

## Interview Alisa N. DeGrave



**1. Who are you and where do you come from?**

My name is Alisa DeGrave and I am from Athens, Alabama, USA.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

I earned my Bachelor of Science in Animal Science from Berry College in Georgia, USA. After graduating in 2015, I completed a year-long fellowship in Germany sponsored by the US and German governments. This fellowship put me into direct connection with the many opportunities that the Georg-August University has to offer, including the Cardiovascular Science Master program where I obtained a very distinctive Master of Science degree.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

The IRTG 1816 is specifically interested in the investigation of redox signaling and phosphorylation in regards to heart failure. During my Master thesis, I investigated the connection between reactive oxygen species and RhoA-dependent signaling pathways by generating oxidation-inert and oxidation-mimicking RhoA mutants. This project helped develop my interest in redox signaling involved in cardiac remodeling, thus, encouraging me to apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words. How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

After heart injury, specific cells try to compensate for the injury by overproducing components needed to form the outside matrix of the cell, which consequently results in stiffening of the heart. However, this stiffening of the heart prevents normal contraction. Therefore, I will use these cells to generate human-engineered connective tissue which can act as a model to understand why there is a stiffening of the heart.

By completing my PhD project within an IRTG, I have the opportunity to not only expand my understanding of many related topics by interacting with the other PhD candidates, but I am also able to collaborate on an international level, most significantly with Dr. Elisabeth Ehler's lab at King's College in London. With this opportunity to collaborate internationally, I can learn new techniques not available here in Göttingen, but also receive necessary feedback that can further my research significantly. Furthermore, an IRTG provides workshops and career-building events in order to develop well-rounded scientists.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

Germany, namely Göttingen, is a wonderful place to live because it provides a nice mixture of German culture and also the opportunity to meet other international students. A few of my favorite places to visit in Göttingen are the Botanical Garden and the Kiesesee, because you can easily meet your friends while still being close to nature. Another advantage of living in Göttingen is that you can reach almost anywhere by bike.

**6. What are you doing if you are not in the lab?**

In my free time, I enjoy baking, running, hiking, and spending time with friends, family, and my cat.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

Once I have completed my PhD, I would like to explore my opportunities in academia a bit further and utilize my PhD experience to further cardiovascular research, as heart disease is very prevalent in my family.

## Interview Ana Maria Vergel Leon



**1. Where do you come from?**

I come from Colombia. Bogota is the capital and biggest city of Colombia.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

I studied medicine, then specialized in epidemiology. My studies focused on chronic diseases and the area of internal medicine in cardiology. Then I did a master's in cardiovascular science in Göttingen and I did research in redox pathways and physiopathologic modifications of the cardiovascular system.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

*I am interested in IRTG 1816 PhD program because I want to do research in cardiovascular field. Indeed, this doctoral degree is training me for research and this is teaching me to acquire some academic tools. I have intellectual curiosity and also I enjoy doing research and making hypothesis about unknown topics in pathophysiological pathways in the redox processes in the heart.*

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

My project is about the application of redox engineered cardiomyocyte compartment-specific mice model to study the changes in the cardiomyocyte function and the role of calcium signaling in adaptation towards hypoxia. I profit to do my PhD within an IRTG because it is an International Research Training Group with a collaborative program between multidisciplinary research groups. I think it is a strong point and we are able to do several collaborations with other labs and close cooperation within the projects. In addition, the IRTG profit offers the possibility to collaborate with the King's College London and a double degree.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

The life in Göttingen is really dynamic. Here the city offers a lot of opportunities to develop different atmospheres in the scientific field, professional areas and also exchange of personal experiences.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

I am learning German and interacting with people from different countries to experience the atmosphere of different cultures and also learn about other traditions.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

*My future career plans are connected with performing research in cardiology field. I would like to become a medical researcher. My career goal is to become a researcher in a hospital.*

## Interview Branimir Berečić



### 1. Where do you come from?

I come from Croatia, one of the newer EU members. It's a small country situated just south of Hungary and east from Italy. However, over the years I have spent some time living abroad in different European countries.

### 2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?

My Bachelor's was done at the University of Zagreb in Croatia, while my Master's level education was done at Coventry University in the United Kingdom. Both of them were done in molecular biology, with a predominant focus into cancer biology and targeted gene editing.

