

UChicago Summer Research Fellowship Experience

Overview:

My first experience immersing myself in a foreign environment has been both exhilarating and challenging. Coming from a different cultural and educational background, everything in the USA feels new and different. This opportunity to experience life in the USA is invaluable, especially for students like myself who aspire to pursue an MS or PhD degree here. The experience has given me a clearer perspective on what studying abroad entails and the unique opportunities it presents. For those still undecided about studying abroad, I can confidently say that this kind of program offers a great chance to become more familiar with the realities of academic life in a different country. Regardless of whether you have already determined your career path, participating in such a program can be an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

Research Life:

One of the most significant aspects of my time in the USA has been my research experience. I have been fortunate to be supervised by Professor Junchen Jiang, working on a project related to the KV cache mechanism in Large Language Models (LLM). While the research topic is similar to the field I have focused on in Taiwan, there are notable differences in the approach and expectations. In the USA, the academic culture places a strong emphasis on independence and initiative. The professor regards me as a real PhD student, expecting me to conduct research independently and produce tangible results.

This expectation has been both empowering and daunting. Unlike the education system in Taiwan, where there is often more guidance and structured support, the USA's approach requires a high level of proactivity and self-discipline. If you don't ask questions or show progress, nobody will step in to help you. This has been a significant adjustment for me. The short two-month period of my program made it particularly challenging to complete the research. Consequently, there was a gap between the professor's expectations and the reality of what I could achieve in such a limited time frame, which sometimes led to inefficiencies in communication.

Despite not finishing the project, this research experience has been immensely valuable. It has helped me better understand the demands of academic research and clarified my future career path. For anyone considering applying for a similar program, I strongly recommend reaching out to the professors you are interested in beforehand. Discussing the goals of the project and understanding the professor's expectations can make a significant difference. Some professors have ongoing projects that interns can join, which might be more suitable for the limited timeframe

of such programs.

Daily Life:

Living in Chicago, where the University of Chicago is located, has been a unique experience. Although the university is situated in a relatively remote area, the amenities available are excellent. For daily necessities, I shop at Trader Joe's, Walmart, and other nearby supermarkets. The campus also offers a variety of dining options, ensuring that I never lack for food choices. To explore more of the city, I often take the CTA, Chicago's public transportation system, which is efficient and convenient.

Chicago's downtown area is vast, offering numerous shopping opportunities and vacation spots. The city's residents are generally friendly, and I have not experienced any discrimination during my stay. Traffic in Chicago is notably safe, with cars stopping as soon as they see pedestrians approaching a crosswalk. The dormitory where I live is clean and comfortable, and I was fortunate to have a single room equipped with a refrigerator and microwave. The dorm also has a common area where residents can socialize or work, as well as a gym in the basement that has been essential for staying fit and healthy, especially considering the oily and sweet nature of American food.

Leisure Activity:

Chicago is a financial hub, characterized by its many skyscrapers, which stand in stark contrast to the urban landscape of Taiwan. The density of buildings in downtown Chicago is much higher, offering a striking view of modern architecture. When I need a break from the city's hustle and bustle, I often head to the shores of Lake Michigan. The lake's shoreline is extensive, with various spots offering different recreational activities, including ferry trips, a Ferris wheel, and bars by the water.

Chicago is also home to numerous museums, where I have had the opportunity to see authentic works by artists like Monet and Picasso. Some museums showcase fossils of dinosaurs or the development of Chicago's industry, providing a deep dive into both art and history. Among all the leisure activities, what I enjoy most is spending time in one of the city's many cafes. Chicago is filled with great cafes, each offering a comfortable ambiance and delicious coffee and desserts. A typical breakfast or sandwich at a cafe costs around \$10 to \$12, which is relatively affordable compared to other dining options, where a meal can easily exceed \$15.

VISA application:

One of the more stressful aspects of my journey to the USA was the VISA application process. It is a complicated and prolonged procedure that requires careful attention to detail and timely action. My experience taught me the importance of starting the process as early as possible. After submitting the required documents, it is

crucial to reserve an interview with the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) as soon as possible. Unfortunately, I delayed this step and was rejected during my first attempt. The post-process of the rejection took several weeks, which significantly delayed my arrival in the USA.

This experience underscores the importance of thorough preparation and timely action when applying for a VISA. Ensuring that all documents are correctly submitted and that appointments are made promptly can make a significant difference in avoiding unnecessary delays and complications.

IU concert in Rosemont



Van Gogh's self portrait



The dormitory



The well-known Trump's tower

