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You never think at the beginning of an adventure that the road before you will take so many turns, or be so rewarding. At least I certainly didn't, starting out the January semester back at my home university. As a science major, it's virtually impossible to study abroad using the same opportunities available to other students. Too often labs and heavy course loads keep us from broadening our horizons and learning in an international context during the normal school year. Applying to the RISE program gave me the chance to explore a different culture while continuing the research I love.

With such a variety of labs to choose from, I applied for research labs that would broaden my experience and give me the opportunity to learn and apply new techniques. The research lab to which I was accepted at the University of Freiburg focused not only on biology, my major, but also worked with biochemistry, a topic about which I wanted to learn more. I was a little nervous that first day at the train station, both at meeting my advisor for the first time and at the prospect of learning a new lab "language." I needn't have worried— she helped me every step of the way, from arranging for a room in town to guiding me through new experiments; I was never alone.

The thing that most amazed me was how multicultural our lab was, with students from Poland, Romania, China, Canada, the US and Germany. This provided lots of fun and laughter as we were able to learn German together, our fellow German researchers and technicians acting as teachers. Besides basic lab vocabulary, we also learned cultural aspects like the traditional children's tales of Max and Moritz by Wilhelm Busch, and culinary oddities (to us) such as eating tuna on pizza.

Beyond getting to know Germany from the perspective of the lab, I also had the opportunity to interact with my advisor in a more social setting. My internship took place during the European Fußball championships, and we had a wonderful time watching the games together at the university mensa (cafeteria) or a local *kneipe* (pub). With a friendly "welcome to Germany," our advisors shared their face paint and German colored leis, allowing us to blend in with the multitude of other avid fans cheering on the team.

Research-wise, our project more than exceeded my expectations. While our experiments required long hours in the lab, working together with my advisor made the work load manageable and rewarding. She took the time to explain not only what I was doing, but also why I was doing it, so that I knew where the project was going. Every day

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brought a new experiment or method, and I really enjoyed having a say in directing the project as we discovered more and more about our topic.

I had the chance to work with equipment and methods I had never heard about at my home university, from phage display to protein fragment complementation assays. The sheer variety of methods, (cloning, liquid culture experiments, protein expression, sequencing, and ELISA to name a few), allowed me to see the project through from the first steps to the final analysis. Having hands on experience with all areas of the project was invaluable when I presented my completed research at an American Chemical Society meeting upon my return home.

While we had great success in our results, the best part of the research project was learning how to troubleshoot when things didn't work. Watching and taking part in the discussion really gave me a better insight into the leadership required from a graduate student. Whereas research back home is primarily directed by the professor, at least at the undergraduate level, my advisor and I had a lot of autonomy in our project. While we would discuss our progress with the head of the lab both on an individual basis and during lab meetings, we were very much independent. I really appreciated being treated as an equal and not just a lab assistant. The camaraderie of the lab made the work fun, and the days flew by faster than I could believe.

On the weekends, I had the opportunity to travel around on my own. With Freiburg being so close to the French and Swiss borders, I got to travel Europe and still sleep in my own bed at night. The public transportation system in Germany is like nothing in the United States— you can get on a train at nearly any hour of the day and get anywhere in a few hours. Rail passes provide convenient and inexpensive ways to see Germany on a college student's budget, and we made the most of this. My favorite place in Germany, though, was the Schwarzwald— my backyard blackforest. Some of the places I visited were so remote, I couldn't get there by train. Instead, I learned to make use of the bus and light rail S-bahn system, so that I could go deep into the heart of this amazing wilderness. Getting to know the public transportation system really gave me a new perspective on the culture as I was able to go places the average tourist doesn't know exists.

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After living in the same place for three months, Freiburg really became a second home for me. I learned where the best ice cream shops were, which bakeries made the best bread, what time the street trains stopped running at night. What was more amazing, though, was the change in me as I came to call Freiburg home. As the leading green town in Germany, Freiburg exemplifies an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Back home, we have two trashcans: things that can be recycled and things that can't. In Freiburg, there are seven trashcans: white glass, green glass, brown glass, paper, aluminum foil, compost, and regular rubbish. Even the lab joined in the green movement, using glass pipettes instead of disposable plastic ones. But the environmental friendliness of the city goes far beyond the recycling system. Bicycles and street trains outnumber cars on the city streets; big windows limit the need for artificial lighting. People walk in the evenings, play soccer in the local parks, and hike in the local hills. In adapting to the local green culture, I found myself wondering why we don't do this back home. I even hiked so much that I wore the soles off my walking shoes.

The hardest part about leaving Freiburg was saying goodbye to my newfound friends and lab family, especially my advisor. Although leaving wasn't easy, it helps a little bit, knowing that I'll be coming back someday, either in a scholarly setting or just as a tourist. The truth is, although I looked forward to coming home, I really didn't want to leave Germany. Now, sitting at home and writing this, I find myself homesick for Freiburg. The RISE program gave me an opportunity to accomplish what I thought was the impossible. Looking back, it's the best thing that ever happened to me and I'm looking forward to finding a graduate school with international connections so I can stay a part of the global research community. It may sound cliché, but I don't know of a simpler way of summing up my experiences than to say that doing research abroad in Germany changed my life, and the opportunity wouldn't have been available to me through any other program.