

**Nora Baart Stichting**  
**Summary experience Boston**  
**Anna Hoefnagels**



For my master internship I moved to Boston to start my 6 month internship in the lab of Michela Fagiolini, PhD at the Harvard Medical School. During my internship I studied the effect of ketamine in MeCP2 heterozygote female mice. Mutations in the MeCP2 gene cause in humans Rett syndrome, a severe neurological disorder, causing lifelong devastating impairments. Recently in the lab of Fagiolini they discovered that ketamine ameliorated symptoms in male MeCP2 knock-out mice, and therefore could function as a possible new therapeutic target. However, to improve translation to the almost exclusively, female patients, research of the effect of ketamine in female MeCP2 heterozygote mice is necessary. During my time in Boston I learned new techniques and enhanced my knowledge of performing pre-clinical research. To perform research at such a high level is an incredibly great learning experience.

Besides scientific knowledge, I also developed personally. Although I lived abroad before, moving to a new country and starting your life all over, without other students or friends, was a new experience for me. Thankfully, the atmosphere in the lab was great and I felt welcome straight from the beginning. I also joined the Harvard Ultimate Frisbee team, as I picked up ultimate frisbee half a year before moving to the states. Being able to play this new sport in a new team, with some of the best players in the States as coaches was a great experience. Besides making new friends straight away, it also gave me the opportunity to learn more about student life at Harvard, as you miss this completely if you work in a lab and not attend courses.

Outside internship hours, I was able to explore some of the beautiful cities and nature in New England. Some of my highlights were Cape Cod, Philadelphia, Chicago, Rhode Island, and the Appalachian mountains in New Hampshire. Hiking over the presidential traverse was definitely the most beautiful. This is a string of summits that are all higher than 4000ft, all named after an American president. From here you have a gorgeous view all over New England.

I moved to Boston at the end of January, just after President Trump got inaugurated. The day after I arrived the travel ban was ordered and Trump news was everywhere. But Boston is a democratic hub and life just goes on. So except for the news items here and there you didn't notice much. If anything, you were welcomed more than ever. Towards the end of my stay however, you noticed more and more about the effect of the policy of President Trump, even in Boston. One event that gave me goosebumps was the rally against white supremacists in August. More than 10,000 people united themselves against a white supremacist rally in downtown Boston. They marched to the city center, passing my house. To see so many people be united for the same cause was amazing to see, although it also highlighted the fact that America is getting so divided that this is necessary. To have lived in the States during this time period gives an extra dimension to my experience.

Altogether, this experience was a unique one that allowed me to grow academically and personally and I wouldn't have wanted to miss it for the world.