Report on Erasmus Internship

Erasmus Internship – Department of Neuromotor Rehabilitation, Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences, Katholieke Universitiet, Leuven, Belgium.

1. Internship Preparation

My experience with the Erasmus internship was one of the best research experiences I ever had during my academic career. I am being a Physical therapist always wanted to have an academic career, for which it is very important to have good research experience. For my research internship, I started my search over the internet in January 2014. As my internship was on a voluntary basis, I was intended to search research groups working on neurological disorders in Europe. I found two academic research groups one in Belgium (Katholieke universitiet (KU), Leuven) and the other in Netherlands (Radboud University, Nijmegen) suiting my academic profile. I sent a formal email to each of the research head of those groups for a possible internship. There was no reply from the research group in Netherlands but I got a positive response from KU Leuven, and the research head asked me to come to meet her personally to know more about me. I went to Leuven on April 2014, to meet the Professor and the research group, and had an informal interview with the professor and after a week she confirmed about the internship. I asked for an internship of at least 6 months but I got an internship for 11 months as the professor encouraged my idea of going into academic research.
2. Academic Experience

My research work started on October 1st, 2014 after I registered as a student in KU Leuven. I have mainly concentrated working with Parkinson’s disease and geriatric population with movement and balance tests in the Movement Analysis Laboratory Leuven, within the Faculty of Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences. According to the contract, I am supposed to work seven hours a day from Monday to Friday. It was quite convenient, that there is no restriction in starting the work at a particular time but I completed at least seven or more hours of work every working day. My work was mainly on biomechanical analysis of balance in Parkinson’s disease patients with Computer Assisted Rehabilitation Environment (CAREN) platform. I took part in data collection in Parkinson’s disease patients using 3D movement analysis techniques, force plates along with EMG integration. I was also integrated with other PhD projects to know about the current advancement of rehabilitation research with Parkinson’s patients and elderly namely virtual reality treadmill training, smart phone based cueing for gait training. The entire training helped me to advance with the recent techniques in analyzing data with high end software like Matlab and Visual 3D. The internship also helped me to integrate well with the research group and improved my team work skills. The research team was so friendly, that I did not had any negative experiences throughout the internship period. They even helped me in the beginning to find accommodation by sending me links from the university and social media websites.
3. **Intercultural Experiences**

KU Leuven is one of the best universities, ranking within top 50 in the world. The university has a total student of at least 55,000 and part of it are international students. I had one of the best research experiences in my academic career learning advance skills in the field of rehabilitation sciences. Also, the internship helped me with some language skills of learning some basic Dutch. I had previously some knowledge of Deutsch, which made it easier to understand basic phrases of Dutch used with patients.

Leuven is a student city, which made me to learn more about different cultures and nationalities. It is very easy to meet other students and make friends as there are a lot of exchange students from all over the world in KU Leuven. There are always some events and festivals around the city where you can learn more about the culture and tradition of the city. I would also like to mention here, that Belgium is a very small country and it is very easy to travel and explore other cities over the weekend.

4. **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it was one of the best internship which yielded me a year of pre-doctoral year in KU Leuven. My best advice for future students who intended to do research internship in KU Leuven is, to contact the faculty directly stating your interest and why you choose to work with the research group. It is always important to use your student email id from the university, instead of using a private email account (eg. Gmail or Yahoo) as most of the professors here use spam filters so that your email will never reach their inbox and you may lose a precious opportunity of getting an internship.