced research questions is a truly satisfying experience.