DAAD-RISE
Between Computational Models and Salsa-Dancing
Exchange students explore the Ruhr-University

Three bachelor students from the US and Canada are spending their summer at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Their hosts are two PhD student mentors from the Institute of Neural Computation.

Two of the three exchange students participate in the RISE programme of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). RISE stands for “Research Internships in Science and Engineering” and offers students from North America, Great Britain and Ireland research internships in Germany. Since no more than two students can be supported by the programme at the same time, the third student is funded by the Canadian programme “Mitacs Globalink Canada”.

Working with lots of enthusiasm

Eva Yezerets studies biomedical engineering and German as major and statistics as minor at Purdue University in the US state Indiana. Mariam Jabara is doing a bachelor in biomedicine at the University of Ottawa, Ontario, with computer science as minor. The two of them assist the PhD student Olya Hakobyan with her research. Olya is working on an algorithmic model of a specific subunit of memory, “recognition memory”. She is very happy with the work of the two interns: “At the beginning I wasn’t sure whether I was giving them too much work, but they did really well.”, says Hakobyan.

The third intern, Eli Jergensen from the US state Oklahoma, studies mathematics and physics, at the moment, however, his minors computer science and German are far more useful. He helps the PhD student Richard Görler with his research on the influence of episodic memory on the learning of sensory representations. “Eli is helping me with improving the algorithm for my model”, explains Görler.

It is the third time that Richard Görler serves as mentor of a RISE-intern and he strongly approves of the concept: “I would recommend the programme to every PhD student on campus – there’s so much you can learn from each other.”, he tells us. Hakobyan agrees with him: “The interns brought a lot of enthusiasm with them and it’s wonderful to see someone approaching your work from a completely different angle.”
Well integrated in Bochum

For the interns the time at the Ruhr-Universität was worthwhile, too. "I really enjoyed being integrated into the day-to-day life on campus. We joined the lab meetings and the journal clubs and were even invited to attend the defense of a PhD thesis. At home all those things would happen at a much later stage of our studies.", says Mariam Jabara. Not only on an academic but also on a cultural level they made good use of their time in Bochum. "We went hiking, travelling and joined a salsa course.", they let us know. In August they will bring all those new impressions back to their home universities, when they leave Germany after their two and a half months internship.

Funding:
RISE is a programme of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). It offers financial support to travelling costs, insurance and a German course as well as a 3-days-meeting for all interns in Heidelberg. The Integrated Research Training Group of the SFB 874, funded by the DFG, supports the interns with a monthly stipend.

Further information:
www.daad.de/rise/en/rise-germany/
www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/sfb874/integrated_research_training_group/irtg.html

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