

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/

Conference Title: SymBioSE – a Symposium for Biology Students in Europe

Travel Dates: 20th July – 1st August

Location: Freiburg, Germany

Group member(s): Vaiva Jakstaite

Aims: Attending the first ever conference, challenging myself by presenting a poster, meeting other scientists, learning about their research, sharing ideas.

Photography consent form attached: Yes
(please refer to your award letter) No

OUTCOME (a minimum of 500 words):-

Over a couple of weeks, SymBioSE became almost like a magical word to me. It is not simply a biology conference, it is a community of students from all over Europe. SymBioSE is a safe and welcoming space where you can make mistakes, grow and feel like you are at home. This reflection aims to describe everything I learnt during the event and how I developed as a young scientist.

First of all, the scientific programme was so intense and diverse, thus it allowed me to tap into almost every field in biology and clarify my interests. Every morning would start with scientific presentations done by our peers, and later in the afternoons – the workshops. The presentations were particularly interesting to me as I saw the research students are doing, their successes and down moments, thus, overall, I felt inspired. During the workshops, we would usually do something more different, but still related to science, for example - a nature journaling workshop. These sessions allowed my creativity to expand, as well as work in a team, reflect and connect even deeper with other people. After many sessions I came to realize that there are a lot of students that are interdisciplinary as me, their shared stories gave me lots of confidence, most importantly – determination.

On top of the scientific programme, we also had some keynote speakers including professors from Freiburg and other universities. I was especially engaged with the presentation done by Anne-Katrin from Basel University about current research done on microbiota and how immunity is closely linked with our gut. Another example – Dr Ralf Reski's lecture that introduced us to drugs that are made from mosses. Overall, I was always encouraged to think, make links between different topics, and learn something new every single day. I believe that SymBioSE provided me with a phenomenal learning experience.

And to end up with a scientific programme, we had poster sessions that were held at the end of the week. As I had some pitching experience while attending some entrepreneurship events at university, presenting a poster for the first time was not as difficult as I thought. I think the biggest lesson that I learnt from presenting a poster, is that students often worry unnecessarily beforehand, they should trust more in themselves. This experience was

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

fulfilling because I had an opportunity to test my public speaking and presentation skills. Moreover, discussions and debates again encouraged me to think outside the box.

However, SymBioSE is not a normal conference. As one of the participants said to me – it is almost like a biology student summer camp. And that's true as besides science, we had lots of culture and events. This included hiking in a beautiful Blackforest, exploring Freiburg with friends, trying the most delicious German bread, doing country presentations, and learning how to cook some of the traditional foods from all over Europe. Every experience was particularly enriching and helped to create a sense of community that SymBioSE is proud of.

Overall, this conference felt like a miracle. It brought together science, ideas, curiosity, awesome people, and awesome places. I am so grateful to James Rannie Bequest for the funding provided that allowed me to discover this conference and make such a strong connection with science students from Europe.