

Field Report

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Home university: University of Applied Science Vienna

Research host: Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBL)

General Impression

My research stay started on the 2nd of March in 2020 in Berkeley, CA at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBL). The Bay area, with its major city San Francisco is an awesome place to spend some time. With all the lockdowns the social life was not really taking place, which is too bad, since especially the east bay is known for a lot of live music.

The surrounding nature with the Tilden Regional Park eastern of Berkeley with lots of hiking trails and good roads to bike around (even though it is steep) invites for after work activity. For weekends northern of San Francisco right across the Golden Gate Bridge lies Marin county with its beautiful hills and coastline. Sausalito is a nice destination for a bike trip on the weekend there. Besides the pandemic, the black live matters protests and the presidential election made it an exciting year, even though Berkeley itself is a small bubble were nothing got really bad whereas in Oakland, south of Berkeley the protest got violent.

The Californians are very friendly and open minded; therefore, it is very easy to get along and connect with them. The best way to get around in Berkeley is by bike and the BART is an easy way to get to San Francisco. With the ongoing pandemic the BART was empty, so it was easy to take the bike to San Francisco to get around there as well. But be prepared, the streets are really steep there.

Quality of the Host institution

Working at LBL clearly was an honor since it is one of the leading laboratories for building technologies. After spending 2 weeks in the lab the Covid-19 Pandemic also effected the United States which lead to a closure of all facilities at LBL on March 16th. My work did not necessarily need the laboratory infrastructure. Therefore, the first two weeks were my last at the lab, due to the limited people allowed to work onsite at the same time. For the two weeks I commuted to work with the LBL shuttle which has a bike rack to bring the bike up the hill to the lab for a fun ride down after work. The Lab shuttle works really well and has multiple stops around Berkeley. LBL ensured the comfort and ergonomics at my workplace and provided me with the necessary equipment to stay healthy.

For the computationally intensive work I got access to a remote computer from the lab. Due to an installation of an uninterrupted power supply system, the computer was shut down unintentionally, but was restored quickly by the lab personal working onsite, so I could continue my work without interruption.

Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

To stay connected with my supervisor we had weekly meetings discussing the progress of my work and to help me gaining more knowledge in programming, since this was a new topic to me. Throughout the 9 months I participated in meetings of the Windows and Daylighting Group led by Christian Kohler and the Building Technologies and Urban Systems (BTUS) where research projects were presented which gave a great insight on the work at LBL.

Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

The housing situation in Berkeley is very relaxed and it is not too hard to find a variety of options. I started the stay in an Airbnb room in a nice house southside of the campus. The plan was to stay there for 2 weeks and look for other living options, but I ended up living there for the whole duration of my research stay. The best way to look for accommodations is on craigslist where mainly rooms in houses with students already living there are inserated.

Especially for California I can say that it is worth it to work hard when you are at home. Traveling through the National Parks and Forests is truly amazing. Since most of the campgrounds were closed due to the pandemic or ran with limited availability the only remaining possibility for spontaneous camping trips (meaning planned trips 1 month in advance) was to go for dispersed camping in the National Forests. It is a bit tricky to find good sleeping spots in the beginning but after some time it gets easier to find spots with nice views.

I never really thought about going abroad for my master thesis, until my supervisor Christoph Gehbauer reached out to the UAS where I applied to. I only can encourage everyone that has the opportunity to stay abroad in the US to do it.