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Field of Study: Agriculture

RISE Report 2009

I came to Germany this summer with the expectation that I would be able to participate in hands-on activities related to my field of study and to learn a little about research and higher education in this country. I leave this September knowing that not only were my expectations met, but that I had a memorable and life-shaping summer with experiences that will stay with me forever.

I can't speak for all German universities and research facilities, but the agricultural engineering department at the Universität Kassel was phenomenal. The department went out of its way to accommodate me, provide me with an office, make me feel welcome, and include me in department activities, of which there were plenty. They even offered to conduct business in English so that I could be included. I was surprised that the German stereotypes I had been exposed to were shattered the first day on the job. The professors and colleagues I worked with were very laid-back people, and while they took their work very seriously, they realized there was more to it, like helping other people with their research and making time for fun. For example, my PhD student and I traveled to Switzerland to help a student with her Bachelor's thesis. It only contributed to our research a little, but my PhD student was more than willing to lend his expertise for her cause and even took more time off to make sure I got to see the Alps. The chemistry of the people in the department was great. Even though I had no idea what was being said at the weekly departmental meetings, it was obvious that they all enjoyed each other's company and loved hearing about each other's research. This constructive and encouraging atmosphere and their upbeat attitude really contributed to my positive research experience.

I can't describe a typical day at my internship because they all differed greatly. One day my PhD student and I would be traveling to farming conventions, and the next I would be receiving tractor driving lessons. It would be just as likely that I would be in the lab all day as it



would be to spend the day doing manual labor. I loved the unpredictability and variability of my job; it never got dull and monotonous. The thing I could count on most to occur was lunch with my PhD student. He loved to learn about my life and university in the United States. That kind of connection and interest made my work days very fun.

While I loved the work week, the weekends were the highlights of my internship. The friendships forged through the RISE program were essential to my summer. Most weekends I would meet with other RISE participants, some I was already friends with and others I was meeting for the first time, to explore all the major cities of Germany. The nightlife here is great, but what I enjoyed most was learning about Germany's rich history. Each city has so many stories and a unique environment. My favorite city was Hamburg, and I really hope to return soon! Another highlight of the summer was the conference in Heidelberg. It was interesting to hear about everyone's internships and to be with people with whom I share this particular summer experience with. Plus, the company tour to the Weingut eco-vineyard was easily the most fun day of this whole experience!

"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."