

DAAD RISE Report – Eva Yezerets, Summer 2018

My summer in Bochum, Germany was one of the most impactful, fun experiences in my life. Not only did I have the opportunity to work with a dynamic, welcoming team in a field to which I had never really been exposed before, but I also experienced German culture on a new, deeper level.

I had briefly visited Germany before as a high school exchange student, but I had never before had the chance to spend 3 months immersed in a culture and at a new university. The Ruhr University Bochum was very welcoming to international students, with many free social events throughout the summer (especially in late May), such as a language cafe every Monday (for practicing various languages) and frequent activities with the ERASMUS Student Network. I made friends with students there as well as with friends of my roommate and with the other interns from the region. It was a very well-balanced environment, with strong academics but also a sense of enthusiasm and collaboration as well as general enjoyment of life. Students at RUB find time to walk in the botanical garden, participate in sports, take dance classes, play in the orchestra, and travel with their friends.

In terms of the research environment, it echoed the culture of the university overall. Dr. Cheng's lab is multicultural and values diversity of background and thought, leading to more collaboration and the generation of new ideas. Interns participated in all aspects of the lab, including a Ph.D. defense, weekly lab meetings and meetings with other labs, weekly seminars and colloquia, and lab lunches and social events (hiking, bouldering, and a picnic). We contributed significantly to our respective research projects; I felt that I was making a meaningful contribution and that my opinion was valued, even when discussing papers with post-doctoral fellows and professors from other labs.

The pace of work was steady and purposeful, but flexible based on the needs of the lab members. On a typical day, I would come to work around 8 a.m., write code or read literature for several hours, attend a lab meeting or seminar, eat lunch with the other members of the lab, work independently for a few more hours, and then go home around 5 p.m.; I enjoyed making dinner after work (grocery shopping was one of the most unexpected and direct cultural experiences in which I got to participate!), walking or biking around the countryside, taking salsa classes, or exploring the city with my friends. I was encouraged to travel and learn new things by the other members of the lab. Overall, it was very conducive to creativity and productivity while minimizing stress and maximizing enthusiasm about continued learning.

I would advise RISE interns to reach out to their graduate students early and ask for help in setting up housing and appointments to register as residents and students. I found the paperwork to be the most challenging part of my transition to living and working in Germany. At the Ruhr University, the International Office was extremely helpful in finding a flat-share (Wohngemeinschaft) in student housing and also for advising me on when, where, and how to obtain all the proper documents. As an enrolled student, I was able to benefit from access to the extensive university library; excellent student housing, with a wonderful roommate; discounted meals at the cafeteria; and free public transportation (with some restrictions) throughout Nordrhein-Westfalen. I got to travel around the region and also had a way to travel to the airport for international trips on the weekends.

I loved my summer with the DAAD; my research experience was fulfilling and helped guide my studies and goals at my home institution, and I made wonderful memories through my travels and adventures with new friends, in addition to reconnecting with my host family. I look forward to applying to study in Germany for graduate school and being part of such a welcoming, supportive, forward-thinking culture. Thank you for opening doors to me!

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.