

Marshall Plan Scholarship Field Report 2020

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Home institution: Graz University of Technology (TU Graz)

Hosting institution: California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly)

General impression of the research stay abroad

San Luis Obispo, the town of California Polytechnic State University is a very pleasant and welcoming community, full of students both coming from abroad and from the US as well. The university campus might seem overwhelmingly big at first, but it's easy to get accustomed or find help if you still need it. Everybody that I met and worked with at Cal Poly were extremely friendly and nice to me, helping me both in research and day-to-day questions and issues. There are also a lot of things to explore during your stay in the US - the West Coast is full of stunning nature parks and beaches, the climate is very nice and comparably warm even in winter. Being in the country with native English speakers can greatly improve one's communication skills and use of English, which is a nice bonus.

Quality of the host institution

Cal Poly is equipped with cutting edge technology for basically any type of research needed, it's a great advantage to improve technical skills and learn from other professionals, sharing experiences among each other. The campus also offers numerous amenities like cafeterias, libraries, study rooms, sports center and even leisure spots like arcade and bowling center. I got all the equipment I needed for my research, got a PC and a personal account assigned to me to get anything I might require and have full access to the data available. I can't say much about the studying process at Cal Poly, because I couldn't take part in the courses or lectures due to my non-student status there.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

My thesis co-supervisor, Dr. Foaad Khosmood was very helpful and friendly, helping me first by showing me around the campus and introducing me to all the people involved in the project that I was working on. It was easy to reach out to him and get advice or recommendation on my thesis work almost all the time.

The representatives of Cal Poly International Center like Susan Tripp, Bianca Silva and many others were also always ready to help in any questions regarding documents or visa or travelling. The events organised by the International Center for the students and researchers from abroad helped to feel more involved in the university life, get to know other students and make friends and new connections.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

The main thing I would like to warn the future Marshall Plan students and researchers about - start early with the documents. This process is indeed complicated and stressful, it sometimes requires a lot of attention and time to organize everything properly. I also had some issues with receiving a visa, even though I got support from two respected institutions

from both sides - mainly due to my citizenship, I have a Russian passport. Another challenging part that you might have to be prepared for is the housing. A student coming to California has to be prepared for the fact that it is expensive and not that easy to rent some place to live in. Especially in San Luis Obispo, where the great part of the population is students, who also need some place to rent and that makes the prices skyrocket. However, my scholarship was still enough to cover those rent expenses. I was searching for an apartment first remotely through Facebook groups and Craigslist - however, beware of scammers! Always organize a video-call with the people you are renting from, ask them to show themselves, the exact place you're going to rent, the surroundings, make yourself friendly to them. Don't send any money anywhere ahead unless both sides signed some sort of a contract and you're completely sure of all the aspects.

It is also very handy to have a vehicle in the US - it's a very big country with great distances and unfortunately public transport is not the strongest feature there. If you want to explore more and get around you might have to either rent/buy a car or make some friends with people with cars :) It also pays off to get a bicycle to get around the town itself.

Try to organise your schedule properly to use up the most of your time there - have some fixed working times, so you can estimate your research duration but also have some spare time for exploration and fun.

Despite all the difficulties in the organisation process and documents I would still greatly recommend to use such an opportunity. Go abroad, meet new people, get new experiences, see places to make your student life as full as you can.