

Field report University of Texas at Austin

My stay at the University of Texas at Austin was everything I hoped for and more. I attribute this pleasant experience to three things. First and foremost, it is the people that make UT Austin special. Talking with my colleagues was always exciting because in every conversation there was a sense of intellectual curiosity that inspired me beyond the context of the conversation. Having colleagues around that strive for the same academic standard is enriching and encouraging. Second, it is the quality of the academics itself. UT Austin's motto is: *What starts here changes the world*. I couldn't agree more. Repeatedly I had the pleasure to work and see cutting-edge technology being developed at UT Austin. Being around such a buzzing academic environment is contagious! I have no doubt that many of my colleagues will go on to do great things in the world. And finally, it is the facilities that enabled me to carry out the research at the highest possible level, that made this experience such a good one. Having access to broad array of facilities, ranging from IT infrastructure to knowledge hubs and data centers, has given me the opportunity to work with data that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

UT Austin is ranked repeatedly amongst the top public universities in the United States. A variety of programs offered attract the best and brightest students from the US and abroad. Thus, it is no surprise that the engineering programs at UT Austin are continuously ranked among the best in the country. Particularly, the *Petroleum Engineering* Program is ranked first in the US and arguably in the world. A vast network of alumni provided industry insights and the frequent industry seminars kept interested students engaged. Those seminars were accessible for researchers and students alike which offered unique perspective on the most pressing issues in the petroleum industry.

My research was partly supervised by an additional professor from the University of Stavanger in Norway. The professor has previously worked on projects with my supervisor from UT. Such a close collaboration was possible because of UT Austin's goal to foster international ties with other great universities. This is further evident from the diverse academic backgrounds my colleagues came from. My colleagues were mostly international students, which is also partly due to the field of study. Nevertheless, the swift inclusion into UT Austin's community was only possible because of my colleagues.

Throughout the many months at UT Austin I was stuck with my research numerous times. Although my supervisor – Dr. Eric Bickel - encouraged me to look for solutions independently, I never had the feeling I was left fighting for myself. Dr. Bickel always gave me slight nudges to look into the right direction. Looking back those experiences were truly invaluable and contributed to my success in my research project, because it also unlocked my creative side. Helpful colleagues were also another big part of why my research work ended up successful. There was always a sense of solidarity and cohesion among Petroleum Engineering researchers and students.

Looking back on my own experience at the University of Texas at Austin, there are several things I would recommend to future Marshall Plan fellows and students. First and foremost, I would recommend reflecting on the opportunity given if you are an accepted Marshall Plan scholar. Much

has changed since CoViD-19 and having the chance to carry out research at a prestigious institution is a life-changing experience, more so than ever before. Make sure you seize every opportunity you get to expand your academic horizon as well as your cultural one. The latter is important to emphasize since I am a firm believer that cultural exchange is essential in a globalized world. Some of the friendships I have formed over the past months will probably last a lifetime. Cultural exchange might be trivial if glanced at, but upon closer inspection one can see that it is because of cultural exchange that new ideas are generated. My international colleagues offered fresh perspectives on an array of topics and I am convinced that their ideas are influenced by differences in cultural backgrounds. The other thing I would recommend to any future Marshall Plan scholars is to be courageous. Especially in the beginning a new environment can be overwhelming. I was dealing with all the changes in my life by plunging into my research and burying myself in work. Looking back, I would probably change that aspect. Being able to step out of your comfort zone is the single most important thing to be successful in your research stay abroad.

Lastly, I want to thank the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation for their support and making this life-changing opportunity a reality.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Petutschnig". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "David" and last name "Petutschnig" clearly legible.

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