

Without any doubt, pursuing Ph.D. studies in a foreign land is a daunting task and it involves huge efforts and cooperation with many people and institutions. Among these, it includes the host university, advisors, funding agencies, colleagues, collaborators, friends, family, and many others. Despite various hardships that one will face during the course of a Ph.D., it is their amazing support, mentoring, care, and constant encouragement that keeps the spirits high and makes it a lifetime memorable, enjoyable, and fun-filled experience. In the following I attempt to recount some of my memorable moments that I had during my stay in Berlin, Germany for my Ph.D. studies.

Around five years ago, my quest for the higher studies in Germany began with my selection for HEC/DAAD higher education program along with forty other scholars from all over Pakistan. I felt extremely exhilarated to be a part of an academic experiment designed mutually by HEC and DAAD aimed to invigorate higher education in Pakistan. The primary goal of this experiment was to select top students in the country and groom them according to the modern-day academic needs in a well established western higher education system like the one in Germany. The goal is that they play a vital role in higher education, establish research cooperations, and benefit society as a whole after their return.

Looking back five years when I began, I still recall painful feelings of departing from my family; fears and anxieties associated with moving to a totally different culture while embarking a flight from Islamabad to Frankfurt. However, a very warm welcome by our senior HEC/DAAD scholars in Frankfurt and Berlin, and our DAAD coordinators at Bonn and Berlin made us feel at home. Indeed, their help in the initial settling phase is commendable.

We arrived in Berlin as a group of ten Ph.D. scholars. Berlin is rightly known as a multi-cultural city with a rich mix of eastern and western culture, largely due to large Turkish population in the city. The liveliness, lush green parks, and rich historical heritage of Berlin very quickly mesmerized me. Our studies commenced with two months German language course along with other participants from the different countries. We were lucky to have exuberant instructors who did their absolute best to teach us German language, culture, and values. Our instructors were also curious to learn our religious, cultural, and moral values to develop better understanding. This bilateral learning of 'do's and don'ts' in different cultures helped us in establishing mutual respect and trust.

It is a dream of every Ph.D. student to work with the top experts of their respective fields. In my case, this dream came true when I joined INET research group at Deutsche Telekom Innovation Laboratories (also known as T-labs) and TU-Berlin. At T-labs, I was inspired by researchers from various countries all striving to push the state of the art out of their love of research. I joined the INET research group, headed by Prof. Anja Feldmann which provided an exciting and incredibly challenging research atmosphere. It also gave me incentive to strengthen the various skills that I required for my studies. During my five years at INET, I learned how to aim high, be persistent, and be patient at the same time to achieve success. INET's close collaborations with Stanford, Berkeley, and other different research Labs gave me the connections to top experts of my field, invaluable for guiding my research. Travelling to conferences in many different countries enabled me to further expand my research vision as well as continually learn firsthand about other cultures.

Of course research is not the only thing that happens during Ph.D. studies. The human networking that one establishes during the course of the studies that plays a key role in the overall success. In this regard, DAAD has provided us excellent opportunities to meet with other students from different countries in a very relaxed and fun atmosphere. Our first meeting after starting our studies was held in Magdeburg. There we spent three days with different activities that were carefully designed to make us aware about the challenges that we might face during our Ph.D. studies. These events allowed us to better understand roles and rules of DAAD for students and answer our numerous questions. Also, it was here we were able to see for the first time our DAAD coordinators with whom we only had an email contact in the past. Meeting our support staff was really refreshing and a delight. Similarly, other events like 'inter-cultural' workshops also provided new students a chance to better prepare themselves for the interactions with the local society. I believe that through these DAAD

activities I was able to understand better not only German society, but my own people as well.

One of the advantage of studying in Berlin is that it is a major cultural center with many ongoing exhibitions and events. During my stay, I was able to attend some prestigious events like the Berlin air show, train exhibitions, and IFA electronics convention. Big planes and trains have always been my passion right from my childhood. Thanks to Berlin, I could see lots of them here. These events provided me the glimpse of the future technology and increased my curiosity to learn more about these new technologies. Furthermore, Berlin hosts various museums and by visiting these museums I was able to understand ancient cultures. I have also enjoyed many long night of science events - a night that presents latest scientific achievements to the general public.

During my stay in Berlin, I have enjoyed many cooking sessions with my friends and colleagues. I always found them curious about the special taste and ingredients used in our food. Similarly, I learned about food from other regions as well. Among my favorites are Kaiserschmarrn, and Kalbsschnitzel.

Given my experiences in Berlin, I can say with assurance that I have certainly adopted new values like punctuality of time, serious attitude towards work, and determination to explore new grounds. These values are very positive addition to my own rich values that I have.

Now that I have finished my studies, soon I will be going back to Pakistan. I will surely missing many aspects of Germany and of Berlin in particular. However, the love, warmth, friendship, and support from my colleagues and friends I have made here will remain my great asset for the rest of my life. My experiences will keep me in touch with Germany and connected with the wonderful people I met there.