

From being supervised to becoming a supervisor: DAAD makes it possible!

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The year was 2006, and I as a fresh engineering graduate got myself admitted to the Department of Biotechnology at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur (India) for a post-graduate program. As one of the premier engineering institutes of India, IIT's provide a wonderful platform to budding engineers and scientists to showcase their talent both nationally as well as to serve the wide scientific world. One of their much acclaimed and time-tested ventures is the "Sandwich Model" program for Masters Students in association with DAAD. This unique model allows around 50 top-performing Indian candidates every year from the different IIT's to pursue their final year Masters Thesis at one of the 7 chosen partner Institutions in Germany leading to successful completion of their Masters degree. In 2007, when I became a lucky recipient of the DAAD "Sandwich" scholarship, little did I know that my academic future was being re-constructed for the better!

When I look back at those 9 months I spent at the Department of Biotechnology, RWTH-Aachen as a DAAD scholar, I feel DAAD did a great job of guiding and advising us on the new life in a new country. Of special mention would be the DAAD meeting at Stuttgart which not only brought all scholarship holders of the Sandwich program from Indian together in Germany, but also gave a chance for all of us to know who the faces behind the numerous mails from DAAD were. It was after the same meeting that I personally made my decision to stay back in Germany to pursue my PhD.

As a graduate student of one of the *Excellence Initiatives* of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the German Research Foundation, I started my PhD with a scholarship from the Berlin International Graduate School for Natural Sciences and Engineering (BIG-NSE) in 2008. In late 2009, when I heard about the call for

applications for the DAAD-RISE program, I was more than elated at the chance to now supervise a DAAD scholar (as I once was). Once the task to be allotted to the prospective student was planned and the documents for the application had been sent, it was a short wait before the offers were made available to the students from US, UK and Canada. Subsequently, I was informed that my project proposal had been short listed and there were around six students interested in working with me. It was a tough task to select the best from amongst the really promising applicants and after quite a bit of analysis, I managed to rank the candidates of my choice. Meanwhile (thanks to the contact information shared by DAAD), I had also been in touch with almost all of them, asking them things I wanted to know regarding their background and their interest in the project that was being offered under my supervision. Finally, after another short wait, I was informed that my first candidate was the one I was being offered by DAAD and the funding of the scholarship was arranged in agreement with the cluster of Excellence in Berlin "*Unifying concepts in Catalysis*".

After months of e-mail and information exchange, when my student arrived from the University of Pennsylvania, the phase of supervision began. I must admit that she was really well informed and prepared to start on the project directly with a small introductory phase. Having been in Germany before, she also did not find the job of social integration difficult and it was a great experience for me learning about the culture and the practices of the world across the Atlantic. A special mention should be made here about the excellent working skills and the time management ability of the student. She also managed to impress me considerably with her results obtained in the short time bound frame of period she was here. But then again, what else could you expect from a DAAD scholar?

No account of my experiences with DAAD-RISE would be complete without speaking about the great time I had as an invitee to the DAAD-RISE students meeting in Heidelberg (8-10th July). I was among the lucky four supervising PhD students also invited as part of the meeting and it was a great opportunity to mingle with the young brains of tomorrow. Besides the interesting lectures and the rare opportunity to visit

multi-national companies, the event also provided us with the wonderful opportunity to make some nice life-long contacts and know the faces behind DAAD-RISE. As I left Heidelberg, I had already made the decision to apply for a DAAD student again for the next round of applications in 2010 to allow at least one more student experience the “Land of Ideas”.