### 3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?

Initially when I started looking for PhD projects, I focused on institutions that utilised the CRISPR/Cas9 system to introduce novel functions in non-cancer cell lines. Despite spending most of my education in a framework lined with cancer, I wanted to break out of that and try something new. The IRTG1816 offered an excellent opportunity for that: the overall project is based on different aspects of heart function using either mice, as an *in vivo* model, or engineered heart tissue derived from human iPS cell lines. Furthermore, various biosensors would be integrated into the animal or the cell lines via CRISPR/Cas9 to enable real time monitoring of changes in cardiomyocytes under different conditions.

### 4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?

Simply put, my aim is to measure the effect of reactive oxygen species produced by the mitochondria on the developing muscle tissue in cardiomyocytes. As the IRTG already had an established protocol for generation of engineered heart muscle, more time can be spent doing work and generating new useful data.

### 5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?

Göttingen has the architecture and the look of a small German town, but as soon as you look away from the buildings and focus on the people it becomes a very vibrant and international city. Although, the extremely large number of bicycles and people using them still feels strange; sometimes it feels there are more bikes than people!

### 6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?

There is a time outside of the lab? Just a little joke. I enjoy cooking a lot, so I try to organise some small get-togethers or invite myself into other people's homes to cook and spread new flavours and new cuisine. The rest of the time is spent either tinkering with computers or thinking up new low-quality jokes.

### 7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?

I would like to stay in research, still somewhere in Europe. Nowhere too cold, nowhere too hot. Seems like a perfect description of Göttingen!

## Interview Julius Pronto



**1. Where do you come from?**

I come from the biggest city in the Philippines, Quezon City.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

I studied biology at the University of the Philippines - Manila, and there partook in a study describing the phytoplankton communities in areas with aquaculture activities for my bachelor's thesis. I moved to Korea in 2013, and there I earned my master's degree in medicine, focusing on cardiac metabolism. My work there aimed to compare the left and right ventricular function in rat hearts.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

Initially, I was just looking for a project dealing with arrhythmias to help me further explore the findings of my master's thesis. When I found the open position in Professor Niels Voigt's lab, it piqued my interest as it aims to employ advanced imaging techniques and couple them with electrophysiology in investigating a rather controversial role of mitochondrial calcium in atrial fibrillation pathophysiology. Realizing later that I would be part of the IRTG 1816, I thought that this collaborative network of students and professors would make for an exciting research experience, since I will have the chance to work with leaders in cardiovascular research, as well as students from different parts of the world, using state-of-the-art equipment and sophisticated techniques.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

Our group focuses on electrophysiological techniques and calcium imaging to explain the how atrial fibrillation develops and progresses. My project aims to ascertain a role for the mitochondria in calcium handling in the atria by looking at inter-organella interactions, calcium signaling, and cellular metabolism. Ultimately, we want to determine the mitochondria-related mechanisms involved in the promotion of atrial fibrillation.

I find that working with other students in different disciplines under one theme is advantageous in making comprehensive research, as I am also familiarized with various techniques that might be valuable in strengthening our electrophysiological findings in my lab. The possibility to work with experts at the British Heart Foundation Centre of Research Excellence at King's College London, as well as the potential double degree, would boost not only my skillset and theoretical knowledge, but also networking opportunities during and after my PhD.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

Being in a country with such good scientific network, such as Germany, it is professionally enriching for a PhD student like I am. German is a difficult language to learn, surprisingly even more than Korean, but it has never been a problem within the scientific community here, as well as in Göttingen. The small city of Göttingen is very easy to navigate; but despite its size, there are plenty of things for students to do to socialize, to do or learn a hobby, or just to enjoy nature.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

Living in Europe is definitely perfect for a wanderlust like I am, so I find myself traveling a lot – within and outside Germany. I also enjoy cooking Filipino food for friends, or just trying out new restaurants. I have also been studying German, and started participating in a university choir, and tried taking salsa classes. On lazy days, I just maximize my Netflix subscription or try playing the guitar.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

I plan to continue to work within the same area of knowledge, either as an academic or otherwise.

