

RISE Germany 2023: Final Internship Report

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My Impression of Research in Germany

First of all, I interned with a high-performing research team who were dedicated to their research, and that was appreciated. The research environment at the *Technische Universität Dresden* (TUD) in Dresden, Germany, differed significantly from my expectations. One key difference that I noted, unlike my other workplace experiences in Canada, is that people tend to value a work-life balance. As an example, in my research group at TUD, other researchers and I were encouraged to leave our work belongings in the office during the weekends and to not work outside of standard hours. In my opinion, fostering a strong work-life balance is greatly beneficial for productivity during designated work hours which, in tandem, increases motivation. Moreover, I think that this mentality should be adopted here, in Canada, due to its benefits.

Particularity of My Research

First and foremost, my research project was challenging and interesting. One aspect of the workplace culture that I found novel was how much independence I was given compared to other positions I held in the past and to that of other RISE interns. As an example, the majority of the work that I completed was performed independently in my assigned office. The environment was such that I had very few discussions with my mentor, once approximately every two weeks, and they would be brief in nature.

Although it may not be for everyone, this environment allowed me to hone my skills by encouraging critical thinking in lieu of seeking ongoing assistance to solve problems. Albeit, it is often seen as gratifying to engage in frequent discussions with professors and mentors. This experience allowed me to determine whether or not I prefer individual or team-based research projects as I am deciding on graduate school.

A Typical Day of My Internship

Each day, I would wake up around 7:30 AM and walk to a grocery store to pick up a fresh pastry for breakfast. After breakfast, I would walk through the TUD campus, passing by many historic buildings that were constructed before the 1900s, to the Department of Thermodynamics, where I worked. Starting at approximately 9 AM, I would work on my project in my office, which I shared with a postdoctoral student until lunchtime.

For lunch, I would go to the student cafeteria with several researchers in my department;

typically, we would discuss topics unrelated to work. It was refreshing to discuss non-work topics at lunch as it gave me the opportunity to learn more about German life and culture. This provided me with a strong foundation on whether or not pursuing post-graduate studies in Germany would be of interest to me. It is important to note that the cafeteria food was delicious and offered unique dishes to what I was used to in Canada; it was a cultural experience in itself.

After lunch, I would return to my office and continue project work until 5:30 PM. I would then walk back to my apartment building and make supper or meet up with other RISE interns and go out to a restaurant. Also, oftentimes in the evening, a group of RISE interns and I would explore Dresden to learn more about what it had to offer. I made many new friends during my time at TUD and hope that I will be able to stay in touch with them for years to come!

Highlights of my Internship

Working on my research project was the main focus of my internship. However, outside of the work environment, my favourite part of my internship was travelling around Germany as well as visiting other countries. During my internship period, I had the opportunity to visit four countries, eight cities, and therefore, many tourist and historical sites. As mentioned in the section above, I was able to meet many other RISE interns, and we travelled together. I did the majority of my travelling on the weekends, and this was common among many other interns in other cities as well. I was able to travel as frequently as I did due to the impressive public transport systems in Germany, paired with the fact that neighbouring countries are very close in proximity. In summary, the vast amount of travelling that I did allowed me to experience various European cultures, see famous monuments, and meet new people. The RISE interns shared our research experiences, talked about our respective university programs, and enjoyed travelling together.

Tips for Prospective Interns

I would recommend that prospective interns get in touch with the supervisor as soon as possible. The first reason would be to have in-depth discussions with his/her research supervisor to ensure that he/she has clear goals and expectations prior to accepting or starting the internship. In addition, the supervisor may also be able to help with finding suitable housing, as it is a challenge to navigate the system from afar. The supervisor will also have a sense of where the best locations are to live while considering the proximity to your research institution, student life, pricing, and more.

I also recommend interns take advantage of the opportunity to travel across Germany and other European countries. This is an additional educational benefit of being a RISE intern. There are also various financially feasible transportation means to travel across the country that makes it very accessible and easy.

Would I recommend the RISE Program?

I highly recommend the DAAD RISE Germany Program to any student who is considering doing graduate studies and who would consider Germany as a possibility. This program gave me insights into a strong academic research-driven environment that had differed from my experiences to date; this was invaluable! Learning about German and European history and culture was also an essential component of this internship and experience.

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