

Hello, my name is Veronica, and I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in Biotechnology at the Berliner Hochschule für Technik. Through the ELBA program, I embarked on the most exciting and enriching journey of my life. I had always wanted to go abroad, and although I am naturally a rather shy person, I decided to step out of my comfort zone and take on this adventure. The ELBA program offered a unique opportunity for me, especially because TCNJ has a strong focus on research and provided an exceptional chance to work in an outstanding scientific environment.

I completed my practical training phase, including my Bachelor's thesis, over six months in Dr. Peel's laboratory at TCNJ in New Jersey. I was warmly welcomed there and had the opportunity to work on fascinating research questions. My project focused on the microscopic worm *C. elegans*, where I investigated how the absence of a specific protein, a tubulin deglutamylase that modifies microtubules, affects the first meiotic division of oocytes.

After about three weeks of settling in, I became increasingly comfortable with my new surroundings and the research topic. As I gained a deeper understanding of the *C. elegans* life cycle, my enthusiasm grew, and I started developing additional research ideas, which I was able to investigate independently. During my six months in the lab, I deepened my experience with classical laboratory techniques such as PCR, confocal microscopy, and data analysis, and I worked more and more independently toward my research goals.

The atmosphere in the lab was not only productive but also very pleasant and humorous. The students at TCNJ were always open, kind, and helpful, and from these encounters genuine friendships developed. Together we spent time outside the lab as well, attending a baseball game, visiting New York City, and taking a trip to the beach in Ocean City.

I also had the wonderful opportunity to live in a guest house where I was able to stay on my own most of the time, which I really enjoyed. The campus was only about a ten-minute walk away and offered many events where it was easy to meet other students. In addition, the TCNJ campus is truly beautiful.

After submitting my practical report and my Bachelor's thesis, I took the opportunity to travel around the United States. I visited New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas, and even took a breathtaking helicopter flight into the Grand Canyon, which was a wonderful conclusion to this intensive and rewarding experience.

Overall, this journey was unforgettable, and I am very grateful that I took this step and was able to gain so many valuable experiences. I would especially like to thank Dr. Peel for the great support and for giving me the opportunity to learn so much. From this experience, I also take with me the desire to continue working with *C. elegans* after completing my studies, as research with this organism has brought me an incredible amount of joy.

Moreover, this journey helped me grow personally. Through many conversations, I improved my communication skills and adopted some of the open, friendly, and helpful attitude that is simply part of American culture. I can only recommend the ELBA program to anyone considering it. Take the leap into the unknown, it is a truly unforgettable experience that I would repeat any time.







