Horizons – a success story continues

The 5th annual Horizons in molecular biology meeting, a scientific symposium organized by students for students, took place from 10th to 13th of September 2008 in the physics building on the north campus of the Georg-August-University Göttingen. The symposium was once again a gathering place for interested students and renowned scientists from all over the world. They followed the invitation of PhD students from the MSc/PhD Molecular Biology Program - International Max Planck Research School to come to Göttingen. This year’s keynote speakers included Tom Kirchhausen, who solved the first X-ray crystal structure of clathrin, Peter Wright from the Scripps Research Institute in California, Wolf Reik, who investigates the regulation of imprinted genes, and Marino Zerial, winner of the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize 2006.

As every year, the symposium covered topics from the fields of cell biology, neuroscience, structural biology and developmental biology. The special session at this year’s Horizons was computational biology and included Cédric Notredame, co-inventor of the multiple sequence alignment tool T-Coffee. The “Horizons” was preceded by a career fair which aimed at providing interested students with information concerning career planning. This included company presentations, a live interview with recruiters from Roche, workshops and a “behind the scenes look at careers in scientific editing” by Dr. Emilie Marcus, editor at Cell. As in the year before, the second career fair was also very popular among the students.

A convincing concept

No question – the concept of Horizons was again convincing. The organizers are PhD students themselves and they know what a symposium should be like for students to benefit most. Not only did the participants hear up-to-date research presentations, they also had the opportunity to mingle with the invited speakers, network a little and simply become inspired. In addition, the student talks and the poster session allowed PhD students to present and discuss their own work. “Horizons was a good start to overcome my fear of giving talks at big conferences”, says Bijan Boldajipour, PhD student in the Molecular Biology program who won the prize for the best student talk at the Horizons 2008.

Two weeks after Horizons he gave a similar talk for an expert audience and felt that his talk at the student symposium was a good preparation. Positive feedback also came from Christoph Biesemann, member of the Horizons organizing team and winner of the poster prize, who said: „The poster presentation was very rewarding. Discussing my results with the speakers, but also fellow PhD students, allowed me to get direct feedback to my research and even revealed possible collaboration with other labs.“

Altogether, the symposium was well accepted by the students. Christiane Menzfeld, PhD student from Göttingen, was one of the participants. She pointed out that the “symposium offered the possibility to meet PhD students with related projects in an informal atmosphere conducive for networking and exchanging ideas.” She also appreciated the fact that students could meet successful scientists in an informal atmosphere.

Next year’s special session will be particularly interesting for all those coming from a medically-related field who want to know more about interfaces between fundamental research and practical applications since the focus will be on medical biology.

The success story will continue with the 6th Horizons in Molecular Biology which will take place from 9th to 12th of September 2009 – a date you should remember!


Birgit Manno

Lope Flórez Weidinger (left) and Achim Werner (right) – two members of the motivated Horizons organization team.