

# Field Report – Marshall Plan Scholarship

Matthias Musil

March 16, 2020 to August 14, 2020

Host University: Florida State University, Tallahassee, USA

Home University: University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria Campus Wels, Austria

## 1. General impression of research period abroad

The Florida State University is a large organization which has a great deal of experience with international students. As such, the whole process of application, acquiring the visa and getting to FSU was rather straightforward and especially Angelique Stevens from the Center of Global Engagement (CGE) was a great help throughout my stay. Unfortunately, due to the Corona-Virus pandemic, the university campus and the lab I would have worked at, the Center for Advanced Power Systems (CAPS), were closed shortly after my arrival. The short time I got to visit the campus and lab were very exciting and I felt very welcome. However, on April 2 I already had to return to Austria, from where I continued working on my project though. Getting all authorizations and organizational issues done in order to continue working from Austria was surprisingly easy and quick and my supervisors and I quickly adjusted to the new situation. We arranged weekly meetings specifically for my project and I was invited to a multitude of other team meetings where I was able to connect with other students and researchers working at CAPS. My supervisors at FSU, Dr. Fang Peng and Dr. Yanjun Shi were very helpful and provided me with a great deal of feedback on my project. Even though I had to work from my desk at home in Austria, it always felt like I was a part of the CAPS team.

## 2. Quality of the host institution

CAPS and FSU in general are both well-known and sophisticated institutions in their fields of research. Organizational assistance from FSU, especially from the CGE, is usually very professional and quick. CAPS has a wide spread of modern equipment for manufacturing, measuring and testing of electronics and high voltage equipment in its labs. At the time I had arrived there, they were currently in the process of setting up a new building for a new power electronics and high voltage laboratory. Also the professors, researchers, students and staff working at CAPS are incredibly proficient and well-experienced in their fields of research. It is no surprise that also the projects and research being conducted at CAPS are of high quality.

## 3. Contacts within host institution and integration into the organization

As mentioned before, getting to FSU was straightforward and the responsible department, the CGE, was very helpful in all questions regarding application, work authorization, visas, travel and so on. Angelique Stevens was my contact person and an incredible help throughout the whole process. Usually, FSU hosts a welcoming event for new international students, but unfortunately it had to be cancelled this year. The head of the power systems group, Dr. Michael 'Mischa' Steurer, was my main contact at CAPS. He made a great effort in getting me to CAPS, then getting me to be able to work in Austria and integrating me into the organization. I was invited to the meetings about the overall research project, where I was able to present in front of and listen to researchers from FSU, Ohio State University (OSU) and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL). Furthermore I got to join the power systems and power electronics student group meetings which was very interesting for me since I got to connect with other students working at CAPS and obtained insights into what they are working

on. Furthermore, I had weekly meetings with my supervisors to check on the project progress and get very valuable feedback on my work.

#### 4. Recommendations for future Marshall Plan Students/Fellows

Generally, I'd recommend future Marshall Plan students or fellows to start with the scholarship application process a few months before the deadline in order to have enough time to fix the project contents with the host university and attain all required documents. Further, I highly recommend starting the visa process early and start looking for accommodations as soon as possible. Most student apartments in Tallahassee only offer 1 year or longer leases and there is no way of getting out of this lease unless a new tenant is found to take it over. I managed to get a short term lease for the time of my research period, but when I had to return to Austria they would not let me terminate my lease, it was also not possible to find a new tenant, so I had to continue paying the whole lease. Also, communicating with this apartment complex was incredibly tedious. Based on this experience, it might be better to try and find an accommodation rented by a private person. Also, public transportation in Tallahassee is very poor so I strongly recommend getting a Florida driver's license and buying a cheap, used car in order to get around town easily. Getting a license is rather easy and much cheaper (some \$50) compared to the Austrian driver's license and used cars can be bought at most dealerships. Alternatively, a bike also helps getting around faster, but due to the hot and humid climate, you'll usually arrive sweaty anywhere you go. Finally, I strongly recommend taking the time to travel around. The USA has plenty of exciting and beautiful places to visit. I couldn't travel anywhere during this stay, but I had visited the USA before and travelled around quite a bit. Specifically in Florida, the fresh water springs and state parks are always worth a visit. My personal favorite place in the USA is the French Quarter in New Orleans. As the birthplace of Jazz, there is live music and art to be found at every corner.