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.

I have always admired Germany, a country that transformed itself from a painful past into a global leader. My interest began with history, but in 2014, during my bachelor's, I took a step further and started learning German, hoping one day to study or live there. That goal, however, had to wait almost ten years. In 2022, I applied for the DAAD RISE Professional program but was rejected, and at that moment I felt my dream of going to Germany had collapsed. Instead of staying in that disappointment, I focused on streghtening myself as a PhD student, attending conferences, winning presentation competitions, and even creating a PhD association in Electrical Engineering. Those experiences helped me grow both academically and personally, giving me the confidence to try again in 2024 and reapply to DAAD RISE.

At the end of 2024, a friend asked me: *"What's your dream?"* Without hesitation, I answered: *"To live in Germany."* At that time, it still felt so far away. As a PhD student in the US, I had applied to multiple internships but was rejected by all of them. Then, one day while having lunch, I received an unexpected message from Annkristin: *"Are you still interested in the internship?"* I was in shock; it was already March 2025. I quickly replied, not fully understanding what it was about, since I had neither spoken with the researcher nor received any recent emails. When I finally checked my junk folder, I discovered that Forschungszentrum Jülich had contacted me back in January! Overjoyed but also embarrassed, I wrote to professor Anja Klotzsche to apologize for the late reply and asked for a meeting. Although she didn't respond, soon after the program reached out: *"Congratulations! You have been accepted!"* That moment was unforgettable, I felt both thrilled and grateful for this incredible opportunity.

The next steps were not as simple as sending the application. Living in El Paso with an eight-hour time difference made communication challenging, though not impossible. On top of that, there was no specific visa category for this kind of internship. When I first contacted agencies, they immediately assumed I needed one, and I even began the process, until I realized it was unnecessary. As a Mexican citizen staying less than 90 days in Europe, I didn't need a visa at all. Once that was clear, I booked my flights and began searching for housing. I turned to WG-Gesucht, where one landlord kindly offered a video call to show me the apartment. Being on the other side of the world, trust was difficult, but after carefully reviewing his profile, I decided I could believe him, at least 95%.

The next step was to open a bank account. I looked into different options, including N26, but since my stay would only last 84 days, I chose Wise. The process was simple, and transferring money between currencies was seamless. I used it to make my initial payments for the *Kaution* and first month's rent, and when the first scholarship payment finally arrived, the experience felt real. Just a week before leaving, I had my first official meeting with the professor I would be working with, Prof. Lena Lärm. She kindly explained the project goals, which encouraged me to dive deeper into a field that was completely new to me: Ground Penetrating Radar. When I landed in Germany, the border process went smoothly, and I headed toward my new home Jülich. Once again, my lack of research caught up with me: it took three trains to get there, and the last one didn't even have a platform. I was

unsure if I was in the right place until I finally reached Jülich Nord, the last stop. The town was small but beautiful, and I quickly came to appreciate its calmness. I lived in a green building on the second floor (third in American terms), sharing the flat with six others who, despite the age differences, became friends I feel lucky to have made.

My first day at Forschungszentrum Jülich felt like a dream. Everyone was welcoming and incredibly knowledgeable. What I quickly noticed and deeply admired—was the German efficiency at work, something that stood in contrast to what I was used to in Mexico. During my research, I identified a specific problem: a process that was being done manually, which I realized I could automate. My main interest soon became signal processing, specifically detecting the beginning of the radar signal. Since radar signals are intricate, this breaking point is crucial, it reveals information about the roots of the plants being studied. Automating this process was essential, as human error in manual detection often contributed to inaccurate results. For the first five weeks, I focused on understanding how the data was acquired, and in the last five, I dedicated myself to developing automation. What impressed me the most was the institute's self-sufficiency, it is a place where you can generate and build your own datasets, creating an environment that truly fosters discovery.

I am fortunate to say that I contributed to that task, at least to the first part of it. In my final two weeks, I went further by proposing new ideas to support their project, particularly in improving the drought index calculation. I also made sure to use my last days wisely, taking the opportunity to travel to Berlin, Prague, and Munich. Overall, my impression of Germany remained unchanged: I continue to admire the country deeply, and I feel incredibly lucky to have experienced living there, even if it was for less than 90 days.

This journey reminded me that dreams may take years, rejection may come first, and challenges can feel overwhelming, but the reward of persistence is always worth it. I wish I had more space to share all my adventures, like the story of how I got my bike for free, or how I now have what I call a "non-official but official enough" bridge between the PhD organization in Jülich and the one at UTEP. There are so many little moments, friendships, and lessons that shaped this experience, and each of them made me feel even more grateful to have lived this chapter of my life. Like I heard once, *"Al final, nunca nadie se arrepiente de ser valiente"*, which means: "I*n the end, no one ever regrets being brave"*. Herzlichen Dank an DAAD RISE Professional für diese wunderbare Gelegenheit – auf Wiedersehen!

Ana C.