



**HARVARD  
LAW SCHOOL**

# **EXPERIENCE REPORT**

**RESEARCH STAY AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

**HARVARD LAW SCHOOL (HLS)**

**CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, USA**

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**Vienna, 5 September 2024**

**HARVARD  
LEARN – RESEARCH – TEACH – WORK – GROW  
FOR TRUTH. FOR KNOWLEDGE. FOR A BETTER WORLD.**

I would like to report on my research stay at the Harvard University (USA):

In summer 2024, in the context of writing my habilitation thesis, particularly about the so-called "Freeman-on-the-Land movement" and its history, I conducted research as a visiting researcher at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. The university itself was founded in 1636, is one of the richest universities in the world and has produced numerous important personalities, including eight US presidents (e.g. Barack Obama and John F. Kennedy), 79 Nobel Prize winners and many other people of great influence (for example, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and the current US Secretary of State Antony Blinken). The college became a university in 1780. There are currently around 25,000 students studying at Harvard, and around 20,000 employees ensure everything runs smoothly. The university area is approximately nine hectares in size. My trip to Harvard University was not only a research stay, but for me personally also a journey through the history and culture of the academic world. Harvard conducts outstanding research in the fields of quantum physics, technology, law, political science, economics, administrative science, environmental science, neuroscience, life sciences and medicine.

After a long admission process (letter of purpose, reports, etc.), combined with a demanding test procedure, I received confirmation in January 2024 that I would be able to conduct research at the elite university. In addition to numerous other criteria (e.g., scientific publications in respected journals), it was necessary to have the standing of an expert or professor in one's own research area. I was screened in detail as a researcher by the university. Personal contacts that I maintain in the scientific community were also helpful. In this context, I'd like to thank all colleagues from the science and research sector and in particular the rectorate (keyword: Dean's Letter) for their written recommendation of me.

The scientific culture at such an educational institution for top research with an extremely important level, as Harvard University undoubtedly is, is different from that at German-speaking universities and colleges. The research stay enabled me to get to know the elite university better in a variety of exciting and busy ways. The trip began with a flight from Vienna-Schwechat to Boston Logan International Airport, followed by a drive to my accommodation in Cambridge near Harvard Yard. When I arrived in Cambridge and passed several historic buildings, I already sensed a special academic atmosphere that was combined with intellectual energy. I only realized that I was actually at Harvard when I saw the famous statute of the theologian John Harvard (1607-1638), which sits on the forecourt opposite Harvard Law School. John Harvard is often viewed as the founder of the university, but in reality he did not found the university, but rather was one of the first people to significantly support it.

My long research days, which stretched from approximately 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., were characterized by searching through books, creating new ideas and instructive encounters with well-known professors. I began each research day with a special ritual, namely a short pause in front of the Langdell Library. I was

fascinated by the distinctive lettering above the entrance to the library, which is also the maxim of Harvard Law School: "Non sub homine, sed sub Deo et lege" (in German: "Not under man, but under God and the law"). This saying reflects the idea that all people are equal before the law. A right that is also enshrined in constitutional law in Austria (Art. 7 B-VG).

As a visiting researcher, you also feel a little honored because the food for researchers who are currently working on projects is provided in the individual institutes. For example, there is free coffee (about eight different types of coffee beans to choose from) and nuts to stimulate the brain. In addition to exchange events at the internationally renowned Harvard Law School, I also took part in external academic discourses, including at the Harvard Kennedy School, the Department of Mathematics at Harvard University and the Littauer Center of Public Administration. Here I was given the opportunity to take part in the scientific exchange, although it was quite demanding for me, with my own research focus. What was particularly evident in such discussions was the high expectations of researchers that are required of international scientists at Harvard. The encounter with the world-renowned US probability theorist, Prof. S. R. Srinivasa Varadhan, whom I often quote in my own lectures and seminars, was for me personally one of the most formative events in my research time. I was equally thrilled by the extremely talented Harvard students, their curiosity and their intensive learning. Such characteristics are not always expressed in this form at some universities and colleges around the world. If you look at studying at Harvard, one thing is certain: For many students, it is a dream to study at Harvard. However, the path to get there is extremely time-consuming and only a few can call themselves Harvard students. A small comparison makes you sure: According to the International Office, only 22 students from Austria will be studying at Harvard University in 2024. The number of students coming from Germany is 154. If you consider that Austria has about 9.1 million inhabitants and Germany about 84 million inhabitants, these are extremely small numbers. Students also told me that they really appreciate Harvard's focus on practice within their studies. In the seminars and courses, students learn to deal well with practical issues and to put themselves in different perspectives. Of course, studying also costs something. Colleagues explained to me that for a one-year master's degree, you have to calculate a total of about USD 120,000.00 – that's about EUR 110,000.00. Colleagues from academia also told me that many want to study at Harvard to pursue a career in practice (e.g., at well-known companies). Only a few would study at Harvard with the aim of later working as a scientist. And this also confirms my assessment: Many good professors are appointed to Harvard later, many of them come from abroad. In any case, the diversity of the students who come from different countries around the world to study at the elite university is astonishing.

