

# RISE Germany 2018 - *Final Report*

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Name of intern: Rebecca Louw

Home University: University of Victoria, Canada

Subject: Neuroscience

Guest University: Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf

Name of supervisor: Arvina Grahl

## **Do you have helpful tips on the visa or residence permit application, opening a bank account, travelling or finding housing?**

Start looking into visas and bank accounts early on to be sure that you have enough time to apply for them if you need to. I found it to be tricky to find the correct information online and calling your local German consulate could be a good idea. I didn't end up getting a visa, but I considered applying for the Youth Mobility Visa as I initially wanted to travel to other Schengen countries after my 90 days were up. I started looking into housing almost immediately after finding out I was coming to Germany, and sent out many emails before getting a response. Don't be discouraged if you don't initially find something as I found more postings closer to my date of arrival. I also offered to Skype potential roommates and provided links to my social media accounts to verify that I was a real person and to try and make a connection since I couldn't view the apartments in person.

## **What was your impression of research in Germany?**

I found the research culture in Germany to be much more collaborative than my experiences back home. Most of my colleagues at the neuroscience institute were either postdocs or PhD students, and I was the only undergraduate working directly within the department. Despite this, I did not experience any of the traditional hierarchy that can often be found in research environments and I really felt that others valued my opinion and were quick to assist me with whatever I needed. Additionally, the resources available for conducting research were far beyond what I am used to; such as an entire floor of behavioural labs for testing participants, a diverse array of experimental equipment, and a dedicated research only fMRI scanner.

## **What was your impression of German universities?**

The UKE is a teaching hospital affiliated with the University of Hamburg, and very focused on medical sciences. This was quite a different environment from my home university. Additionally, I found that many of the medical students were also focused on research in addition to their traditional studies. This is

quite different from the experiences of Canadian medical students that I have talked with and I thought that was really interesting.

**What did you find particularly interesting about your research?**

The research study that I participated in focused on placebo and nocebo effects in relation to pain perception and treatment expectations. This was extremely interesting to me not only because I have a strong interest in sensory neuroscience, but also because this research has a direct clinical application. It is very motivating to be involved in research that could potentially help alleviate someone's pain symptoms.

**Describe a typical day of your internship.**

I would arrive at work at around 10 am and stay until about 6 pm. The hours were flexible, and as long as I finished my tasks I had a some freedom in when I worked. My work day to day was quite variable - either helping to run participants for a pain study, attending a workshop on cognitive modelling or learning a new statistical coding language, or helping to gather research and edit scientific papers. I was able to have a wide range of experiences and work on projects with different supervisors, which was really wonderful and gave me a holistic view of the different kinds of research being conducted in the institute.

**Highlights of your stay (both personal and academic).**

Academically, I was able to take part in an fMRI study as a participant and it was a very surreal experience to be able to see the scans afterwards and look directly at my own brain. I was also able to view a brain that was recently included in a postmortem study, which was fascinating. Personally, the whole experience was so positive that it's hard to delineate just one thing. I met so many wonderful people that I hope to keep in contact with and was also able to travel quite a bit during my stay.

**What's your impression of Germany in general?**

Germany is a diverse and beautiful country with many opportunities that are willingly shared with people of diverse international backgrounds. I found everyone I interacted with on a daily basis to be very kind and considerate. I would absolutely come back to Germany for longer period of time if given the chance.

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