## Interview Magdalena Shumanska



**1. Where do you come from?**

I come from the north of Macedonia.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

After completing my secondary education in my country, I started my Bachelor study in The Netherlands in a small town called Middleburg (south of the country, close to the Belgian border). My university was called University College Roosevelt. The main reason why I chose to study there was the freedom of choosing your own courses through the three years, and of course the possibility to go abroad. I majored in Science, but I also attended courses from other departments, such as Arts and Humanities and Social Science, and this gave me a broad view of the different subjects and a more broad education. Of course, ultimately I majored in Biomedical and Life Sciences, which is my main interest that prompted me to continue my education in Germany, Göttingen University. Here I did my Master study in Cardiovascular Science, a more specific and detailed program that enabled me to continue with a PhD.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

Through the Cardiovascular Science program I learned about the IRTG 1816 and about the different project topics. My knowledge gained during my master program made me more confident to apply for a position in a project that really interests me the most: a combination of immunology and cardiovascular physiology.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

In very simple words, my project is investigating the role of the immune system in a diseased heart. More specifically, I am looking at the molecular mechanism of cells from the adaptive immune system and their activation, and how this might affect heart failure. Calcium and reactive oxygen species signaling are two very important pathways in these T-cells and have a big role in mediating cell activation and inflammation. The IRTG has provided me a lot of resources which I can use to further investigate this project once it develops. Furthermore, the close collaborations within the IRTG program make it easier to gain and exchange knowledge about a certain topic in a 'safer' environment.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

Since I already lived three years in a foreign country, adapting to the German lifestyle was not that difficult. I met some wonderful people here which are now my close friends and who helped me feel more like home. The language is always a barrier, but in my opinion international students are accepted and are a big part of the community in Göttingen.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

Since lab work takes up so much of my time as a PhD student, interests outside of lab are quite limited. I always try to find time for exercising and sports, as well as spending time with friends. I also love to travel, so I try to visit different places within and outside of Germany whenever I get a chance.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

So far, I do not have specific future plans after my PhD. I would like to continue working in the research field, possibly in an institute or a private company.

## **Interview Mufassra Mushtaq**



### **1. Where do you come from?**

I came from Pakistan that is a South Asian country. It is a beautiful country having diversity in terms of region and culture.

### **2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

After completing my high school, I joined Punjab University, Pakistan for my bachelors, where I studied chemistry as a major subject. After Bachelors, I joined Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan for Master's in Biochemistry. Biochemistry is a vast subject and have different research domains but my interest for cardiac pathologies led me to join signal transduction lab. Under the kind supervision of Dr. Iram Murtaza I finished my Master's thesis with a focus on cardiac hypertrophy and oxidative stress. In my master's thesis, I used the plant extract to scavenge free radicals that are produced in a rat model due to hypertrophied condition.

### **3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG1816?**

I was highly motivated to do my PhD from abroad to interact with people of different cultures and for my personal growth in terms of independence. I was looking for PhD position related to cardiology and I found IRTG1816 program in Germany that grabbed my attention. The program was related to heart failure and redox stress, and involved new techniques, which I have not used before. So, I applied for this position with the hope that it will not only help me in becoming a good researcher but will also create opportunities for my future career.

### **4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within an IRTG?**

Atrial fibrillation is a heart disease that is characterized by fast heartbeat (arrhythmia), and it's relation with oxidative stress is not clearly understood. Therefore, my project aims to study the redox stress and remodelling mechanisms in atrial fibrillation. I am working with mouse models having mutation in Na channel and biosensor implanted to study the pathophysiological mechanism of atrial fibrillation. IRTG1816 is an International research training group having collaboration with multidisciplinary research groups, that enables us to collaborate with other groups and to support each other. This collaboration is beneficial to have a unique experience of sharing data and get new ideas. IRTG1816 is also organizing events like retreats, and social events like Christmas party etc. that provide opportunities for young scientists to interact and have fun along with learning. Additionally, I will also get the double degree if I spend 6 months or more in King's College London.

### **5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

I feel good as an international student to live in Göttingen. It is a small city and one can find all the necessities of life very easily. I found it quite easy to adjust here because there are lot of international people, so people are used to communicate in English. Additionally, IRTG speaker and coordinator

were supportive enough and made my journey from Pakistan to Göttingen smooth and stress free. In short, Göttingen is my new home and I am enjoying stay here.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

During weekdays, I am usually taking German class in the morning. After lab, I usually go for sports because it not only keeps me physically and mentally fit but also I get an opportunity to meet new people and friends. Sometimes I also go for dinner with friends or invite them to have some food together. On weekends I visit nearby cities or make short hiking trips. If I am very lazy, I prefer to stay home, listens to some nice music and treat myself with nice food.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

So far, now I do not have any specific plans after PhD, but definitely, I would look for some opportunities in research. I want to have a good scientific career in the field of cardiovascular sciences.

