

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/ Conference Title:	American Society for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) Annual Meeting 2015
Travel Dates:	12 th February-22 th February 2015
Location:	San Jose, USA
Group member(s):	Melina-Theoni Gyparaki
Aims:	Present findings of undergraduate research project completed during 2014 summer research program in Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, USA

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

Thanks to the James Rennie Bequest I was awarded, I had the opportunity to participate in the 2015 AAAS annual meeting in San Jose, California. The AAAS conference was a five day program of seminars, lectures, networking opportunities and poster sessions. The conference was open to both undergraduate and post-graduate students as well as post-docs. I was accepted to present my research findings from a summer project I performed in Cold Spring Harbor laboratory (USA) over the summer. I was working in Dr. Marja Timmermans lab studying microRNA-Argonaute associations in plant development. In particular, my findings were presented in the student poster session under the category of Cellular and Molecular Biology. I was also listed as a co-author for another poster in the same category. This poster contained findings from a research project I had performed during the academic year 2013-2014 in Dr. Justin Goodrich's lab in Edinburgh along with another undergraduate, Eliska Zlamalova and in focused on endosperm cell death. Presenting my poster was an incredible experience for me as I felt like a professional researcher. Several academics and peers would come around to ask me questions and in this way, I got to develop my presenting skills which are necessary not just for scientists, but for every profession. During the conference, I also got the chance to volunteer as a session aide. More specifically, I was helping out in different talks and press conferences throughout the length of the conference and in return, I received free conference registration. Again, I got the opportunity to interact with individuals from around the world and I also experienced real scientific press conferences for the first time. As a result, I developed an interest in science journalism and I am now interested to get involved with it later in my scientific career.

When I was not in the poster session or volunteering in another session, I had the chance to attend some talks and explore the city of San Jose. By far, my favourite

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talk was by Karl Deisseroth who is well-known for developing optogenetics, a field that I am very interested in. Finally, the conference was held in San Jose, the heart of the Silicon Valley, and I had the opportunity to walk around the city, visit attractions and also explore nearby universities such as San Jose State University and Stanford University, which is in Palo Alto.

I tried to make the most out of my trip to San Jose, and I believe I did. My participation in the AAAS conference was of benefit, not only on a personal level but also to the Edinburgh University science student body as a whole. I am very grateful for this rare opportunity I had to present real research in a real conference environment. Finally, I am very grateful for the funding provided by the James Rennie Bequest as it gave me the opportunity to attend the 2015 AAAS Annual Meeting in San Jose, an opportunity that I might have not otherwise received.