



## **RISE Supervisor in 2007 and 2008 Technical University of Munich**

Martin Distel graduated in 2003 from the Technical University of Munich with a Bachelor of Science in Molecular Biotechnology. In 2005, he earned a Master of Science in Molecular Biotechnology from the Technical University of Munich and the Lund University in Sweden. He finished his PhD in Neuroscience at the Helmholtz Center Munich and the Technical University of Munich in 2009 and will pursue his Postdoc studies at the University of California San Diego (USCD), funded by the DAAD Postdoc scholarship program, in 2010.

### **Learning from each other**

I was in the second year of my PhD in Neuroscience when a friend told me about the DAAD RISE program. At that time, my PhD project offered enough work for several people, and so I became interested in the program and eventually applied for it. My boss also liked the idea of having an international student in the lab and heartily supported my application.

As my participation in the RISE program was for me the first time to be in a position to offer someone a “job”, the application process itself was a new experience. How do you best write the “job offer” so that it gives enough information about the project and sounds interesting to students with whom you would like to work? I tried my best to explain the relevance of my research and the learning opportunity that I could provide, and to my surprise many undergraduates from the United States and Canada with experience in my field applied for the project. The decision as to which one I most wanted to work with for the next three months turned out to be quite difficult. The selection process was really instructive and a lot of fun. One must learn how to read letters of reference and to carefully consider the criteria for choosing one student over another. This was a great practice, which will be very beneficial in the future if I am one day in the position to hire new employees. Also, the experience of being at the “employer’s side” will certainly be helpful for my future applications.

Once I had chosen my favourite students, I had to wait for the final pairings to be made by DAAD. Luckily, my project was chosen and soon afterwards my first choice student started working with me in the lab. He was a talented student from the U.S. with a good knowledge of basic molecular biological techniques. After making him familiar with the project and new techniques, he quickly started working very independently. It was great having someone working on the same project with whom I could share ideas, and our collaborative efforts were in the end very fruitful. Aside from his experiences in the lab, he also learned something about German botany, in

particular that it is not such a great idea to jump into a bush of stinging nettle to catch a frisbee.

On the other hand, we in the lab also learned about life at a U.S.-American university. In fact, having heard about the research at the home university of my RISE student, a fellow PhD student later applied for a postdoctoral position at this university.

This overall very positive experience with the DAAD RISE program convinced me to apply again the following year. This time a highly motivated undergraduate from Canada came to work with me. She was very interested in German culture, spoke German fluently and was most deserving of the RISE scholarship and the chance to actually get to know Germany. In the lab, she was a bright student and a great help. Her curiosity made me think more about many routine methods that I had not previously given much thought. In addition it turned out that she had a lot of experience in website design. At the time we were creating a website to make the data from my project available to the scientific community, and her expertise in programming was an invaluable help. After the internship was over, she decided to stay in Germany and spent the following year studying in Freiburg.

My participation in the RISE program was a great experience, during which I learned a lot about what one might call "leadership". I thank my two students for their fantastic work and DAAD for offering such a great program. I strongly encourage PhD students and undergraduates to take advantage of this unique opportunity.