

THESIS WORK DURING SHORT TERM SCHOLAR AT CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

I am currently working on my master thesis in Pittsburgh thanks to the CMU Robotics Institute, which will host me for 6 months as a short term student. To get there I had to do lots of paperwork, but I will try to explain the whole process to you.

Once you decide to apply for a thesis project, with the help of your Italian supervisor you will have to send your CV to the foreign co-supervisor. After a few days a Skype call with both the professors will be scheduled. If everything goes well, the university will email you all the instructions to obtain your J1 visa. The starting date of your period abroad will be at least 75 days from the date in which you will receive the email from the CMU secretary.

Passport: If you don't have a passport, you will have to require a new one. The time required to obtain it may change between city districts, in Trieste I had to wait less than a week. To obtain an Italian passport, you will need the following things:

- 2 recent photos;
- The receipt of the payment to the "Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze - Dipartimento del tesoro". You will have to go to the post office and pay 42,50€;
- A tax stamp of 73,50€, which can be bought in any tobacco shop;
- A printed copy of the adult passport request you find online;
- A valid ID.

DS2019: this is one of the most important documents you need to apply for your J1 visa and to live in the US. It is a bit tricky to obtain this piece of paper and you will be required to send through mail the following documents:

- J1 cover letter/check list, which is a form to fill with personal information.
- Visitor data form, which is another form to fill.
- Passport copy.
- Financial support, which is a letter from your bank that proves you (or your family) have at least 12.000\$ (for 6 months) in your bank account. To obtain this document (which has to be written in English) I had to wait 2 weeks. NB. The financial support documents may be different if you have private funds from an agency/company instead of personal/family funds.
- Exchange rate from your currency to dollars.
- Health insurance agreement, in which you accept to meet some requirements.
- Proof of English proficiency, one of the following is needed:
 - TOEFL ibt with a score of at least 84 (22 in listening and 18 in speaking);
 - IELTS with a score of at least 6 in listening and 6.5 in speaking;

Test must have been taken within the last 2 years. If you do not satisfies those requirements you may ask your foreign co-supervisor to evaluate your English level through a Skype call. In this case you won't need to ship the English proficiency documents.

To ship the documents I have chosen UPS, I have spent 17,27€ and they arrived in the US within 3 working days.

Now you will have to wait and once your DS2019 will be ready, you will be asked to pay 48,78€ to ship the document back to you. To receive the DS2019 I had to wait approximately 20 days from the day my letter arrived in the US.

J1 Visa: this is what allows you to enter the US (unlike tourists you won't need to do the ESTA)

- Complete the DS 160 module online and print the confirmation page.
- Go on the following website and register yourself <https://usvisa-info.com>
- Pay the MRV online, which costs 160\$.
- Schedule an appointment in a US embassy or consulate to obtain the visa
- Go to the appointment with the following documentation (NB. be sure to bring all the documents, otherwise you will have to schedule another appointment and pay again the MRV tax):
 - DS 160 confirmation page;
 - Passport;
 - Photo 5x5cm;
 - Original DS 2019 document;
 - Receipts of SEVIS payment of 180\$;
 - Financial and social documentation about you and your family;

If your visa will be approved, it will be send within 2 working days in a DHL branch.

Now all the paperwork should be finished and you could start searching a flight and an apartment in Pittsburgh.

OIE registration: in your fist week in Pittsburgh you will have to schedule an OIE registration appointment ad then you will be able to ask your student ID.

Travel

A direct flight from Italy to Pittsburgh could be tricky to find (if it even exists!). One of the cheapest ways to travel I have found so far is a direct flight from Milan to New York and then a bus from there to Pittsburgh. While flight prices may vary a lot, I can tell you that the bus usually costs between 20\$ and 25\$ and transportation from JFK airport to the Port Authority bus station costs about 8\$. The bus company I used was Greyhound and I travelled by night for 7 hours. Another famous company is Megabus.

Internal flights within the US usually are quite expensive and that's the reason why I preferred to take a bus, but if you decide to take another airplane you should need at least 4 hours between the two flights because you have to pass the immigration and customs controls in New York, collect your checked baggage and then embark it again.

Apartment

The bests neighborhoods to reach the CMU are: Oakland, Squirrel Hill North and Shadyside. A useful website to search an apartment is Craigslist. I decided to ask the landlords to have a video call to see their apartment and I think it could be an option also for you, but I may also suggest you to stay in an hotel for a few days and see the apartments in person.

Unfortunately student houses are usually quite dirty and ruined, so it may not be that easy to find an high standard place. Another problem you may face is that lots apartment are unfurnished, but there should be an Ikea outside the city or you may try to buy used furniture.

Prices ranges between 350\$ to 1000\$ or even more, it depends a lot on your budget and on what you want.

Reaching the Campus

Thanks to your CMU ID card, you will have CMU shuttles for free and maybe even port authority ones (you have to ask if you will have them for free as well).

CMU shuttles itinerary is well defined and you may find it searching on Google. Port authority busses costs 2,75\$ per ride or 2,50\$ if you purchase a Connect card. The monthly pass costs about 100\$.

If you are in Pittsburg in the warmest months you may decide to buy a bicycle, in that case I would strongly suggest you to have a peek at the FreeRide Bicycles, where you may purchase a bike for few dollars and they will help you to restore it.

Medical Insurance

Polimi as some agreement with Europe Assistance. A six month insurance with them should cost between 300€ and 380€ according to the type of insurance you prefer.

Bank

If you need to open a bank account I suggest you to go to the PNC bank because for CMU students is free.

US phone number

It is more expensive than in Italy, it usually costs about 40\$/months. I suggest you to order a US mobile SIM card, because the SIM card is free if you are a student and because you can customize a lot your plan according to your needs.

Sports

As a CMU student you will be allowed to use the gym, the swimming pool, the tennis court,... for free.

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