

DAAD RISE Internship Personal Report

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I always knew I wanted to study abroad but was unsure of exactly how I would do so. I did know, however, that I wanted a truly independent experience; I didn't want to go to a new place with people I already knew. I wanted to learn and experience the culture as intimately as possible, even if that meant facing the frightening proposition of being alone at times. This program was a godsend for me – it offered me the chance to work and study independently, as a local would. So, for three months, I blended into the German environment and observed the culture with glee. Though it was scary at first, I am all the better for it today. Both professionally and personally, this program has enriched my life and allowed me to grow.

My research was in a subject area I have always wanted to study. At my home university, I study industrial engineering; however, I have always wished to apply the principles I learn to the transit field. Here in Aachen, I had the chance to do so! I was responsible for using the simulation software known as MATSim to run simulations from which transit analysis could be done. My impression of this research, which was both in-person and virtual at times, was great; when I came to the office in-person, I was able to eat lunch with my co-workers and connect with them on an intimate level. I made many cultural connections by nature of the in-person aspect of the internship. That said, even when meetings were conducted via Zoom or other online platforms, I still felt connected to my co-workers and had friendly and productive discussions.

The work I did also strengthened my confidence in my own professional abilities. Initially, I felt overwhelmed and scared I would not be able to live up to the expectations of my superiors. I had never used MATSim; how I would do the transit analysis when I didn't even know how to install the program? However, I chipped away at the task, little by little, every day. I read the MATSim textbook, I browsed online forums, and I e-mailed leading creators of MATSim. Over time, I got a better and better grasp of it, and began to feel confident in my abilities. Now, three months later, I have a working model of my own city of Aachen and have done interesting and purposeful analysis on my city's transit. I never expected to achieve this much here, but I did, and it has shown me that even the most difficult challenges can be overcome with enough effort and hard work.

Germany was, of course, different from my home country in a multitude of ways. I appreciated the ease of public transit and, since I lived in a city, enjoyed being able to walk to my destinations. Of course, all the delicious baked goods and regional specialties didn't hurt either – I will greatly miss Streuselbrötchen and Döner upon my return! On the other hand, I found other things foreign and hard to adjust to, such as the early closing times of shops or the sometimes peculiar social cues apparent in German culture (for example: I found Germans to be quite direct, which can be misinterpreted and misconstrued as rude by an American). All in all, however, I now have a deep and great love for this country, and I cannot wait to return in the future. I am beyond grateful for the experience I've had and would not trade it for the world.

“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.”