

## THESIS WORK DURING INTERNSHIP AT HOUSTON METHODIST RESEARCH INSTITUTE (HMRI)

I'm attending an internship of 6 months (for the master thesis) at HMRI (Houston, TX) as a Graduate Research Fellow in the department of Computational Surgery (CyBHOR). What follows regards my experience.

Once you decide to apply for a proposal of thesis/internship by the HMRI the first thing you are required to do is to contact the responsible of the proposal and to provide him your CV. Then probably a Skype call will follow; it is a sort of job interview and it is mainly used to let them know something more about you, to understand if you are the right person for the job (remember that there could be more than one person who is applying for that internship) and to let you know something more about the project.

Then you will have to provide them an answer with your decision in a couple of days and they will let you know if you are in or not. My advice is to contact other people who have been there to know their opinion about such an experience.

If everything is fine, it starts a long procedure in which you are required to fill-in lots of forms that will be sent to you (you should reply in a prompt way to speed up the process). Firstly you will be in contact with someone of the administrative office inside the department, then you will be contacted by Human Resource and Immigration offices. For example I contacted them in November 2016 and I have been able to start my internship in March 2017.

If you have a bachelor degree probably you will be hired as a graduate research fellow with a salary. For the American government you must provide the proof of financial support for a certain amount of money (for me was 13500\$/6months).

During the overall procedure, apart from the forms that they will send you, you are required to provide:

- Most recent Bank statement of your financial supporters
- Letter of support: it is just a letter from your parents in which they states they will cover your expenditures for a specific amount of money (for me: 13500\$ - salary\*6months).

A skype call will be scheduled with an exponent of the administrative office of the department in order to test your English proficiency.

Then you will be contacted by the other offices for the job application, other forms and some online safety questionnaires.

For this kind of internship you need a **J1 visa**. All the info related to the required documentation can be found at US embassy site. Here is the site of the Italian US embassy of Milan: <https://it.usembassy.gov/it/visti/niv/j/>

The most important things (not all) you will need are:

- DS2019: it is a document coming from the Methodist (I waited a lot for it). You will need that document also to enter the US.
- Payment receipt of SEVIS
- DS160: online form. To complete it you will need two codes that will be provided by the Methodist together with the DS2019 (the program ID number and the SEVIS ID). You can compile this online form also partially and save it (it remains more or less 2 months if I remember right); my advice is to pre-compile all the fields you know in advance because in the last period there are usually lots of things to be care about.
- Passport (pay attention on the date of expiration)

Only once you have all the documentation specified in the embassy site you could apply for an appointment for the VISA. Don't make any travel plan until you will obtain your visa (you never know...).

Travel: Usually Houston is not directly connected from an Italian airport, so you will have to take at least two planes to get there. My advice is to change plane in Europe and not in the US because of all the security controls at the arrival.

Apartment: I was helped by a guy in the lab. I think it is quite common procedure to help the new arrivals, so if you will have the same opportunity, you should follow his/her suggestions (it will be very much easier).

The medical insurance can be done before or after you reach the United States. I've done it before and my plan was the following: plan E plus (<http://www.visitinsurance.com/eplus.html>). You can choose the one that you like most but you must be sure that the medical insurance for which you want to apply covers the minimum requirements of the Houston Methodist Hospital.

**Once you arrived in the United States you will have to obtain:**

- Bank account: because the institute can pay you only through an American bank account
- SSN (Social Security Number): it is an identification code that everyone who work in US must have. The HR will provide you instruction to let you know how to apply for it (it is very easy: just complete some forms and go to a specific administrative office).

The **first week** is usually used for the check in at HR and immigration offices (on Monday or Tuesday) and to complete a medical screening in which you will receive some vaccinations that are mandatory for HMH policy (it could be useful to bring with you a list of the vaccinations you have done in your life. However it could not been accepted because it is a certification that comes from outside the US).

The **following week** you will have to attend 2 days of orientations and then you can start to work. You will received your badge and a transport card for bus and metro rail by the end of the orientation and you are required to set up all the information related to your bank account in order to receive the salary.

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