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DAAD RISE 2008

When I left my home in Ohio for a summer in Germany, I didn't have many expectations. This was not because I wasn't excited about the chance to spend a summer doing research in a German institution, but merely because I knew things would be so different it would be fruitless to have any expectations. I was correct in every sense of the meaning.

My internship at Universität Heidelberg was everything I had hoped for in an internship. German universities are run much different than those in the United States and I had no idea how different until I was thrown right into the middle of it. When I came back however, I found myself wishing schools in the US were a little more like those in Germany. The university is much more incorporated into the local culture and less secluded, mostly because there is no on-campus living. I lived in a house with students from the University as well as people who just worked in town. Back in the states, living on campus could mean that you have little to no contact with the townspeople. This was not the case in Germany.

I found the close-knit atmosphere of my research group very welcoming and comforting. All of the PhD students who worked in my group were not just peers and co-workers but also friends, working together during the day and hanging out together at night. It wouldn't be strange if you were with the same people from early in the morning to late in the evening, from riding to work together on your bikes to having a grillen in the park in the evening. I've never experienced the workplace friendships like I have here in Germany.

The most memorable part of my stay in Germany will by far be the experiences I shared as a result of befriending the other North American interns. There was a large group of RISE students working at the University in Heidelberg and two other interns working within my very own research group. We first contacted each other when the RISE organizers emailed a list of all

2008 participants and their locations. We organized trips on the weekend and met up during the week for various activities. Sometimes we could have a picnic in the park by the river or go out into the city for dinner. During the EuroCup, we would meet up and watch the games together. It was nice, being in a foreign land, to have the comfort of sharing the experience with someone who was in the same position.

A typical day during my internship would begin when my alarm started buzzing, just shy of 08:00. I would leave for the University around 8:30, either on foot or on the bicycle that my supervisor let me borrow for part of the summer. Everyday at work was something a different, and it never was certain exactly what I would get into on any given day, which thankfully minimized the monotony that could have resulted from a full-time internship. On any given day I could be starting a new reaction, working up a reaction that had been cooking or cleaning up a finished product. The thing about organic chemistry is that what works flawlessly on paper has no guarantees in a flask, so every day was as unpredictable as the last. At 11:30, without exception, the interns and most of the PhD students would leave for the Mensa together to eat lunch. The Mensa is different from any American dining hall but delicious in its own way. After lunch I worked in the lab for another couple of hours until 15:00 coffee break, when everybody takes an afternoon break in the coffee room together. On an average day I would leave the lab around 18:00 and meet the other interns at Café Botanik, which is part of the Mensa at the University. We would eat dinner together, organize our travels for whatever the destination was for the upcoming weekend, and walk over to somebody's flat to watch a movie. I would be home and in bed around 00:30, for just enough sleep to wake up and do it all over again.

The RISE program not only gave me the chance pursue research in my field of interest, learning new techniques and performing procedures I never would have had the chance to learn

at my home university, but also the opportunity to see lands I had only heard and read about. I was able to travel throughout several cities in Germany (Dresden, Frankfurt, Frieberg, Hamburg, Warnamunde, Stuttgart, Munich) as well as other foreign countries (Czech Republic, Switzerland, The Netherlands). I saw things I had always wanted to see and things I never knew I wanted to see.

The summer internship gave me the confidence to pursue other life endeavors. I managed to survive a whole summer alone in a country I had never been to, speaking a language I had never studied, within a culture I had no familiarity with. There isn't much more that forces the development of independence.

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.