## Interview Sabine Maamari



**1. Where do you come from?**

I am from Tripoli, Lebanon.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

I did my B.Sc. in Medical laboratory sciences at the American University of Beirut and my M.Sc. in Cardiovascular Sciences at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. My focus was on epigenetic modifications in cardiac fibrosis.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

Since I had the chance to do my master studies here in Göttingen in the heart research field, I was well aware of the success of the IRTG 1816 program and its valuable collaboration with King's College London. I realized that this is a great opportunity and collaborative environment for me to pursue a PhD.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

In my project, I attempt to decipher the role of TET3 in DNA damage response during cardiac fibrosis. Other than the well know role of TET3 as an enzyme capable of the hydroxymethylation of methylated DNA and reactivating silenced genes, we believe that TET3 is also involved in the DNA damage response and repair pathways.

Pursuing my PhD in the IRTG1816 program, one can profit from the expertise of several labs and PhD candidates. Since the main focus of all the labs is the cardiovascular field, it opens up chances for collaboration and provides a medium where one can easily discuss and troubleshoot their experiments.

Other than the local support we receive from our peers here in Göttingen, joining the IRTG1816 program provides us with an international network suited for cardiovascular research. We have the chance to gain experience in collaborating with the partner site and share expertise during our doctoral studies. Also, joining a working group in KCL will enable us to learn new techniques that we can apply in our experimental studies. We will also have the chance to receive feedback from KCL site which will help strengthen our thesis and research thinking methods.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

I believe Göttingen is an international student-friendly city. Throughout the three years living here in Göttingen, I was able to form close friendships and bonds with people from all over the world as well as Germans. Göttingen provides such a perfect opportunity for integration, and as much as it is small, you always have something to do and people to meet.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

If I am not in the lab, I am usually learning German, going to the gym, or exploring Germany over the weekend.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

Since I am interested in the academic field and what it offers, I would like to pursue a Post doc position with relation to Cardiac fibrosis and epigenetics. I would also aim to become a Professor in the future as I really enjoy teaching.

## Interview Sana M. Sheikh



### 1. Where do you come from?

I come from the land of Pakistan that is located within the confines of South Asian region popularly known by dint of its profound scenery and surreal landscape. In Pakistan, I explicitly belong to the city of Gujrat that is an ancient urban area and the 20<sup>th</sup> largest city of Pakistan. Even though, I had been staying in Islamabad- the Federal Capital of Pakistan for the past 08 years to serve the purpose of higher education and professional development.

### 2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which university did you study and what were your focus areas?

I started my BS in Biosciences at COMSATS University Islamabad during the year 2012-2016. After the completion of my BS degree, I got myself enrolled for Masters in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (2016-2018) at COMSATS University Islamabad. During my MS, the research area of my focus was pertinent to health sciences with prime interest in human disease genetics. Soon after the completion of my MS degree, I began my professional career and was appointed as a Research Assistant as well as a Teaching Assistant at Shifa College of Medicine and COMSATS University Islamabad, respectively where I was thoroughly engaged in Gene Expression Profiling/ Studies.

### 3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?

Exploring human diseases on genetic grounds has always been a domain that hugely intrigued me. Therefore, in an attempt to enrich my research interests, I applied for the PhD position in IRTG 1816 so that I may be able to work on cardiovascular diseases- a group of diseases with quite a high prevalence and mortality all across the globe. Moreover, it was a phenomenal opportunity for me to become a part of such a prestigious scholarship program and gain immense expertise by working under the supervision of highly eminent scientists, hence, learning from their experiences. I absolutely liked the intuition and insight of the whole program that attracted my attention more towards applying for this scholarship and work even harder to sustain it for better.

### 4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?

The title of my project is “The role of STAT proteins in controlling leukocyte migration into ischemic areas in myocardial infarction”. My proposed project will provide an insight into the differential STAT1-dependent signal transduction by **IFN- $\gamma$** , that plays a fundamental role in modulating leukocyte behavioral responses through a STAT1-dependent signaling pathway. STAT1 has been a remarkable and novel target of therapeutic intervention that has an important role in facilitating the interaction between damaged vessels. Therefore, its activation by **IFN- $\gamma$  will result in increased expression of inflammatory mediators**. In this regard, IRTG 1816 has been serving as a constant source of funding and provision of all the resources necessitated for on-time execution of the project and its accomplishment within the prescribed time frame. Not only this but IRTG 1816 also sponsors tremendous opportunities for its scholars to attend and become an integral part of the seminars/ workshops/ conferences/ journal clubs through which the chance of interaction and collaborative with the scientific elites is largely enhanced, therefore, adding to the scholar’s expertise over time.

