

Final report

(Internships Abroad)

General information on the internship

Subject of studies:

Epidemiology

Course of studies (Bachelor/Master/Staatsex.):

Master of Science (MSc)

Time of internship:

16/Aug/2021 to 16/Dec/2021

Place of internship:

Lyon, France

Internship title:

“Internship at the International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organization in the cancer surveillance branch on premature mortality from cancer and on Women and Cancer”

My decision to seek out an internship abroad was motivated primarily by the opportunity for professional growth. I was attracted to my host institution, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organization, for several reasons: Firstly, it is a completely international organization, bringing together diverse collaborations between researchers from all over the world. I was very excited to gain diverse, international and interdisciplinary perspectives on health as I believed this could offer me a new kind of comprehension of global health issues. I was also looking forward to building connections with colleagues from my host institute and experiencing first-hand how they approached their work and how their daily working life looked like. Secondly, the fact that the institute was in Lyon, France appealed to me as I felt that the new context could offer me unique insights into the research field of epidemiology.

On a personal level, I also believed doing my internship abroad could provide me with the challenge and room for growth offered by new and different surroundings and the opportunity to meet new people. I knew Lyon has a beautiful historical center and I was excited to explore the architecture and history of the city. After several months of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic I found the prospect of novel experiences especially energizing and fulfilling.

Internship

During my internship I was entrusted with a research project on premature mortality from cancer and received the opportunity to work as a collaborator of the Lancet Commission on Women and Cancer. Both of these research projects provided me with extremely enriching and fulfilling experiences, in which I learned even more than I could have imagined.

Within the scope of the two projects, I explored different methodologies to be able to quantify premature deaths. This entailed discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each method with my team members, critically reviewing and presenting about previous research and learning to practically apply the methods. I also became familiar with big data in epidemiology. Next, I spent a great deal of time on strengthening my skills in data analysis by coding with R and analyzing the data for the project. I learned to interpret and present my results and findings in front of different audiences. The Lancet Commission on Women and Cancer uses an interdisciplinary, intersectoral feminist approach to investigate the burden of cancer in women, specifically focusing on low and middle income countries. This gave me the

chance to learn to draw from perspectives from various disciplines to gain a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the global health issue.

Besides cultivating fundamental research competencies, I also developed various soft skills. I cultivated professional and communication skills by interacting with colleagues on a daily basis and working closely together with team members. In doing so I learned a great amount from my colleagues and their experiences. I both received the opportunity to hold presentations but could also attend lectures given by my colleagues to directly learn from them how to communicate ideas and research findings in an optimized way. I also learned when it was important to ask for help from others and became more confident in taking initiative and contributing my own ideas to the project. By juggling between different tasks and projects, I was able to improve my time management skills and set priorities to become more organized. This also helped me to optimize my work efficiency but also recognize my limits and learn to communicate if I wouldn't be able to finish a task in the allotted time.

I very much appreciate the large amount of support I received from my host institute. I met with my supervisors at least once a week, sometimes even more frequently and they took a lot of time to guide me and integrate me into the working group as much as possible. My supervisor also often asked me for my opinion and my ideas, which I cannot thank her enough for. Being able to voice my own thoughts and viewpoints proved to be an invaluable opportunity to self-sufficient and independent creative thinking.

Accommodation in the host country

Finding accommodation in Lyon was most likely one of the most difficult parts of my stay abroad. It was very difficult to find an apartment through online websites from Germany – most of them were in French, many proved to be scams and nonexistent and the rest were very expensive. My host institute tried to kindly help me, but most of their suggestions were too expensive for me (more than 1200€ per month) and the more student friendly tips were not available. I ended up moving twice in a time span of 4 months so to anyone looking to move to Lyon, my advice would be to start searching for accommodation as early as possible and ask for help from others who are living there.

Social interactions

All of my colleagues at the International Agency for Research on Cancer are very welcoming and friendly, allowing me to feel completely included and happy during my time

there. I gained the opportunity to meet and spend time with many new people. Many colleagues became my friends. I learned a great amount from them and cherish the memories I have with them. I did not get the chance to meet many local people outside of my internship but I was still able to explore a large amount of the city life and surrounding areas with my colleagues, which made me feel more connected to the place I was living in.

Everyday life and leisure

In my free time, I would meet with friends from my work and explore the city. I enjoyed going on bike rides, exploring museums, visiting different historical sites, going to local cafes and restaurants, finding the tastiest croissants and travelling to nearby cities or villages. I did not have the time to attend a French language class unfortunately, but after spending some time in France I would definitely recommend to do so to be able to better communicate with local residents. Lyon is also close to the Mediterranean Sea so I would strongly recommend to head down to Marseille and go hiking and swimming there in some of the bluest waters you can find. I found the train system in France to be very useful for short trips and affordable.

Financing

The living costs were in my experience much higher in Lyon, as compared to Germany. I am therefore very grateful to Erasmus+ for giving me the opportunity to pursue an internship abroad and financially supporting me.

SINIK: Intercultural Seminar at the LMU

I attended an intercultural seminar and found this to be very helpful to get into a mindset that allows you to make the most out of your time abroad. It also teaches you that any difficulty or hardship that you face in the process can be a valuable learning opportunity. For these reasons, I would recommend it to other students, especially those who have never been abroad before or are looking to gain new insights and perspectives onto their upcoming journey.

Internship and studies

My studies and previous research experiences provided me with foundational tools and background knowledge that I could draw from throughout my internship. By being able to

apply these skills and competencies, I was able to strengthen and build on to them. This allowed me to cultivate essential epidemiological research skills and grow confidence in putting them to practice.

Due to the rewarding and fulfilling experience I had during my internship, I feel highly motivated to pursue my studies and to maximize the insights I gain from my courses and professors. The experience also incentivized a future career in global health and epidemiology. Through my internship I realized how important it is to approach a health topic from different angles and perspectives in order to fully understand it and to be able to inform health policy measures aiming to mitigate the health problem. This taught me how diverse the field can be and how important it is to think creatively and maintain an open mindset for learning from others, regardless of the stage you are in in your career. This reinforced and strengthened my motivation for pursuing a career in global health and epidemiology.

Conclusion

While my expectations that I would learn a great amount about the field of epidemiology and develop professionally were fulfilled, my experience abroad also turned out to be very enriching on a personal level – far more than I had anticipated. During my time in Lyon, the new people I met, the unique and historical surroundings of the city and the positive and challenging experiences I was confronted with paved the way for growth and self-development. It also made me more open and adaptable to setbacks and helped shift my perspectives to ones in which I could more easily cope with and learn from mistakes.

I believe challenges during an experience abroad are inevitable but that they ultimately prove to be valuable learning opportunities. As eliminating them is not an option: to reduce problems, I believe it is important to plan ahead as much as possible. In my opinion, however, it is more important to anticipate that unexpected outcomes, both good and bad, are bound to come your way and that the way you deal with them will shape your experience.

If you receive the opportunity to do an internship at the International Agency for Research on Cancer, I would highly recommend to grasp the chance. The International Agency for Research on Cancer is a very open-minded and welcoming institution, tailored towards international cooperation. It is a place that fosters growth and openness. I am very thankful that I was able to spend my four month internship there and would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. S and colleagues at the International Agency for



Research on Cancer, as well as to those at LMU Munich supporting the Erasmus+ traineeships abroad.