

Throughout a person's life, there are a number of experiences that shape their lives. Most of these experiences have been predetermined, such as graduating high school, graduating college, getting married, or seeing their first born. While no two lives or people are the same, people share many of the same experiences, which begins to beg the question, which experiences truly define me? I can honestly say that my experience with RISE Professional has profoundly changed the definition of who I am as a person and what I want to do with my life.

From application to this final letter I am writing, these past few months have contained some of the most rewarding and incredible experiences in my life. I have learned so much about who I am, what I am capable of, and what I want from my life. When I started living in Germany, I was so

relieved when I met an English speaker, seeing as the first two weeks I refuse to speak to anyone in fear of butchering the German language. I learned basic German words in the Netto down the street on Anne-Frank Strasse. I would intently listen to the conversations the shopping attendants were having with other customers, to see what I should say. After three months, I still easily butchered the language, but I miss speaking conversational German and hearing how much passion the Germans had for the things in their lives. Their appetite for life made me want to live my life with unadulterated passion as well. My experiences with the German language not only made me want to learn German until fluency, but to officially work towards a life that is "more work to live" and not "live to work".

My internship was with Evonik in Dr. Carloff Rudiger's laboratory working with the Methacrylates group. My objective was a simple one, but under the circumstances of being in a different continent with a completely different culture, it was a challenge. I would start work around 8am or 8:30am, after riding my bike the 5 kilometers to work. After getting set up, I would either begin my plan for the day or begin planning out my day. Dr. Carloff and every colleague would come in every morning to greet me every morning, which made me feel right at home, especially on the most homesick days. My project was simple and straight-forward. It allowed me to get a crash course in materials science including compounding, stress testing, chemical testing, as well as economic evaluation. While most lunches were spent by myself, it gave me time to reflect and truly value the accomplishments that brought me here. I would end the day saying goodbye to all of my colleagues and then typically head for a Milchkafe and Kuchen or Buchtel before retiring home. Evonik taught me that not only that I was I capable of working in an international environment but indirectly taught me to appreciate myself as the scientist and engineer that I have become. For that I am forever grateful.

Since my internship was rather straight-forward, traveling was encouraged by many people within my company and friends back home. After, my first trip to Frankfurt, I saw that traveling around Europe was a must. After Frankfurt, my traveling exploded and I traveled to



Amsterdam, Prague, Munich, Berlin, and Heidelberg. Each new city I did something new, and I learned almost the same thing; that the world is a small beautiful place and the people who live in it are just as wonderful. While I was in Prague, I planned to have a night on the town and experience some orchestral music and dinner in the heart of Prague. Instead, I was so enthralled by the people I met in Prague that I decided to ditch my plans altogether and go on an adventure with my new friends. This night was one of the most wonderful, and honestly silly nights, of my entire life. While in Berlin, for my birthday, I went to the kiosk near my Airbnb and asked them where would they go for their birthday? Immediately, they shouted, "Monster Ronson's Ichiban Karaoke Bar". Once I got there, they decided that because it was my birthday, I had to sing a song. After dazzling (yes, dazzling) the crowd with my rendition of Salt n' Pepa's "Shoop", I found myself in a sea of new friends and many free birthday drinks. Some of the most wonderful and best experiences while in Europe and Germany were not planned, I realized that life can't be planned a lot of the time. You need to get to trust yourself and let life guide you sometimes, otherwise life will pass you by.

I couldn't be more grateful to the RISE Professional Program for admitting me and letting me be a part of this amazing experience. Before this experience, I was an American, an engineer, and a little afraid of life. After this experience, I am world traveler, a citizen of the world, an engineer, a scientist, a rap artist, and hungry for more life experiences that will change my definition of who I am. Thank you so much DAAD and to the RISE Professional Program for giving me this life changing opportunity. I didn't know what to expect, but that's life!

Michael Sgarioto

I agree that my report and accompanying pictures may be used by the DAAD in printed materials, presentations, and on websites in order to inform funding organizations, sponsors, and students about the RISE program.