

Field Report

I spent 6 months (September 2020 – February 2021) in Boston for a research internship at Boston Children's Hospital with a Harvard Medical School affiliated lab. There, I was working under the supervision of Dr. Yang Shi on epigenetic histone mutations in the context of 3D genome organization. My experience of conducting research abroad changed my outlook on my future path as a young scientist and I am deeply grateful for having had the support for realizing this opportunity.

My general impression of Boston and my host institution during my stay abroad was, of course, skewed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, my time in Boston could not have been any more agreeable. Boston is, in my opinion, the perfect city to spend a semester of research abroad in. The city is densely populated with numerous university campuses and other research institutions, so there is always something going on in terms of science. As a student intern at Boston Children's Hospital and a temporary collaborator at Harvard Medical School, I benefited from the inspiring work environment in the Longwood Medical Area and the (virtual) scientific presentations organized by the Cell Biology Department of HMS. Boston, especially in the field of academic research, attracts a large number of international students and researchers each year, so it is nearly impossible to feel out of place as an international student from Austria.

The Shi Lab at Boston Children's Hospital is located in the Enders Research building on the 9th floor and counts as an affiliate to the Harvard Medical School labs. The whole group was very welcoming and always helpful to answer my questions and show me new techniques. I closely collaborated with one of the post-doctoral researchers, Alan Jiao, who gave me one of his smaller projects to continue independently. In the comparably short time that I spent in Boston, I learned a great amount because I was given all of the tools and feedback I needed to make progress. I consider myself very lucky to have met all the members of the Shi Lab because they showed me how often the brightest minds are the humblest and that a common passion for science bridges any differences. Yang

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and a few members of the lab are moving their research to Oxford University, Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, in Summer 2021. Yang supported my application for a DPhil in Clinical Medicine to continue my research with his lab, so I am very happy to be joining them in Oxford as a graduate student in autumn.

To anyone who is about to depart on their semester of research or studies under the guidance of the Marshall Plan Foundation, I would say have fun and really make the most of it. For anyone still debating on whether or not to take that step, especially in pandemic times like these, I would say go for it. In the end, every city is dealing with the pandemic right now, and if someone thinks their experience abroad will be tarnished by Covid-19, I would reassure them that what you learn from taking the risk surpasses anything you would have learned by staying where you are. For me, with the moral support from family and friends and the financial support from the Marshall Plan Foundation, undertaking a semester of research in the US was definitely worth it.