

FIELD REPORT OF DAVID BERGER
MARSHALL PLAN SCHOLARSHIP, 2019/20
Medical University Innsbruck, Department of Virology

General Impression of Research Stay Abroad

My time at the Medical University of Innsbruck has proved to be an influential period in my personal and professional life. Innsbruck is a fantastic small city and unique due to its proximity to an amazing selection of outdoor sports. Albeit disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, I look back on wonderful opportunities to engage in high-level cancer immunotherapy research, shadow physicians, and contribute to COVID testing in Innsbruck. I would recommend this program to any student seeking a high-level research experience abroad.

Quality of Host Institution

The Department of Virology at the Medical University Innsbruck is a well-organized institution maintained by a core group of senior members with a strong connection to the department. The department encompasses several research groups, which collaborate on a generally friendly level and hold monthly general meetings for scientific discourse. The infrastructure was impressive with a multi-channel flow cytometer for single cell sorting, 3D optical tomography IVIS Spectrum In Vivo Imaging System, modern cell culture hoods, and any relevant molecular biology equipment.

Contacts Within the Host Institution / Inclusion in the Organization

I was warmly received by everyone in the department, although it took longer than expected to work independently with the new methods I was acquiring. The support by my principal investigator, Dr. Guido Wollmann, was extraordinary from the beginning of my application. He was very supportive in helping me find regular shadowing opportunities with a colleague of his and navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Krishna Das for guiding me in designing and executing my independent project throughout the grant and navigating the challenges throughout. Many

thanks also go to Ms. Tamara Hofer for the comprehensive methodological training in immunology over several months that enabled me to complete my project.

Recommendations for Future Marshall Plan Students and Fellows

As a dual EU/American citizen, I cannot speak to any challenges related to the visa acquisition. The biggest challenge for me was that the project I had proposed at the time of my application was no longer relevant to the lab by the time I arrived. In a related manner, I noticed quickly that my role in the lab was hard to grasp for my fellow lab members as they struggled to fit me into the normal „Bachelor student“, „Master student“, „PhD student“, or „laboratory technician“ classifications. This meant that I was without a clear project for the first 3-4 months of my grant, but rather learning the immunological methods slowly and progressively by contributing to others' projects.

As such, I would recommend that future students check-in with their supervisors several times after their acceptance to discuss the relevance of the proposed projects and discuss potential alternatives if necessary. This should facilitate the transition into the laboratory. Furthermore, I would encourage Fulbright or the Marshall Plan Foundation to establish a relationship with the respective hosts to increase understanding for the students' roles in their environments.