



Travel Story 2016

Name: Marie Lycksell

Year and line of study at KTH:

Civil engineer in Biotechnology, starting year 5

Master's program Molecular science and engineering, starting year 2

Which university did you visit? (Name, city, state):

University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), Fairbanks, Alaska

Time frame: 6 June 2016 to 15 August

Visa type: J1

Insurance: PSI Health Insurance

Scholarship: CHUST

Please write about your travel, internship and time in the U.S. by answering the questions below as detailed as possible, in 1-2 pages. You may answer in Swedish or English.

Project description

Can you describe the project you were working on? What subject area did it cover? How did the contact with the Professor/supervisor work? How long was an average day in the lab?

I performed FTIR analysis of pollen and volcanic ashes respectively, two separate research lines that both were aimed at exploring what information one could gain from the different samples using FTIR. I also calibrated a home built Raman spectrometer. The subject area primarily covered was spectroscopy, but from the samples aerobiology and geology came into the mix. Organic chemistry/biochemistry was useful when analyzing the pollen spectra.

The contact with professor Fochesatto worked well. He has many things going on, but he still finds time to be a teacher or someone to bounce ideas with. Quick to answer emails and at the office most days.

How long an average day at the lab was depended upon my choice. Most days were probably between 6 and 8 hours, though some days I stayed longer.

What new things have you learned during the project? Was your prior knowledge sufficient for you to handle the tasks presented to you? How much responsibility were you given?

From the project I gained practical skills in the use of an FTIR spectrometer and a Raman spectrometer, which I also learned about calibrating. I learned a lot about what studies of pollen and volcanic ashes that have been performed using these two spectroscopic techniques. My prior knowledge was fully sufficient.

I was given the responsibility of working independently and handling expensive laboratory equipment after having received introductory training for the apparatus.

Campus life

What was life like at the university you visited? Campus life, nightlife and potential trips?

Summer is a quite time at UAF with not much going on on campus. On Thursdays a student organization sell cheap ice cream on central campus. During the day there is a free university shuttle bus that go between the different ends of campus. There are a few pubs/night clubs in Fairbanks with vicinity, but only the Marlin is within walking distance from the campus. There are hiking trail starting on the campus area and if one have access to a car/a friend with a car there are many good trails within reach, some of which that will bring you from the forest up to alpine tundra.

In Fairbanks Pioneer Park is worth a visit, as is the midnight sun festival market. There are quite a few smaller things going on most of the time if one keeps an eye open. Still, local friends will lead to you finding things you would have missed otherwise and you are sure to make your own activities together. For the tourist experience exploring the gold mining history of Alaska the short tour Gold Dredge 8 is something to go on. Chena Hotsprings is just a few hours drive from Fairbanks. Closer still is the town North Pole where the street lights are candy canes and it is Christmas all year round. There is even public transport to North Pole, but as always when using the buses in Fairbanks, be sure to know the time table and plan your trip accordingly for buses are far between, stop rather early in the evening and there is no Sunday service.

There is a multitude of potential trips to do while you are in Alaska. Typically some traveling is involved, Alaska is large. Denali national park, where the highest mountain in North America is located, is a must visit. The coastal mountains is well worth a visit as the nature there is quite different from that in Fairbanks, e.g. one could go to Seward and/or Anchorage. There are cruise options along the southern coast, but I didn't go on one. Other places that probably are worth a visit that I didn't go to is the state capital Juneau and the town Barrow, which is one of the most northerly located human settlements.

How much did it cost living in your city? How did you finance the stay in the U.S? Scholarship or private funds? If you received any scholarship, did you need to send any documents to the university in order to receive the funds?

Living in Alaska is quite expensive. I rented a room on Campus through their conference guest housing where I qualified for the academic rate, which is cheaper than the recreational rate. Prices here range from \$26/night, which gives you a small dorm room where kitchen, toilet and shower are shared with the corridor.

Food was expensive, probably in part due to the shipping costs. Expect prices a little bit higher than in Sweden. Fruits and greens don't last long after being bought before going bad.

