

Marshall Plan Foundation Field Report

September 18, 2018 – June 30, 2019

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Host University: Medical University of Vienna

Research Project: The Effects of Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation on Heart Rate Variability

Because of my plans of becoming a physician, I chose to apply for a fellowship at the Medical University of Vienna to participate in neuroscience-related clinical research and obtain a perspective on the Austrian medical system. Due to the generous support of my supervisor, Dr. Christian Windischberger, and my colleagues, I was able to accomplish these goals and learn about Austrian culture.

General Impressions of Research

I was initially drawn to Dr. Windischberger's research because of the fact that his lab is the one of the few that studies the effects of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) with concurrent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Due to the novelty of his work, many of our experiments utilized prototypes. The graduate students often collaborated with manufacturers and relayed feedback on potential areas of improvement. They also worked directly with physicians and other healthcare workers in planning clinical trials. I found it particularly interesting to observe the relationship between researchers, medical device manufacturers, and clinicians. Dr. Windischberger was also enthusiastic about scientific exchange and often encouraged us to participate in scientific conferences. With his encouragement, I applied to and attended the Organization for Human Brain Mapping Conference in Rome. It was a valuable opportunity that allowed me to network with professionals and provided me with context for my research.

Quality of the Host Institution

The first aspect I appreciated about the Medical University of Vienna was that the administration was highly accommodating of my stay. Within the first few days of moving to Vienna, I emailed the International Office and asked to be registered as a transfer student. Within two weeks, I completed the registration process and was able to enroll in classes. Another quality I appreciated was the frequent collaborations and symposiums between different groups at the Medical University of Vienna. Within my department, the Center for Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering, there were four distinct fields of research, each led by different principal investigators. In order to encourage communication between different fields, my department held biweekly "15-Minute-Talks" in which one representative from each of the four fields would present on their work. My department also organized socials and academic retreats throughout the year, and frequently solicited our advice on ways to improve. On a university-wide level, the Medical University hosted many research symposiums and socials throughout the semester to allow students of diverse backgrounds to interact and exchange ideas.

Living Abroad

My supervisor was very kind in finding me university-affiliated housing. I found Vienna to be affordable and well-connected. Though groceries were more expensive than what I was used to

back home, the monthly stipend from the Austrian Marshall Foundation was sufficient to cover these expenses. Coming from a city with little public transportation, I especially appreciated the extensive transportation network in Vienna. With a student ID card, semester cards for transportation are relatively cheap.

Contacts within the Host Institution

International Office at the Medical University of Vienna

Recommendations for Future Marshall Plan Students and Fellows

I would highly recommend the Medical University of Vienna to future students and fellows. One lesson I learned during my fellowship was to be more proactive. When I had questions or problems, most people were willing to assist me if I asked for help. I also would recommend spending an hour every week looking into potential opportunities for personal and professional growth. By doing this, I discovered extracurricular activities and Hackathons that I later become involved in.