Collaboration with Kings College London within the IRTG will definitely benefit us as team researchers. This joint-PhD programme provides students to pursue a diverse approach towards research within both international renowned institutions. This will be an opportunity for us students to learn and benefit from each other’s experiences and knowledge. The experience that you gain by collaborating with different institution benefits you a lot as a student.

This program gives opportunity to students to work with supervisors from both the institutions and gives us the advantage to gain from their knowledge and experiences. I will take it as an opportunity to expand my expertise with both academic research group, by working in corresponding areas. Last but not least, I will have the opportunity to broaden their expertise and cultural horizons during my stay in two vibrant, European nations.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

As an international student, it is an absolutely incredible experience to live in Germany, particularly, in Göttingen. As this stay is providing me with likelihoods of meeting new people from different cultures across the world and getting to know them, collaborating and integrating with them. Even though, my experience has also been relatively challenging overall. In the initial days, it was a bit difficult to understand the system and the language constraints, nonetheless, this greatly enhances one's growth and adds to the diversity. The more we challenge ourselves the more we grow.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

When I am not in the Lab, I prefer to socialize with my friends and learn through their experiences while their stay here at Germany. I am really intrigued to visit Göttingen and explore its historical dimensions through the course of my stay at Germany.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

After my PhD, I plan to secure a post-doctoral research position at some prestigious institute at Germany. Also, I intend to establish myself in the academic sector so that I may serve to help the prospective students, hence, they can benefit from my knowledge and expertise in the domain of cardiovascular diseases research.

## Interview Surabhi Swarnkar



**1. Where do you come from?**

I am from New Delhi, born and raised in the national capital of India.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

I did my Bachelors at the University of Delhi in Biomedical Science Honors. My Bachelors thesis was based on developing an Aptamer based diagnostic toolbox for rapid detection of Tuberculosis. After finishing my B.Sc., I studied at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi for my M.Sc. in Biotechnology. The main focus area of my thesis was to look at stem cell based regenerative therapy for murine models of Myocardial Infarction.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

I like the framework on which the IRTG 1816 is built on. We have close collaborations with scientists and clinicians, so the research has a high translational value. Moreover, IRTG 1816 follows a theme so we see that there is an overlap one way or the other between different working groups. This enables for better knowledge transfer among peers and there is always some scientific 'food for thought' for everyone through regular seminars and colloquia! These were my major motivations for applying to the IRTG 1816.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

My project is aimed at exploring the redox dynamics of the failing heart. We specifically look into Heart Failure with Preserved Ejection Fraction (HFpEF) which accounts for about half of heart failure cases and for which substantial treatment still remains elusive. I want to employ a redox biosensor in a mouse model of HFpEF and then observe how redox reactions play a role and look for potential anti-oxidant therapeutic targets.

I profit with the IRTG 1816 in several ways. First, there is regular streamlined supervision from top researchers in the respective field. Second, the network of peers and colleagues is really strong so there is always some scope for learning from experiences. I also like the fact that we are working very closely with our partners in King's College London so the depth of collaborative research is even more.

**5. How is it as an international student to live in Germany and Göttingen?**

Göttingen is a lovely and charming city. It is very multi-cultural and equally student friendly. I feel like it is my home away from home. I look forward to snowfall and Christmas markets every year. Moreover, living in Germany allows me to satiate my travel-bug as well, many European destinations that were on my bucket-list are a train or flight journey away. It is always new and exciting!

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

If I am not in the lab, I am in the city center shopping or eating! I also try to travel as much as I can on weekends and holidays. I like to visit cultural events also, plenty of which are regular in Göttingen.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

I want to go the traditional Post-Doc track for a few years and then I may want to try my hand at academia. It all depends on how the next few years roll out.

## Interview Svenja M. Kiehn



**1. Where do you come from?**

I am Coming from Hamburg in Germany. I grew up in a small village in the near of Hamburg and went to a private school in Scheeßel.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

After my Abitur I did a voluntary social year in the surgery area of a hospital in Hamburg. Then I started my bachelor in Biochemistry at the Georg-August-University in Göttingen and wrote my Thesis in the institute for biomolecular chemistry in a medical related topic. My Master I did in cardiovascular science at the University Medical Centre Göttingen (UMG) and I focused on cardiac research with the methods of biochemistry and microscopy.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

