

The nine-week experience has been immensely rewarding and fruitful. Looking back at the application process, all the effort during the semester was worth it. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to join a prestigious research lab, where everyone is passionate about their work and dedicated to their research topics. I was fortunate to be part of a biomedical engineering lab focused on photoacoustic imaging and its various applications. I was especially lucky that my PI was available when I first arrived, allowing us to discuss suitable topics for me to work on over the summer. My main task was to improve the image acquisition system of the photoacoustic microscope and enhance the image quality from the data collected.

The primary tools I used were LABVIEW and Matlab. While I had some experience with LABVIEW, Matlab was new to me. One of the key aspects of a summer internship is the need to quickly learn new skills to apply them immediately. However, thanks to powerful search engines like Google and ChatGPT, this is much easier nowadays. The real challenge is being prepared and open to learning new things.

The lab I joined was large, and we didn't have meetings during the summer because the PI was mostly away. As a result, I didn't really know what others in the lab were working on and focused mainly on my assigned task. In hindsight, I wish I had been more proactive and engaged with other lab members. If I were to give advice to future interns, it would be to start conversations with others. Trust me, it's not as hard as it seems after you break the ice. People are willing to share their experiences and knowledge, but they won't do it spontaneously—you need to ask questions. This is a key cultural difference between Asians and Americans. Americans tend to ask more questions, even random ones, while we often avoid asking questions, sometimes out of fear of sounding ignorant, or simply due to reluctance to engage. This is something that really stood out to me during my time here.

Initially, it was difficult to integrate into the lab because everyone seemed busy with their own work, and I didn't feel a very "welcoming" atmosphere. After talking with interns from other departments, I realized that our lab had a more "serious" environment. I had to figure out most things on my own, which I think is part of the lab's expectation—you're essentially a team of one. However, after a few weeks, I saw the benefits of this working style. Everyone focuses on their own tasks and only discusses research-related topics when necessary, which makes it more efficient. There were no strict rules about arrival or departure times, so I could organize my schedule according to my own needs.

One of the best aspects of this internship was meeting wonderful people and forming great friendships. Since the program was for international students, I met people from India, China, Bahrain, Mexico, Ghana, Canada, and more. I wasn't used to having parties in Taiwan, but since all the interns lived in the same dorm block, we had several meetups and parties, which were new experiences for me. Through these gatherings, we learned about each other's cultures and languages, even playing games using each other's native tongues—it was a lot of fun. We discussed everything from food, education, and politics to work environments and other topics we wouldn't have thought to talk about if not for this internship. I'm truly grateful for the exposure to such a multicultural environment.

The companions from NTU were incredibly supportive and warm. We helped each other throughout the entire process, from onboarding to completing the internship. It would have been a very different experience without them, as we explored many places together. We often shopped for groceries, cooked, and ate together. On weekends, we visited different places, which seemed natural to us, but one of our friends from India was quite envious because traveling as a group is important in St. Louis, where it can be dangerous to go out alone. If we hadn't come as a group, we might have missed out on many fun places. I am thankful to both NTU and WashU for providing us with this opportunity.

WashU also organized numerous activities to help us experience American culture. We visited Grant's Farm, attended a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game, and saw *Les Misérables* at The Muny. All of these activities were incredibly enjoyable and gave us insight into typical American pastimes. I especially loved the baseball game—it was my first time watching one live, and I think I should definitely catch a match in Taiwan someday! I sincerely appreciate the effort WashU put into organizing these activities, as it would have been difficult for us to know about these "must-try" experiences as foreigners.

All in all, I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to participate in this program. A big thank you to NTUOIA for coordinating everything and keeping us updated. I look forward to seeing more doors open for NTU students to connect with the world.

