

Molecular Neuroscience at Harvard University

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Hi! I am Marjolein and I recently finished my 6-month internship on molecular Neuroscience at Harvard University. I studied mitochondrial mechanisms in Parkinson's disease in the lab of Prof. Isacson. It was a unique opportunity, because the lab allowed me to work with 'induced pluripotent stem cells': This is a very costly cell culture method, so generally only PhD students are allowed to perform this research. Furthermore, the lab was partly clinically oriented which made it possible for me (as a fundamental researcher) to engage in the translation of stem cell research to the clinic. Very interesting!



To all of the readers interested in performing research abroad, let me tell me some more about my international experience. The hospital I worked at is affiliated to Harvard University. Don't let that fool you, however. All of you who think that Harvard hospitals encompass state-of-the art research facilities could not be more wrong. The interior design of most labs date from the previous century, actually establishing a real old school look. Furthermore, the number of people working in the lab is generally fairly small. For instance, my lab primarily consists of a few postdocs, some research assistants and a visiting student every now and then. If you're thinking of going to a prominent university yourself one day, let me tell you one of their major advantages: Generally, universities in the US have an enormous budget for biomedical research. So, instead of spending hours on preparing buffers, making gels or mixing time consuming solutions, you can just buy everything! Moreover, they have high-tech microscopes and other novel, innovative lab materials. Your research is therefore much more efficient, which gives you time to plan extra experiments. Another thing that might appeal to you is the notable social aspect of the typical American lab, which includes breakfast meetings, cookie lunches and nice lab dinners.

I'd also like to promote the city of Boston. I can say that Boston is probably one of the most exciting places to be a student. Why? Because there are so many fellow students as the Boston area has 8(!) universities. And, even better, the majority of these students has a strong interest life sciences. From my short experience I can tell you that the Boston skyline is beautiful, the milk and cheese are not that bad, the cars are not that big, the public transport system might still learn something from the Dutch NS. Also, there are a lot of Dutch students performing research in Boston so you'll never have to feel as if your far from home. I really enjoyed my time in the States, and I would recommend everyone to go abroad and experience the (research) culture in another country.