I did one of my Lab Rotation within my masters with Prof. Schwappach and Julia Menzel. Julia is part of the second cohort of the IRTG 1816 and told me about it. It sounded very interesting to me, as it also has the cooperation with the United Kings College in London. As I didn't go out of Germany to study, I wanted to take the chance in my PhD. Moreover, I was interested in the topic of channelopathies in the heart and their biochemical investigation and it is the perfect next step in my career as it suits my master education.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

As my PI changed to Prof. Brüggmann in the institute for heart- and cardiovascular physiology my project also changed. My project focused now on the intracellular sodium accumulation during hypertrophy and heart failure. I want to investigate if the lowering of intracellular sodium is a potential therapeutic I target for heart failure. I will use the advantages of an optogenetic tool and electrophysiology to investigate this question. The IRTG 1816 offers me the possibility of two supervisors – one in Göttingen and one in London. With Prof. Shattock in London I have an experienced second supervisor and with the other students of the program I have the opportunity to discuss topics further and exchange experimental experiences.

**5. How is it for you to study in an international environment in which you are in exchange with foreign study colleagues?**

As my master program was also an international program this is not new for me. I really like the different cultures and the different approaches people use to investigate new topics. Also the former studies are very different and are a great possibility to learn from each other.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

I like to swim and be in nature in my free time. Moreover, I have dinner and cooking evenings with my German, Indian, Danish or Spanish friends. In addition, I am following my passion and work in a sauna and going to competitions in sauna show performances. In my holidays I like to travel around in the world.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

As I learned Norwegian, I would like to do a postdoc or intern in Norway. I also would like to habilitate and/or find a save position in an institute which works in cardiac research.



## Interview Wiebke Maurer

**1. Where do you come from?**

I originally come from Göttingen, but moved to Uelzen, a small city close to Hamburg, when I was 12.

**2. Please give us a short overview about your academic education. At which University did you study and what was your focus areas?**

After finishing a biological-technical assistant training in Hamburg I did my B.Sc. in Biology at the Georg-August-University Göttingen with a focus on Molecular Biology. Afterwards, I continued with my M.Sc. in Molecular Biology at the International Max-Planck Research School at the Georg-August-University Göttingen. Now, I am more than happy, that I can continue my academic education with a PhD in the IRTG1816 program.

**3. Why did you apply for a PhD position within the IRTG 1816?**

After finishing my master's in an international program I wanted to stay in an international environment during my PhD as I appreciated the input from the different cultures – on a scientific as well as private level. Additionally, I was looking for a program more oriented towards applied, clinical science. Both, I could find within the IRTG1816 program. Furthermore, I could stay in my favorite city.

**4. Please describe your project in lay words? How do you profit to do your PhD within the IRTG 1816?**

My project is focusing on the molecular causes and functional consequences of dilated cardiomyopathy making use of the very promising model of patient-derived induced pluripotent stem cells.

Doing my PhD within the IRTG 1816 offers the possibility to work in an already existing network of experts of PIs and other PhD students in many different fields all relevant to my topic, who are easy to approach. Additionally, it is a structured program, with a team full of helpful and supportive people, which one can approach whenever in doubt. This gives the opportunity to concentrate on scientific work and not to worry about difficult administrative work too much. Furthermore, the collaboration with the King's College London offers amazing possibilities. On the one hand, we can conduct our PhD studies abroad at an excellent, outstanding collage in a beautiful city and work with even more experts, extending the research possibilities we already have at the University of Göttingen. On the other hand, the possibility of getting a joint degree offers a unique possibility for our future career.

**5. How is it for you to study in an international environment in which you are in exchange with foreign study colleagues?**

Studying in an international environment is amazing as it gives the opportunity to get input from people of different cultures and backgrounds. Especially on a personal level it is super enriching getting to know all the different cultures and habits. One can broaden its horizon and make amazing new friends.

**6. What are you doing, if you are not in the lab?**

If not in lab, I like to spend my time with family, friends and dogs. Cooking together or going for hours-lasting walks in the forest, at the sea or in the mountains. But I also like to spend some time on my own just reading some exciting thriller.

**7. What are your future plans for the time after the PhD?**

That is always a difficult question as there are so many possibilities one could think of. I think after finishing the PhD I would like to continue with a Post-doc position for one to two years if possible, to get more experiences in scientific thinking and working routine. Afterwards, I could imagine switching to the research and development or research and diagnostic area. I am hoping for a perspective career where I, at least partly, still can do hands-on experiments, as I love lab work. Whatever comes, I would like to stay in science for sure.