

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: Kinetoplastid Molecular Cell Biology Conference 2009

Travel Dates: April 25th-29th 2009

Location: Marine Biological laboratory, Woods Hole, MA, USA

Group Member(s): Paula MacGregor

Aims: To present data from my PhD at an international conference

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The Kinetoplastid Molecular Cell Biology meeting is a biennial conference held in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. This is the leading conference in the field in which I work and the 2009 meeting is the only one which will be held during the time I shall be working towards my PhD. Thus, I was eager to have the opportunity to present data from my research at this meeting in order to meet and receive feedback from some of the leaders of the field, as well as to learn about the most up to date advances in the field. As this is such a key meeting in the field, my supervisor, two post-docs and another PhD student in the group in which I work also attended. The meeting had over 250 attendees and more than 100 posters and 50 talks this year.

Having never visited the USA before, I was very much looking forward to the trip from both a scientific and personal point of view. After a long flight and a good night's sleep I was not disappointed. We went out for our first American breakfast of pancakes and bacon with butter cream and maple syrup along with a bottomless cup of coffee. Heaven! This set us up nicely for the conference ahead.

Upon arrival there were immediately familiar names and faces and it seemed like everyone knew everyone else. This was the first time I had appreciated that the term "scientific community" really is an accurate description. As I attempted desperately to hang my large laminated poster which kept curling off the poster board I was assisted by a PhD student from London who had a poster, already perfectly hung, next to mine. She assisted me in finally getting my poster to stay up and it turned out that she worked in a lab run by one of my supervisor's former post-docs. This only helped to reiterate the feeling of community within the field and there was a sense that it was very important to be at this meeting if I too were to be part of this.

The first talk session began that first evening. There were no overlapping sessions and so everyone was able to attend all of the talks. The calibre of the talks, in terms of both presentation and data, were impressive and I thoroughly enjoyed the session. The subsequent sessions over the following few days were of an equally impressive standard and although it was tiring to attend so many talks in such a short space of time it was incredibly interesting. Along with the wealth of information being presented, it was very enjoyable to listen to some of the key players in the field and be able to put faces to so many prominent names in the field. Two of the post-docs from our group gave well received talks and it felt encouraging belonging to such a well represented group.

The poster sessions were held on the second and third evenings of the meeting. My poster was in the first of the two sessions and prior to the start of my session I felt increasingly nervous. I managed to find time for a short walk and detour to my room to gather my thoughts. As soon as I arrived at my poster I had people interested in speaking to me. Many people visited my poster during the session, including numerous principal investigators that I hold in high regard as well as post-docs and PhD students who were able to offer many useful comment and suggestions. It was exciting to have so many people talk to me about my data and it was reassuring to feel that my project was interesting to more than just myself. At one point as the busy room got warmer and my throat got hoarser an ice-filled glass of water was lowered down over the shoulders of the people I was talking to by my supervisor and that was much appreciated. Although the session was rather intense I feel that I gained a great deal in only a few short hours. I had spoken to and received feedback from some of the top scientists in my field and I had gained ideas as well as confidence for my work. During the second poster session I was able to talk with many people about their work - it was a much more relaxing session for myself since I was not presenting. One of the advantages of this particular conference is that there is a lot of time given and effort given to the posters such that the sessions are full of discussion and interest.

On the fourth day, after the conference ended with a final talk session, I left feeling more motivated, more knowledgeable, rather exhausted and truly part of a community. I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest for providing me with funds to travel to this conference. In hindsight, I realised that presenting my data at an international conference had been one of my career goals since I had started my undergraduate degree over 6 years and it was a fantastic feeling to realise that I had achieved this.