

My internship for 9 months in University of Michigan

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Impression

When I was a second year master's student, I decided to apply for JGP internship. At that time I expected that this JGP internship should provide me a great opportunity to nurture me to be a global researcher. I just imagined that staying at a foreign laboratory could help me to acquire the skills to present my study in English, to debate logically, and to design experiments well. But once I started my internship, it turned that I just pretended to think well about my career. I didn't know specifically what I had to do to make the most of this internship.



After my farewell party

In the earlier part of the stay I worked desperately because I was afraid of my return without any progress. I learned new techniques voluntarily and proposed various projects, but people around me didn't seem to be interested in my work and proposals.

I ended up being so frustrated that I asked the professor why he didn't allow me to start what I wanted to do. And then he said that I was working very well, but my way of proposing was not interesting. Honestly, I was still not sure about how to make others excited after I listened to his answer. But what struck me at that time was I was not just clear enough to explain my idea, but it's important to make listeners want to be involved in it by clear explanation.

When I look back at those days, I am not sure whether or not I was able to grasp the tip to speak interestingly. But in order to tell something in an interesting way, at least it's important to focus on who is the listener now. Plus, it may be helpful to ask myself what are the problems and difficulties of listener. Also, I should have asked

advise from people around me for my research more frequently. This reminds me of the professor emphasizing the importance to have discussions.

This was the first time for me to work in a foreign country. There were many things I didn't know about. For example, before I left Japan, I couldn't imagine that the majority of the people working at labs in US are non-US citizens. There was no common sense there. We can just get to know about each other through conversation because of curiosity and prevention of misunderstandings. I thank JGP internship for making me think more deeply about what is the meaning of working globally.

Research

I worked on the mechanism of amyloidogenic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer disease. The patients diagnosed with these diseases carry protein aggregation around the specific cells of the body such as pancreas and neuron. Recently the researchers in this field focused on the interaction of cell membrane with an amyloidogenic peptide as the initial part of the aggregation. I approached the problem about how it starts aggregating in the model system of cell membrane combined with NMR and molecular dynamics simulation. I succeeded in showing that the aggregation rate depends on the lipid compositions on cell membrane as well as that I examined the availability of the model membrane inhibitory to the aggregation for a new type of drug.

Life

I lived comfortably with one Indian roommate for 9 months. Living with someone is a common style to stay there especially for visiting students. This allowed me to enjoy my short stay and to study English necessary in daily life. The transportation was convenient enough to go to the university and buy something. When I wanted to eat Japanese dishes, I could buy them at most supermarkets and find Japanese restaurants. I could also easily find Japanese people working and studying there thought the websites of Japanese community. Actually I didn't feel any troubles during my stay. One thing I didn't care about much was how to live with people with different backgrounds. In the case of living with them, things to be likely to trigger problems are how often to clean the room, the amount of using electricity, and acceptable noise level like TV volume, music and even singing. I remember that my

roommate often sang Indian songs so loudly that I couldn't sleep. I realized that only communication helps both people because in most cases one doesn't know that the other is annoyed by what he/she does.

To readers considering JGP internship

I'm sure that JGP internship gives you great opportunities not only for your current work but also for your future career, no matter how long your stay is. There is no doubt that kind JGP officers (I really appreciate what Furutani-san did for me) support your stay from scratch. But when I decided my internship, I was confused by the lack of information especially about the whole process of the preparation Note that I'm writing only about University of Michigan and each university has its own process.

12 months before my departure

I started finding a laboratory to admit my stay. I speculate that most of people including me take advantage of their professor's network in order to find a laboratory. Certainly, you are able to contact with the professor whose project is interesting to you by something like email, but it sometimes doesn't work. This is because my professor in University of Michigan told me that he got many internship offers from all over the world, but a problem is that he has no way to make sure whether an applicant has a nice characteristic or not. That's why he turned down most of the offers. If it's difficult to ask your professor, I strongly recommend JGP seminars to make a connection with visiting professors. This is what I actually did and my professor emphasized that he could know about my honesty at that time.

4 months before my departure

I started contacting the officers in University of Michigan. I sent my CV, the document for financial support, and the copy of my passport to get DS-2019, which is the important paper document to certificate my stay and to get VISA(J-1). After I received DS-2019 published by the university, I applied for VISA. Meanwhile, I was looking for an apartment because there was no dormitory for visiting students. One of way the people use to find an apartment is to book a hotel for a while. During the stay in the hotel you can find a place to live, because there are a lot of visiting students trying to find a roommate to save their rent.

After my arrival

I took several tutorials to start my research. In one of the tutorials, an officer recommended us to open a bank account and get driving license and social security card. Driving license is convenient as ID. The university provides some opportunities for visiting students to improve English for conversation and presentation. I used one of the services to find language partner to teach own language to each other. The department also provides opportunities for students to make friends. For example every Wednesday we had a party to talk with students in other laboratories over coffee and cookies. And in the end of the year I took part in Christmas party and made a skit.

