

RISE GERMANY REPORT

Julienne de Vastey

Academic & Professional Impact

During the Summer of 2022, I was fortunate enough to receive funding from RISE Germany and the German Zoological Society to work on the project "Urbanization and Body Size Changes in *Halictus scabiosae*" at the zoology department of Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg (MLU). For 11 weeks, I lived in Halle, Germany, working on the project under the guidance of Dr. Panagiotis Theodorou and Ph.D. Candidate Ms. Lucie Baltz. The project evaluated how *Halictus scabiosae* bees' body size fluctuates along an urban gradient around the city of Braunschweig. My time was split between measuring the intertegular distance (ITD) of the bees and working with Quantum GIS software. I also had the opportunity to learn QPCR and hone my skills in DNA barcoding, which I hope will serve me well in future research positions. I was very happy that the project yielded significant results that might inform city planners on how best to protect wild bee species. When reviewing sampling methods and analysis using R, it was interesting to see concepts I had learned about in biology class, applied to my species of study. On top of the valuable research experience, Rise Germany also allowed me to learn about new cultures and travel throughout Germany and Europe. I would recommend that any students interested in the sciences apply.

Impressions of Research in Germany

My time in Germany not only taught me valuable research skills but also helped me gain more experience working in a laboratory setting. I had researched in the Yellowstone Ecology Lab of Washington and Lee University. I found the work atmosphere at the zoology department of MLU different from what I am accustomed to. After the first few weeks of training, I was able to work independently, which I appreciated. Although there were always other researchers available to ask questions, it was vastly different from my experience in monitored lab courses. I gained confidence in my lab skills and my ability to problem-solve. The experience also informed me about how collaborative research is. In the break room, researchers would often debrief each other about their projects and offered each other advice based on previous studies they had reviewed or their own experience.

Tips for Housing, Banking, and Travel

Perhaps equally as important to acclimating to the work environment, is navigating housing and other practical matters in Germany. Since I only know a handful of German phrases, finding housing was a difficult task. I would recommend that students begin the housing search as soon as they receive their acceptance letter. I would start by looking into university housing. Since you will of-

ten have to make housing agreements while you are still out of Germany, university housing ensures that you are signing legitimate housing agreements and sending rent money to a trustworthy source. Additionally, universities often have summer housing plans, whereas short-term leases in Germany are not as common. Another good housing option is student organization houses, which is where I ended up living. I lived with students who attended the university where I was performing research. Because subleasing works differently in Germany, I ended up signing two contracts, one to start the lease and one to break it at my move-out date. Though the website did seem to offer legitimate rentals, some of the offers asked me to buy the furniture from the previous tenant, which I would not recommend. Starting the housing search early gives you time to find the best rental price. Because we live on a stipend, it is important to make your set costs (travel, rent, etc.) as low as possible. Another reason to begin the housing search early is to set up the German bank account necessary to receive your stipend. Most German banks require you to have a German address before applying. Usually, this is the address where they will send the physical card. I used N26, and it worked very well for my purposes. It is a completely online bank. I would also recommend sending some of your own money into this new bank account before reaching

Germany, since rent might be due sooner than the scholarship funds get sent to your account. During my stay in Germany, I took advantage of the 9-Euro Ticket to get around Halle as well as other German cities using regional transport. While in Germany, a colleague lent me a bicycle to use, which was even faster than the train system for some destinations. Living in Central Europe also makes travel costs to other countries less expensive. I would take advantage of websites like Flixbus and Hostelworld to plan weekend trips. I managed to meet up with a few Rise Interns in Amsterdam and had an amazing time exploring the city and connecting with other researchers.

Favorite Memory

Once or twice a year the Zoology Department at MLU collects honey from the hives they keep in the back garden. I think I will always remember the buzzing of worker bees whizzing past my beekeeper headgear. We spent all morning collecting the honey from the hive, and all afternoon extracting it by hand in the basement hallway. It was my first time collecting honey, and even though I am not afraid of bees, being surrounded by whole hive was a thrilling experience. I actually ate the raw honey for the next few weeks during my breakfast. It was a really cool exposure to food science that I did not expect when signing up for the program.

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