

## McKelvey International Students Research Internship Program at Washington University in St. Louis Experience Report



My name is Claire Wang, and I am pleased to share some experience about life at Washington University in St. Louis (WashU) during my summer research internship 2024. I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in this internship program. Due to the difference in academic schedules between Taiwan and the U.S., I had to fly to the U.S. immediately after the semester at NTU ended in early June, which made the transition quite hectic for me. Additionally, since I had always lived at home even during my university years, this was my first time living on my own, and for an extended period abroad. Before departing, I was extremely anxious. However, looking back now, I'm truly thankful that I chose to step out of my comfort zone. The experience has allowed me to grow significantly, both in terms of my learning and my personal development.

- **Accommodation:**

I lived in a school-arranged dormitory, sharing a suite with 3-4 people. Each person had a private room, while the bathroom, kitchen, dining area, and living room were communal spaces. The kitchen was equipped with essential appliances, including a refrigerator, stove, microwave, and oven. However, one were required to provide their own cookware and seasonings if they intended to cook regularly.

A laundry room is located in the basement and is available for free use. I purchased a laundry basket to make transporting clothes more convenient, particularly when handling larger loads.

- **Transportation:**

Our labs, primarily situated around the McKelvey School of Engineering, are approximately a 20-minute walk from the dormitory. However, given the intense summer heat in St. Louis, if you want to avoid discomfort in the morning, you may opt to take the metro, even though it's just one stop to the main campus. WashU provides us with metro passes that grant unlimited access to both the metro and bus services. Typically, it is not

necessary to scan the pass when entering metro stations, but on occasion—especially during large events such as the Fourth of July celebrations or baseball games—staff may check your tickets. So, remember to carry your card with you at all times.

The metro station is a brief 3-5 minute walk from the dormitory. While metro services run less frequently, approximately every 20 minutes, delays are rare. Google Maps offers real-time updates on potential disruptions, making it easier to plan your schedule efficiently once getting used to it. Additionally, the university operates a complimentary campus shuttle service. For longer distances, ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft are commonly used. Lyft, in particular, offers discounts for new users, and when sharing the fare with others, the cost becomes quite reasonable. Nonetheless, it is important to note that public transportation is not as extensive as in Taipei, so there might be times when you'll need to walk



Fireworks at the arch

- **Groceries:**

We typically do our grocery shopping on Friday evenings after work. There are several supermarkets near the Brentwood I-64 metro stop, with Trader Joe's and Dierbergs being the ones we frequent most often. Both stores offer fresh ingredients and are conveniently located close to the metro. However, since these are local grocery stores, if we want to buy Asian ingredients, we have to go to Asian supermarkets like United Provisions, where the prices tend to be higher. We typically purchase enough groceries to last for 1 to 1.5 weeks, and if we buy too much or the items are too heavy, we'll take a Lyft back to the dorm. Fridays are also our "happy night," where we gather in the living room to enjoy snacks and desserts we just bought while chatting, which is a great way to bond with each other.

- **Lab life:**

Upon arrival, you'll first meet with the professor to discuss the focus of your internship research. Some tasks may involve ongoing projects, while others are assigned based on

your field of expertise and interests. Typically, senior members of the lab will mentor you, providing ample opportunities to interact and engage in discussions. The timing of meetings depends on the professor's schedule.

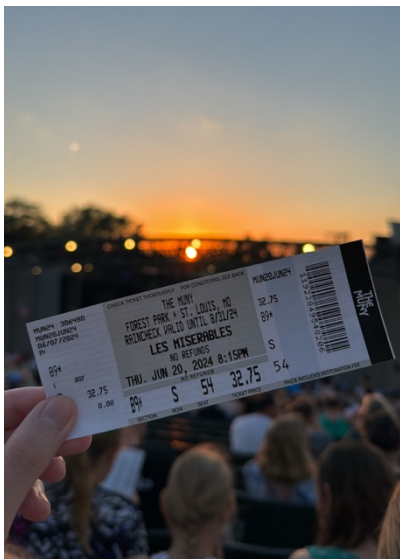
In my lab, the working hours are quite flexible, with no strict requirements for when to start or end the day. Most people are focused on their research, though occasional discussions about each other's work do take place. Sometimes, you'll also hear senior lab members discussing topics not quite related to the lab, which can be interesting. During lunchtime, our lab tends to go out for lunch together, although some labs have members who prefer to bring their own meals.

Since the summer research internship lasts only ten weeks, the professor generally does not expect you to produce significant achievements, so there's no need to feel overly pressured. Any questions or issues can be discussed openly with senior lab members or the professor, who are always willing to provide guidance and feedback. Although the final research outcomes may differ from your initial expectations, the overall experience offers a great deal of learning and growth.

- **Other activities:**

The university organized numerous activities for us to participate in and experience, such as attending outdoor musical performances at The Muny, watching Cardinals games at the stadium, touring local breweries, and visiting iconic landmarks like The Arch. There was a different event almost every week. While participation was not mandatory, I highly recommend attending as many as possible if your schedule allows. The school provided transportation to all events, and for evening activities, we were often taken to local specialty restaurants for dinner at no extra cost.

These events not only allowed us to experience local entertainment and culture, but also provided opportunities to connect with individuals from other countries and share perspectives on the internship program. I eventually formed friendships with many of them, which made the experience even more rewarding.



Muny musical, baseball game, Arch tour

The greatest takeaway from this internship was gaining a clearer understanding of what research is truly like. I had the chance to engage closely with senior lab members and professors, receiving first-hand insights through discussions. Additionally, there were plenty of opportunities to bond with other interns, whether by participating in school-organized activities or hosting gatherings in the dorms. Many of us became close friends, and we've stayed in touch even after the internship ended. Of course, there were certain aspects that were difficult to adjust to in the beginning. For instance, the tap water in the U.S. tends to be hard and has a distinct taste when consumed directly. I would highly recommend getting a water filter or using a kettle to boil water. Another noticeable cultural difference is the tipping culture in the U.S. Menu prices do not include tax, so when paying the bill, you not only need to add tax but also a tip, which makes dining out quite expensive. Cooking at home is a much more cost-effective option.

Although there were some moments of culture shock, the experience broadened my perspective. It also reassured me that I enjoy living in the U.S., and in the future, I aspire to pursue further studies here.



Street on fourth of July, picturesque campus, trip to six flags