

American Society for Matrix Biology Meeting 2016, St Petersburg, FL, USA 13-16 November 2016

I am a fourth year PhD student in the lab of Dr. Dieter Reinhardt at McGill University. With matrix biology being the main focus of my research, it was a great opportunity for me to attend for the first time the biennial conference of the American Society for Matrix Biology held in St. Petersburg, Florida. I am very thankful to ISMB for providing me an international travel award to facilitate my conference attendance.

I was selected by the organization committee to organize a 90-minute special interest session entitled, "ECM in Vascular Development". My responsibilities included developing the scientific program, inviting speakers, selecting student speakers from submitted abstracts, and chairing the session. This provided me with my first experience to single-handedly organize an entire session in a high-profile conference. I also had an oral presentation entitled, "Importance of Cellular and Plasma Fibronectin in Maintaining Vessel Wall Integrity and Function" which enabled me to present my own research project. The turnout of the session was excellent, despite the fact that it competed for attendees with other concurrent sessions. The conference organizers were very pleased with how I had developed the program with excellent speakers from various stages of their research career (from PhD student to senior investigator). I was also appreciated by various conference attendees for my skills as a chair and as a speaker.

Other aspects of the meeting turned out to be very useful for my scientific interest and development. There were talks which were very relevant to my research and helped me to further develop my project. One impressive example was a talk by Dr. Sophie Astrof on the role of fibronectin in blood vessel development. In addition, all the talks within the session entitled "Signaling from the ECM: Cell Matrix Interactions and ECM Growth Factor Regulation" were very relevant to my research and helped me develop my concepts further. Another major impact for me came from the talks which were not directly related to my project. They provided me with new insights into other exciting aspects of matrix biology. These included for example presentations in the sessions entitled "ECM in Exosomes: Intercellular Communication" and "Novel Mechanisms of ECM Regulation". It was further fascinating to hear from Dr. Qing-Jun Meng how circadian rhythms can affect matrix production. These aspects opened a whole new perspective for me to look at my own research.

Other than science, I was also amazed by the social aspects of the conference and the collegiality of peers. The conference dinner evening included a guided tour through the Dali Museum in St. Petersburg. This impressive excursion into another world was like a story being told with a paint brush. I was surprised to discover how Dali was so close in some of his paintings to scientific aspects of life.

In summary, this conference provided me a breathtaking opportunity to intensely develop in various aspects of my scientific endeavors.

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