

These past three months in Germany have been a very rewarding time in my life both personally and professionally. The relationships I have built and strengthened, the knowledge I have utilized and gained, and the challenges I have faced and overcome, while conducting undergraduate research in the electrochemistry group of the Institute of Surface Chemistry and Catalysis of Ulm University, will make this a summer I will never forget. From the very first day I arrived at the university shortly after stepping off an airplane in a foreign land, I have been welcomed and accepted in Germany. Although the research I conducted was dealing with topics which with I was initially unfamiliar, my advisor and other group members literally took me by the hand and patiently taught me everything I needed to know. Since my background is at a small liberal arts college in the southern USA, it was an exciting opportunity for me to work with a set-up here in Germany that is the only one in the world. While I am sure that my experience was somewhat unique because I was living with friends that I knew from an exchange student program from my high school days, I definitely would say that the German people are welcoming and willing to collaborate internationally particularly on a scientific level.

A typical day for me began around 6:15 A.M. I ate breakfast (yummy German bread) with the family I lived with every morning before my thirty minute commute to work. Work began around 7:45 A.M. and typically lasted until 5:15 P.M. However, there were a few longer days in the laboratory. My work started much differently than it finished as the first month we were working with our set-up and trying to produce stable Pt films for measuring. After many, many “unsuccessful weeks,” we finally made some progress and spent the next month doing measurements and collecting data. As our

experimental procedures are still being developed and are somewhat unpredictable, it was hard to plan what we would be doing each day so I had to be very flexible and willing to do whatever was necessary. The last month has mostly been devoted to evaluating and organizing data. A huge advantage that I was not expecting was that I was provided with an office and a computer to use during my stay in Germany. Every day also included lunch with my advisor and some other friends as well as a few coffee breaks whenever necessary. Our group had a meeting every Thursday morning to discuss plans and share results; our institute had a seminar every Friday morning to share results with more formal presentations. Since my German is quite limited, it was nice that everything was for the most part in English. Our institute was close-knit and we often went out and did things together. We had barbeques and parties. We went to local festivals and restaurants. We had cake at least twice a week for any occasion that could possibly be celebrated. Our group was accustomed to hosting international students and researchers so having a visitor for a few months was normal for them and probably part of the reason I felt so welcome in the university.

Our results will eventually be published and it was quite exciting to be a part of an innovative and unique project during my summer research. I also made a research poster and wrote a paper so I will be able to share our results at the ACS Fall Meeting in Washington D.C. and at my home university.

Aside from the research, some of the highlights of my stay include the many friends I made and the traveling I was able to do. While I lived in southern Germany, I was able to travel to Munich, Heidelberg, Triberg, and Hamburg. Outside of Germany, I was able to travel to Amsterdam, Alghero, Sardinia, and Basel, Switzerland. Since I was living

with friends it was easy to meet people and integrate myself within a different culture, but I also met some wonderful people with whom I will continue to be friends long after my time in Germany. One of the major things I will take away from this summer is that people from different cultures and different worlds have a lot of little things different, but even more things in common. The human experience is so beautiful no matter the setting and really getting to see deeper into the people here than would have been possible during a short holiday vacation was a blessing. The longer I live the more I realize that people and the investments you make into relationships are more important than anything so it would be remiss for me to merely speak of the scientific things I have learned. I have had deep relationships and superficial relationships during my summer, but all of the contact I have had with people here has taught me things about myself and my life at home. People here really place a lot more emphasis on walking and riding bikes whenever possible and that is one thing I will take home. I plan on riding my bike most of the time rather than driving my car everywhere. Also, while I was here I had so many barbeques outside in parks and at homes that I definitely will encourage my family and friends to do that more instead of eating out so much and wasting money.

In general, I loved my time in Germany and will be back soon. While I have no idea what my future holds, I could see myself spending longer periods of time in Germany in the future and will encourage others to pursue research opportunities in Germany. Thanks for all you do to make these international research opportunities a reality. Keep up the good work!

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