

Gordon Research Conference (GRC) and Seminar (GRS) on Collagen

Colby-Sawyer College, New London NH United States

15/07/2017 – 21/07/2017

Thanks to the ISMB, which awarded me with an international travel grant, I was able to attend the GRS/GRC on Collagen in July 2017. Being my first international conference in the U.S I was very excited and looking forward to all the new experiences and encounters I would make.

The seminar, held by and for graduate students and post-docs, resembled a unique platform to meet and present data to scientist at the same age and a few senior scientist, who participate the GRS as additional discussion leaders. No situation arose, where I felt uncomfortable or unwelcome, the exact opposite was the case. The friendly, relaxed and open-minded atmosphere invited to ask questions and discuss projects even if the scientific content was not directly linked to my own field of research and helped gaining confidence for the following conference. My highlight during the GRS was the “Mentorship Component: Career Panel”. Within this session we, as young scientist, were allowed to ask leading scientist like John Bateman (Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Australia), Melinda Duer (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom), Joseph Freeman (Rutgers University, USA) or Sufi M. Thomas (University of Kansas Medical Center, USA) how work-life balance is managed, what daily struggles they have to go through, what encouraged them as a scientist the most or how important and valuable a good mentor is. And to my surprise all answered in an honest and humanly way and pointed out that you can achieve leading scientific positions also on a roundabout way.

Encouraged by the GRS I felt prepared to join the conference.

The GRC unites leading investigators of a variety of interconnected and interrelated disciplines essential for a comprehensive and encompassing study and understanding of collagens involved in development, signaling, disease, and regeneration. For that reason I was pleased not to find any hierarchical structures. World famous senior scientist approached young scientist where stimulating and exciting scientific discussions, helpful suggestions and valuable feedback on their and most importantly also on my current work were combined with worldly wisdoms. I did not only gain more insight into the field of collagens, particularly being surrounded by all the expertise, new ideas and state-of-the-art methodologies inspired me and will help me improve my PhD thesis.

Not hesitating to ask a leading scientist for advice might give me the opportunity to visit Taina Pihlajaniemi lab (University of Oulu) to refine my techniques. The conference opened me a scientific landscape of collagen I was not aware of.

Especially as a female scientist I was encouraged to step up and take the lead, being able to become successful in a scientific or non-scientific environment.

I am grateful for this unique experience and can, like former participants, only encourage graduate students and post-docs to attend this conference and experience on their own the “The Spirit of Gordon Conference”.

Stefanie Heumüller, Graduate student, University of Cologne (Germany)