

Field Report – Research stay at Louisiana State University

When I received the message from Marshall Plan Foundation that I was granted the scholarship to doing research at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge one of my big dreams came true and I am really grateful that I got this great opportunity.

After all preparations concerning visa, flights, insurance, etc. were made, I left Austria in February 2019 ready for a new adventure in the United States. This journey was my first trip to the United States, and I was not sure what to expect as a researcher at an American university. Of course, I had an image of the American student's life from the movies: universities with big campuses, huge sport facilities, dormitories, mascots, sororities etc. And this image was reality indeed, the campus was even bigger and more impressive than I expected. The LSU campus is like its own village within Baton Rouge. Every department has its own building/hall on the campus. But apart from studying facilities, there are a lot of dormitories on campus, churches, shops, there was a huge basketball stadium where more than 100,000 people fit, one building of two floors had all kind of fast food restaurants, even McDonalds. Additionally there was a barber shop, post office, a university police, diary shop with homemade ice-cream, a huge recreation centre where I could practise all kind of new sport like climbing, boxing, dancing, there was a massive outdoor swimming pool, the own university lake, and last but not least the mascot of LSU: Mike the Tiger, who had his own little paradise on the campus.

As soon as I arrived at LSU, I had to register and fill some papers at the International office, the staff was really helpful and generous. I immediately got my student card and my own computer in an office for visiting students at the Department of Geography and Anthropology. The international office also organized many events for visiting scholars: a weekly meet and match event, where I also had the opportunity to present my research, an international theatre and international dining, where all students cooked something from the countries.

I used to live 20 minutes walk off campus in a house sharing with two PhD students. I really liked the neighbourhood and the walk to the campus. Especially during the early spring in February, when all the flowers were blooming and squirrels were running. The campus is also very green with a lot of big old oak trees. However, I was almost the only one walking. I was impressed that even the students who live on campus have their own big SUV or truck. But to be honest, if you want to live in Baton Rouge for a longer period, you would need a car. If I wanted to do groceries or go shopping, I relied on friends with a car, because the malls are far away and distributed all over the city. Moreover, it is not safe to walk in the evenings and the infrastructure for walking or biking is not like we are used to in Europe. During my time in Baton Rouge we also got flooded several times by storms, but locals are used to that. They still drive their cars on streets that turned into rivers and every now and then a lost alligator showed up in the LSU lakes.

The Louisianan colourful diverse culture is amazing, including Creole and Cajun, Spanish, French, African-American influences, the place where Jazz was born, the Cajun cuisine with their famous crawfish boils, and traditions like Mardi Gras. I was lucky to be in Louisiana during Mardi Gras time, so I attended some crazy parades in New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

My experience in Louisiana gave me confidence and made me think in new ways. I think my unique experience of living and studying in the USA made me stand out when I applied for the job that I will start soon. I got to know new cultures, people, ways of living and working. It is one step closer to become a citizen of the world and to broaden your perspectives and I only can recommend to everyone to apply for a Marshall Plan scholarship to get this amazing opportunity as I got!

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