

Marshall Plan Scholarship Field Report 2020

Mario Feldhofer BSc

Home Institute: University of Applied Sciences (UAS) Vienna

Host Institute: National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Gaithersburg

General Impression of the research stay abroad

Even if you are not sure whether you want to pursue a career in research or in industry, spending time abroad at NIST is a valuable experience. Washington DC offers a great number of free museums and gave me a lot of insight into US history. I was fortunate enough to have time to explore this vast and beautiful country. Hiking through the Grand Canyon was one of my most memorable experiences.

Finding affordable housing in Gaithersburg was relatively easy thanks to the Guest Researcher Association (GRA). The GRA organized events like soccer and happy hours on a regular basis, so I found it easy to make friends right from the start. Having housemates who also work at NIST definitely helped as well. The diversity in this country is truly amazing and I was able to connect with people from all over the world.

With the help of my colleagues at NIST I was able to finish my master's thesis ahead of time and could also write a journal paper. Working together with knowledgeable people from various disciplines and countries at NIST vastly improved my problem solving and communication skills. I am now very confident about working on projects in an international context.

Quality of the host institution

NIST's mission is to promote U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness by advancing measurement science, standards, and technology in ways that enhance economic security and improve our quality of life. NIST employs about 6000 people including associates. A great number of guest researchers assures that skilled people from all over the world can contribute to NIST's mission with their experience and different point of view. The quality of research at NIST is showcased by 5 Nobel Prizes shared by NIST researchers.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

My colleagues from the 'Energy and Environment Division' made me feel welcome from my first day. Their doors were always open for me and they offered guidance, even if they were not part of my project. I also had 2 orientation days and separate tours of different research buildings, which made it easier for me to find my way around the NIST campus. Even though things were a bit chaotic right after the government shutdown, my supervisor Bill Healy tried his best to provide me with the equipment

necessary for my research. I also met up with my coworkers outside of work and felt like a part of the team early on.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

I would highly recommend to everyone who plans to do research abroad to think about project goals and the methodological approach in advance. This way you can start working from day one and leave a margin for delays, which are unavoidable in research. You can always slow down later and focus more on enjoying living abroad. Keep your supervisor updated on your research progress and schedule regular meetings if possible. Having to redo weeks of work because it was not up to standard is frustrating and easily avoidable.

An easy way to start making friends is living in a shared apartment with other guest researchers. NIST has a guest researcher association and I met a lot of people, including locals, through them. Going on trips together and exploring new places was definitely the most memorable part of my stay in the US.