

Field Report

In fulfillment of the documentation requirements for the Marshall Plan Scholarship

Research stay: 9 March 2020 – 8 July 2020

Villach, Carinthia, Austria

Angela Schirck-Matthews

Mathwiz961@ufl.edu

Due to Covid-19 my experience was much different than I had expected. I unfortunately had very few interactions with people at the University during my stay. I arrived in Villach Austria on March 6, 2020 and only spent one week at the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences campus (or FH as it's typically referred to) before everything closed down. The school assigned me a buddy who picked me up from the train station and helped me with all the necessary registration at FH as well as registering my stay with the Austrian government. I highly recommend the buddy system and am glad for this help in navigating my first week. In that first week I was able to meet the people in the international office as well as my local advisor, Gernot Paulus. My general impression of the quality of FH during my short encounter is positive. I was supplied with a workspace that was clean and equipped. There were also well-equipped computer labs and classrooms. In all, I was very impressed with the facilities and available equipment for a small campus. The food in the cafeteria was good and reasonably priced, which is great for students on a budget! Most importantly, everyone I had interactions with was kind and helpful and made me feel welcomed. When FH closed down the following week Gernot brought the supplies I left there to my apartment along with a computer monitor to extend my laptop screen so I could work from home.

After the closure of FH a week after my arrival Gernot was my main point of contact. We met via Zoom at least once a week to discuss my research progress and he was also helpful in other respects during my stay as well (such as fixing my bike tire when the stores were closed). I was very grateful for his assistance since I had no friends or family nearby. Alex Böösi in the international office was very helpful and when I needed to extend my stay because I couldn't get flights home; she helped me with information regarding my visa. Unfortunately, under the circumstances I did not have an opportunity to feel included in the day-to-day activities of the institution but was happy for the opportunity to meet with Gernot and also Dariia Strelnikova, with whom I had collaborated on a previous research project, during my first week.

I did, however, enjoy my stay in Villach despite the quarantine. Coming from a large and populated metropolitan area, I appreciated the "small-town feel" of Villach and the wide-open

spaces and natural scenery. I had plenty of opportunities to enjoy the scenery, ride my bicycle along the river, and explore the area.

I applied for this opportunity because it came highly recommended to me by another student from my home institution who came to Villach on the Marshall Plan Scholarship in 2018. Despite the circumstances, I was not disappointed. The experience of living and studying abroad is useful in providing students with cultural experiences different from their own to prepare them for work in a global community. This was an amazing opportunity and I am thankful to the Marshall Plan Foundation for providing this chance to study abroad. I have made international connections with others in my field that would not have been possible without this opportunity. I would highly recommend the Marshall Plan Scholarship opportunity to other students seeking a study-abroad experience. You will make connections and memories to last a lifetime!

For other students wishing to study abroad I would make the following recommendations.

- Review literature in your field and find an institution where your local advisor is knowledgeable and well-published in the field.
- Ask your host institution if they can provide you with a “buddy” to navigate your visit. This is especially helpful in the first week for registration and learning about the local area.
- Inquire ahead of time about public transit and how you will commute during your stay.
- Start looking for accommodations early. Try websites like AirBNB who often provide discounts of up to 40% for long-term stay.
- Take time to enjoy your visit and do some “touristy” things like site-seeing or activities that are unique to the area in which you are staying.