I financed my stay with private funds, but am applying for a stipend from CHUST. For that stipend, 20000 SEK, I needed to fill in one document, which I received during the

beginning weeks of my trip. If I receive money from it remains to be seen as I am handing it in now after the trip. It is probably advisable to hand it in early rather than late like me.

**How did you find housing during your stay at the university and how much did it cost?
How satisfied were you with the housing situation?**

The best thing about the housing is that it is located on campus, which is very convenient. Fairbanks may not be a large city, but it is spread out. The University is located at one of the outer edges and is itself rather spread out, so if one do not get some sort of transport one want to live close to the office. As it was I was on campus and still had a pleasant 15 minute walk from my room to my office.

The rooms on campus are nothing fancy, but they fulfill their function. Nothing major wrong with them, but not much to praise either. Probably the most affordable housing in Fairbanks in addition to their location on campus. The rooms come fully furnished, but as kitchens are shared and students are responsible for having their own kitchen utensils, don't count on the kitchen to be fully equipped. The cheapest option is \$26/night and if you want your own toilet and sink the price goes up to \$56/night. Be aware of to which date they offer the summer housing, for arranging to stay longer than that might be quite a bother as they then aim to work as ordinary dorms for the regular students.

Application

Were there any problems that did arise during your stay that you think future students need to know about? In such case, which problems did you encounter?

Be aware of the phrasing in your insurance letter. My international coordinator and/or the department of state did not think that the insurance letter from Länsförsäkringar was explicit enough on the points:

A) Coverage of medical evacuation to the home country, if medically ordered, in the amount of \$50,000 (USD) or 406,247 (SEK);

B) Coverage of repatriation of remains to the home country, in the event of death, in the amount of \$25,000 (USD) or 203,123 (SEK);

C) Company rating:

1. Any policy, plan, or contract secured to fill the above requirements must, at a minimum, be: Underwritten by an insurance corporation having an A.M. Best rating of "A-" or above; a McGraw Hill Financial/Standard & Poor's Claims-paying Ability rating of "A-" or above; a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of "B+" or above; a Fitch Ratings, Inc. rating of "A-" or above; a Moody's Investor Services rating of "A3" or above; or such other rating as the Department of State may from time to time specify; or backed by the full faith and credit of the government of the exchange visitor's home country.

So they can be rather strict about phrasings in the insurance.

If you have a transfer at LAX in Los Angeles and this is your port of arrival to USA, be sure that you have enough time for the transfer. 2 hours is not enough. 3 might work, but the risk is

that it is tight. 4 hours and up is what I would recommend. I had about 2.5 hours to do a transfer at LAX, thus this was the time I had to go through immigration, pick up my bag and go through customs, change terminal, drop off the bag at the connecting flight and go through security. Half an hour before my flight's departure I was at the front of the line to immigration. I didn't make it to my connection. No thanks to SAS did the airline of the connecting flight manage to re-rout me and get me to Fairbanks. So make sure that you have enough time to do your transfer, they take more time than you think and just because the airline offer you an option with a short lay over time doesn't mean that it is a possible time. At least SAS is not responsible for long lines and do not have 24-7 support service for non members.

What documents did you need to send to the university and what did you need to bring to the embassy in order to get your visa approved?

To the University:

CV

Proof of funding

Copy of passport ID page

J1 Exchange Visitor Authorization Request Form

Documentation of degree level

To the Embassy:

DS-2019

Letter of invitation

DS-160 confirmation page

Visa fee payment receipt

I-901 SEVIS fee receipt

Proof of funding

I20 Extract of the population register, with all family relations

Passport

ID photo 5cmx5cm

May we publish your travel story on the official CHUST webpage (kongligkemi.se/chust) so that future exchange students can be helped by the information?

Yes

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this form and share your story!

Name the document according to: "University – Your Name" and send it as a PDF to chust@k.kth.se

Best regards,

CHUST committee 2015/ 2016