I was also lucky to stay in the home of a Harvard professor whom I had met at a conference in Germany in 2024. This meant that the housing situation was also unproblematic for me. Thanks to the professor's scientific expertise, even after a long day of research, there were still plenty of topics for me to talk about

science, life, the world, and the search for truth. At the same time, I was able to put my C2 English into practice again, even though American English is something I still need to get used to. The Harvard professor made sure that I quickly found my way into the local Harvard scientific community and also supported me in the meticulous Harvard registration process at the university (e.g., regarding safety instructions or obtaining the researcher ID card). In order to be able to move freely at Harvard as an international researcher, additional introductory training for scientists from abroad is required. As a visiting researcher, who did not belong to the student sector but to the academic and professor (faculty member) sector, I was able to use the technical and library facilities (including access to computers and databases). I was also free to choose my workstation, so I researched in the Widener Library (with around 3.5 million books), Langdell Hall, Lamont Library and Baker Library. Harvard's library offering is exemplary, after all, Harvard Law School includes the world's largest academic law library. Due to the outstanding conditions, I was able to use my entire time at Harvard efficiently for my research. At the end of my research stay, I visited the well-known and extremely respected Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which is also located in Harvard Yard, together with colleagues from the science and research sector. The Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society was also visited. There, the primary research focus is on the interface between the Internet, law, and society. A personal highlight for me was the tour of "Annenberg Hall". It is reminiscent of the famous dining room from the Harry Potter films. At Harvard, Annenberg Hall serves as a dining hall for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for first-year students. The dining room is often busy well into the night as students discuss major scientific questions together. This place has a very special feeling. An unusual insight was also given to me by an acquaintance who also conducts research at Harvard. He showed me the room with the number H-33 in Kirkland House, which serves as a student dormitory, where the idea of founding Facebook was born in 2004. Zuckerberg himself lived in apartment H-33 during his Harvard student days. Today, Facebook is one of the best-known companies, belongs to the Meta Group and employs over 7000 people worldwide.

I was also pleasantly surprised by the security at Harvard University. There is its own Harvard Police Department and also its own shuttle service. Sometimes I had to smile: I had to walk past the statue of John Harvard on my way to work every day. I was able to observe how some students touched the left shoe of the Harvard statue before their entrance interviews, exams, or other academic appointments. Colleagues enlightened me and told me that legend says that touching them would bring them luck. A side detail: It is doubtful whether John Harvard really looked like he is depicted in the statue, because no one really knows what he looked like.

For my personal research and my own "being a scientist", the research stay at Harvard with its wide range of resources was of particular importance. I was able to make contacts with well-known professors on site, with whom I will continue to stay in touch. Possible joint publications have also already been announced. The student "Harvard Law Review", for example, is one of the most respected legal journals

in the USA. I was also able to get to know new ways of thinking, innovative approaches, and new inspirations, while at the same time sharpening my academic profile. What Harvard showed me is the fact that first-class research can be experienced and tangible - beyond the borders of one's own country and one's own research focus. Research thrives on common interests and interdisciplinary ways of thinking. Another special aspect at Harvard is the multidisciplinary collaboration between different scientific fields. In the past, it was often these joint creative and innovative collaborations that led to groundbreaking results for humanity. Of course, there are also aspects that can be discussed critically. Such challenges include, for example, the high level of competition that is evident within the various student groups. The workload, for both students and professors, is also considerable.

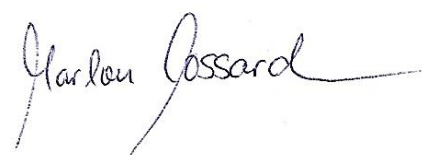
In terms of topics, I was able to take many links with my habilitation project from Harvard, which I am very happy about. The priority here was legal research, which is also strongly interdisciplinary. The links to questions of sociology and philosophy were particularly relevant for me and my research. I will remember the uncomplicated and flexible discussions with renowned professors, such as in the Harvard campus lounges, other locations in Harvard Yard or on a walk along the Charles River. The conversations with students from all over the world with a coffee in the premises of Wasserstein Hall at Harvard Law School were also special for me. This special setting, surrounded by images of all the professors who teach and research at Harvard Law School, is indescribable. I'd like to thank all colleagues from the scientific sector who were involved for their support. This had a lasting impact on my academic career development and further promoted my pursuit of excellence. I am already looking forward to another research stay at Harvard University with its striking brick buildings.

In the end I would like to say:

It doesn't matter whether it's Harvard or another university. It doesn't matter whether it's philosophy, law, or another discipline. We scientists all have one thing in common: We want to understand the world! However, the constant striving of the sciences for truth also shows us that there is still a great deal that remains unexplored. And yet we must admit to ourselves that we are only human. To put it in Shakespeare's words: "*We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.*" (*The Tempest*, Act IV, Scene 1)

Knowledge never ends – and you can feel that especially at Harvard.

**VERITAS!**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marlon Possard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.