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RISE final report

30/9/08

I agree that my report and accompanying pictures are used by the DAAD in printed materials, presentations and on the website in order to inform funding organizations, sponsors, and students about the RISE program.

If someone had come to me on the street and asked me if I would be interested in getting paid to live in a beautiful section of Germany for the summer and conduct cutting edge research in an area that I loved I probably would have laughed and asked what the catch was. If they would have just smiled and went on from there to tell me that I would get all that plus a rail pass to travel around Germany as well as an all expense paid conference in Heidelberg where I would be wined and dined in an effort to convince me to come to Germany for graduate school I probably would have given them a weary look and walked away in fear of them being crazy. This was, in fact, much my reaction when I first discovered the RISE internship opportunity last fall. I kept expecting to find something that would show that it really was too good to be true. Thankfully, I never found that thing.

During the application process I was continually impressed by the precision and efficiency in which the DAAD, and the RISE committee, handled my application and questions. The process itself was extremely transparent and the information given on the internet about the program made it very easy to apply and understand exactly what I was getting myself into. I was also highly impressed at the breadth and depth of areas offered for the internship; I found it hard to only pick three projects to apply too as there were many more that looked interesting.

I can still remember the day that I got the email that informed me that I had been successful in my application and that I would be going to Tuebingen. I was ecstatic. Once the initial excitement wore off, though, and I began to see how much I had to get ready to go my excitement turned to nervousness of the unknown. Neither myself, nor my immediate family, had traveled to Europe, let alone Germany, and I was starting to realize I had many questions with not too many people to get the answers from. This was where the DAAD saved the day. They had a lot of supplemental material that was sent out with the award letter that gave answers to many of the questions I had and were really good about responding to my emails when questions outside of these supplements came up. My supervisor for the internship was also infinitely helpful. He did most of the footwork to get me set up in the student housing, getting me acquainted with the subject of our research for the summer, as well as information about the town I would live in. I don't think I would have found the transition to living in Germany nearly as smooth without all the help from the DAAD and my supervisor.

Once in Germany the internship kept getting better and better with each week. I was paired with an incredible supervisor as well as being placed in a beautiful town in southern Germany. My

supervisor had picked a range of topics for me to look at over the summer and left it very open to me to pick the project that was most interesting and relevant to me. Through this, I was able to work on a project that was of great interest to me that was challenging, educational, and fun. I was able to become trained on equipment in the lab that was not available at my home institution as well as work on a project that was not available at my home institution. This allowed me to broaden my research interests as well as get some hands on experience with the research I thought I wanted to pursue in a PhD program later on. This aspect of the RISE internship was of paramount importance to me going into the program. I am currently in my final year of my undergraduate education and faced with the choice of choosing a location and subject in which to do my graduate work. Getting hands on experience with this research before having to make a final decision on a program was very helpful, and, in the end, saved me from going into a program I would not have enjoyed.

The academic and professional benefits of this program would have been enough on their own to allow me to be very satisfied with the program, but there was also much outside of the lab and classroom to make the internship invaluable. Through the program I was able to take a language course in Berlin to help me get around Germany with my limited speaking ability. The language course itself was phenomenal and I learned enough German to get around during my travels and at home in Tuebingen, and it was a real treat to live in Berlin for two weeks. It was extremely fun to explore Germany's capitol city with the friends I made at the language course. The friendships made during this experience were the foundation for many other trips to come during the internship. My friends from the language course and I took several other weekends during the summer to meet in various cities throughout Germany to explore. Through these travels I learned a great deal about myself, my new found friends, and the German culture and history.

One of the most intriguing aspects of traveling in Germany was learning the history, especially World War Two history, from Germans. I feel that I gained a new, and much needed, perspective on world events both past and present. The history was also so much more relevant when I was standing at the site of the event. It was a truly powerful experience that will never be forgotten. In addition to learning some of German history, it was a lot of fun to see the differences and similarities in the German academic system compared to the academic system in the United States. Both of these aspects helped me to gain a greater appreciation for the German people and culture as well as build a greater appreciation of my own people and culture.

Over all, this internship was an incredible, once in a lifetime, experience that will continue to impact my decisions both personally and professionally. Even as I write this report, I find myself wondering if this actually happened, or if it was just a really, really good dream. Thankfully, I have the souvenirs, pictures, good friends, and good memories to remind me that it did, in fact, happen. I find myself now hungering to do more exchanges abroad, especially to Germany. I hope to return to Germany some day as it will always hold a special place in my heart.