

DAAD RISE Reflection

At the beginning of the last school year I would have never dreamed of myself taking off to Germany for three months the following summer and doing research in a German University. However, I clearly remember that November day when someone came into my Pharmacology class describing this program called DAAD RISE. The moment that I heard of this I knew that this is something that I would like to do. I had never done any extensive traveling before, and had never been on an airplane. But I knew that I was ready to try something new. The one thing that was so appealing about this particular organization was that it was so structured and so many things were taken care of, such as my work permit. That afternoon I went home and told my parents that I was going to apply. So I applied, got accepted, went and am here right now reflecting on this amazing experience that I had.

It would be difficult for me to describe a typical workday for myself, because for the duration of my internship I worked on several different projects and was involved in many different things within the graduate school and the university itself. I would say that the only consistent thing for me throughout the summer was that I would begin my workday at the University at 10:00am; this was great! There were two projects however that I spent most of the summer working on. One of them was 'Vertical Linkage and Cumulative Learning in Chemistry and Physics' where I rated the cognitive activities of teachers and students in videos taken of Grade 10 high school classes. I handled the video-software Videograph© and helped to optimize the coding system. The other project I was involved in was the international cooperation project 'Developing and Validating a Large Scale Instrument Measuring Students' Competence in Nature of Science and Scientific Inquiry' where I constructed scientific case studies that were used to develop items for a student questionnaire for nature of science and scientific inquiry. So while these projects were very different from each other, both required me to be at the computer for most of the day. However, it seemed that I was always apart of something within our lab or the university that really the time spent at my computer didn't seem so much.

One day I went with the people from my lab to Münster, to partake in a Science Education Workshop for Primary School. We discussed how to conduct science experiments with students in Grades 1 to 4. The great thing was we were able to do the experiments ourselves and then look at what some of the misconceptions students would have while doing the experiments. The Universities are really big on collaboration projects. My University, University of Essen-Duisburg, and the University Münster for example are collaborating on this science education project, so they get together quite frequently to discuss their findings. Great way to meet more people too; after the workshop, I went with three other girls from my lab and two of the PhD students from

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Münster University for a walk around Münster and saw the botanical gardens, the amazing University buildings and the cathedrals.

Another small project that I took on during my internship was a presentation that I was asked to give by another PhD student in the graduate school, to a group of undergraduate students who were going to be teachers. The topic was 'The Education System in Canada, and Standardized Exams in Alberta.' So for a week I prepared a PowerPoint presentation and collected some different handouts so that I would be able to give this group of students an idea about the education system in Canada. This was also a great way for me to learn more about Canada's education and to practice my public speaking. So I believe that this was great benefit not only to the students but to me as well.

So while I got lots of practical work experience at the lab, there was time for me to explore other things as well. I was able to find a beginner German language course offered by my University and was able to take part in five of their classes. I was able to join in on the English class that all the graduate students at my lab took part in every week. This was very interesting as I was able to see how English is taught as a second language. Outside of the work week, I was able to go with my whole lab on a weekend retreat to the Saauerland of Germany. I found that this was a great opportunity for me to talk with people from my lab who I otherwise would not see on a day-to-day basis just because of the large size of the lab.

For the most part I saw the people at my lab only during working hours. The other major part of my whole experience in Germany was the chance to embrace the culture and to experience day to day living. This was in large part made possible by a connection who I had in Germany before hand who arranged for me to live with two girls who lived/studied in Essen in a smaller neighbourhood. Living with two natives, helped me gain so much insight into German culture. I realized that the German culture was not that different from my own. Through them I was also able to make a connection with a local church. This proved to be a source of great friendship and great experiences. Whether it was meeting with a group of people for lunch, going out for Eis, going for a run (to work off all the Eis that I had been eating) or watching the Europa Cup Fussball games I always had something to do. A highlight though for me during the summer was the chance to go with the Church, as a volunteer staff member, on a two week camping trip to Italy. For the majority of the two weeks I worked as an assistant in the kitchen preparing the meals for the 90 teenagers and the 30 staff members that went along. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to practice my German (as I was the only native English speaker there) and to interact with some German youth. I was also surprised at how responsive the teenagers were to having a native English speaker with them on their camp. They were patient with me and my limited German skills but they also really appreciate the chance to practice their

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English with me. So really it was a win-win situation. I was able to make some great connections with the people who I met at the camp and made some great friendships.

Looking back at my summer I can definitely say that this had been the best summer of my life. I loved having the opportunity to embrace another culture and not just by taking a two or three week vacation there, but to actually live and work there for an extended period of time. Also to have the chance to get involved in all aspects of German life; working and doing research at a university, spending time with natives, and everything that is included in living in a foreign country. Another aspect that I really appreciated while I was over there was the chance to meet all the other RISE scholars at the Heidelberg conference. Having been in Germany for a couple of weeks by then, I was able to share and compare my experience thus far with other students. This was a great chance for me to interact with students from other regions of Canada and US students as well. Normally I would not have the chance to have this interaction. Through this program I have been stretched personally and academically. I have learnt what I am capable of and am inspired to take on future endeavours such as this in the future. And haven't fallen in love with Germany, I do not think that this summer will be my last time visiting Germany!

"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."