

Personal Testimonial

Research Stay	
Institute: EPIC	
Project: Planning an Affordable, Resilient, and Sustainable Grid in North Carolina	
Supervisor: Dr. Robert Cox	Duration of stay: 1 Month

Contact Details	
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MINTernship Program 2021

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I first heard about the MINTernship from a friend, who joined the program in 2018. I was very impressed by his research topic and the work he has done during his stay at UNCC. A year later another friend participated in the program, and he gave very positive feedback about his experience there. This motivated me to also apply for the MINTernship at the end of my master's studies. Even though this year's topics were a little bit less exciting than the ones offered in the previous years, I managed to find two interesting topics that awoke my interest. The application process was straightforward. Two months after my application, I've been informed of being among the lucky students, who were selected for the MINTernship 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there have been some travel restrictions and lack of appointments at the different US consulates, which meant that some of the internship will be done remotely from Germany. However, it wasn't clear how long the remote portion will be. Some participants were lucky to find some free appointments right after the beginning of the internship such that they could start working on the UNCC campus right from the second month. I and another participant (Hedi) however were not as lucky and had to work a couple of months longer in remote. At some point, Hedi and I could find some free appointments for June, which we booked. While everything worked out well for Hedi and he could join the other members in July, I was unfortunate for having my appointment canceled by the US consulate due to high demand and them prioritizing to process immigration visas over non-immigration visas. For many weeks it seemed for me like I will spend the rest of the internship working remotely from Germany, which is way less exciting than being on campus there. Finally, I was fortunate to find a free appointment in August, which meant that I could enjoy spending the last month of the internship with my fellow interns.

The remote work was generally fine. Due to the confidentiality of the data, I was not allowed to do any work on my personal computer or download any data to it. Thus, I had to connect to a remote desktop and do all the work there. The connection to the server was a little bit troublesome sometimes. The connection could either be not established or the session just

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drops out without any pre-warnings, ... Thankfully it wasn't happening all the time but quite often to be worth mentioning. Each week, I had two to three meetings with Dr. Cox and the EPIC team, where we introduced the progress in our projects and asked for advice from other members if needed. I was impressed by how interdisciplinary the team was, which was a great enrichment for my project. I enjoyed the close supervision of Dr. Cox, where we discuss different points very deeply and he took a lot of time discussing different ideas with me. He didn't give me the impression like he was the supervisor who gives hard instructions to follow but more like a friend who discussed with me my ideas to go further with the project.

After getting my appointment at the US consulate, it was time to start searching for accommodation as UNCC decided to use the rooms they used to offer to us to isolate covid-19 infected students. Since the other interns have arrived much earlier than me and it wasn't clear whether and when I would join, they have booked a house for them and Hedi has booked some Airbnb rooms near the campus for ridiculously high rents. So, I was left on my own to find an accommodation.

Luckily, I had a friend, who I have known during my internship in Michigan back in 2018, who has studied at UNCC and he still lives in Charlotte. Thanks to his relationships and his extended network of friends, he managed to find a nice flat for me to rent for one month at a reasonable price and very close to EPIC. I am so thankful for his effort.

After arriving in Charlotte and settling in my new home, I was able to join the EPIC lab. Even though I couldn't have an official introduction to EPIC due to Dr. Cox being on a working trip and the secretary being in carnitine, I got on very easily thanks to the detailed info-mails I received from the HR and the support of the fellow interns. I liked how uncomplicated everything was. Most of the paperwork could be done very easily and very fast. I was also impressed by how kind and helpful the staff of the UNCC were.

In the EPIC building, we had a dedicated space for the KIT interns, and a nice desk with a computer was reserved for me. Working on-site was much more comfortable and productive than in remote. I liked being able to interact with my colleagues directly and being flexible to jump to their offices and have a brief discussion with them at any time. I had a bidaily meeting with other PhDs and working students who were working on the same project. We used the time to discuss the different problems of the project and how we can deal with them. Unfortunately, the number of meetings with Dr. Cox shrunk significantly after the semester began, but I knew that he was there to offer support whenever I needed him.

The UNCC campus is just great. Unlike the south campus of KIT where some trees can be seen near the buildings, the UNCC campus was like a big, beautiful garden with some buildings here and there. I also liked the consistency of the architecture across the whole campus. Just by looking at a building, it's effortless to tell whether it belongs to the campus or not.

The canteen of UNCC is amazing. It's open from 7 am to 10 pm 7 days a week, the whole year. Even on holidays. It's an all-you-can-eat-and-drink buffet style. You pay a one-time entrance fee and enjoy different delicious foods, from burgers you can stuff as you like to different pizzas, salads, Asiatic foods, sweets of all kinds and colors, ice cream, soft drinks, coffee, ... you won't miss anything.

There are also so many activities, which are offered for free in the UNCC. For example, billiard tables, on-campus theatre (Kino) every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, a sophisticated recreation center (Fitness) with indoor and outdoor pools, ...

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The couple of weeks I spent on campus were great. It felt very fast like home, and it was such a hard feeling to leave the campus. Even though this isn't my first internship in the US, this one is the first time where I experienced student life there, and it was great.

Due to a Ph.D. offer, which starts immediately after the internship, I had to return quickly to Germany. I had only 4 days to spend traveling, so I decided to revisit the nice west coast passing by the shiny Las Vegas. Las Vegas is always a nice transit city thanks to the cheap flights from and to Las Vegas. From there I took the Flixbus to Los Angeles, which I visit for the first time. It was a nice experience, but the city was rather under my expectations. After this stop, I took a second Flixbus to San Francisco. San Francisco was much nicer than LA. The city felt much cleaner, and the vibe there was great. I used the opportunity of being in SF to visit a friend who works in Silicon Valley and have a nice dinner with him in the same Thai restaurant we visited 3 years ago. I also took the opportunity to celebrate with some Google employees some event on the Google campus, where I was offered a piece of cake colored in the 4 colors of google and a bottle of Coke.

My overall experience during my stay in the US was great. I managed to spend more than \$4500 in one month while earning only \$1500. Staying in the US for just one month is ridiculously short. After returning to Germany, I still cannot realize that I've been there at all. It was such a nice time.

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