

WashU Internship 心得

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The idea of going to WashU for the summer research internship started in 2023, when a senior student came back from his internship in WashU looking stronger and describing how he played basketball with all the students there in the indoor gym with air conditioning on all day long. I made up my mind that I would like to go abroad and play basketball with people all around the world. Under the asian education system for over 20 years, my life was filled with all kinds of homework and exams and didn't have a chance to breathe for a while. Having free time after work, and maybe some travels during weekends were an unreachable dream for me in Taiwan. I hope that I can find a work-life balance by seizing the opportunity of joining the internship in WashU and living in the US for the summer.

The application process was not complicated. I'm told that the whole process was similar to the application of a master or PhD to the Universities in the US, so it's a great practice to run through all these processes before really applying for the master or PhD. Writing a personal statement and CV nowadays is much easier with the help of ChatGPT. It helped generate outline, fixed grammar and give suggestions of modifications to the essays, which saved a great amount of time for me during the application. There was one online interview with the professor in WashU, which made me pretty confident since I was one of the only two people I know who got the interview. When I knew that I got admitted, I thought I was going to that professor's lab. However, things didn't work out that way. I got admitted by another professor who didn't interview me at all. And this unexpected twist started my journey to WashU.

The work life there is simple, go at nine and leave at five. There are six PhD and five interns in the lab this summer, making the big lab room underground a little bit crowded. The research topics in the lab vary greatly from recording biopotential signals using amplifiers to solving max-cut problems for error correction of quantum circuits. The research diversity really impressed me, since in Taiwan, research conducted in the same lab would usually be highly relevant. However, the differences in research didn't stop us from having discussions. I was still able to find someone to discuss whenever I ran into a problem. Also, we have a very diligent professor who comes to the lab at least twice a day. He'll talk to every student in the lab about the progress of the projects and give suggestions to us whenever we're having trouble. It is so lucky to have such a great professor who really cares about his students and engages with the whole research process together. Another important event in our lab is that we always have our lunch together. When someone gets hungry at noon, he will ask everyone to go to lunch at the common area on the second floor of the building. We shared our food and talked about the differences between our countries. It was a really nice activity to get to know everyone in the lab.

The life on campus is quite chill. We usually take the metro to the lab, but sometimes, we walk back to our dorm after work. The campus is about the same size as NTU, but in a completely different style. It's just like a big country house standing on the hill that can overlook the forest park across the street. Surrounded by the buildings, there are grass fields

and trees in the middle for students who want to take a rest under the sun reading or having a picnic. Though it was sometimes stifling, walking in the campus is still relaxing for an exhausted student after the lab. We can slow down our pace, take our time pondering, and make ourselves relaxed.

Not to mention that the gym on campus was extraordinary. The facilities were brand new and clean, and there were two indoor basketball courts with wood floors. It was such a paradise for basketball lovers like me that we didn't need to stand for sun exposure and humidity outside, and the air conditioning was on all day long. The players in the US play completely differently than the players in Taiwan. It was quite a culture shock for me that people there would be more likely to make a movement and shoot by themselves rather than pass the ball and work as a team, so it took some time for me to get used to it. Besides basketball, there is also a swimming pool, badminton courts, a table tennis table, and even squash ball courts. Though I only played table tennis twice there, I had a lot of fun playing with friends in the lab.

We usually cook for dinner since it is extremely expensive to eat out. Fortunately, many of us know how to cook. However, there was no rice cooker in the dorm's kitchen, so practicing how to cook rice using a pot was the first thing we needed to learn. In addition, it's hard to find Asian food ingredients in the US supermarket, so we've tried several different kinds of unknown vegetables and cooked them in an Asian way. We also made pasta, spaghetti, soup, cakes and sandwiches. Most of them tasted good, but some of them didn't. I believed that the best food we've ever made was pan-fried steaks, simple, but delicious. Just before we left, in order to consume all the flour in the closet, we decided to make chinese pancakes and dumplings from scratch. It was my first time kneading noodles, so every step was trial and error. At first, I made the dough too wet, and to fix that, I kept adding a handful of flour repeatedly. However, I didn't know the exact amount of flour I needed, so I was in the cycle of making the dough too wet and too dry. But in the end, I believed that I did a great job and created a beautiful piece of dough. Making dumpling skin was another difficult process. It's hard to roll out the dough and make it thin enough but not broken. Then comes the fun part. We wrapped the fillings with dumpling skin and made them the shape we wanted. There were stars, triangles, ravioli and so much more. Most importantly, they all tasted amazing! Cooking has become an important ritual for us after work. Everyone would all gather in the kitchen no matter if they were cooking or not. Some of us cooked, some of us prepared ingredients, and the others just stood there and chatted. I really enjoyed that all of us were cooking and having dinner together. It was the best time of the entire day.

The internship in WashU let me have a fulfilling summer vacation. Not only did I improve my technical skills by conducting the research, but all the activities on and off campus also enrich my everyday life. I learned how to balance the time I spent between working and relaxing and actually carried out a well-balanced life there in St. Louis. This trip made me realize that there are so many other options and opportunities in life that I have never thought about. It broke the limit and frame of my imagination and opened a whole new perspective for me. And hopefully in the near future, I will be able to travel somewhere else and see another part of the world.







