Gordon Research Seminar and Gordon Research Conference – Tissue Repair and Regeneration, June 4-10, New Hampshire, USA.

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In June 2011, I was lucky enough to receive a CASS Travel Grant to attend the Gordon Conference for Tissue Repair and Regeneration, and the preceding Gordon Seminar, in the remote (although beautiful) woods of New Hampshire, USA. For those who have never been to a Gordon Conference (I was one of them), the program is often quite full (9.00am-9:30pm every day, with a 2.5hr break in the afternoon and an evening social session from 9:30pm-midnight!) and they are held in a setting which encourages networking and interaction, as attendees stay in college dorms and share all meals together.

Despite being in a college, the food was excellent, varied and plentiful (all buffet meals and an ice-cream bar!) with lobster for the final dinner (I heard the record was eating five lobsters, but I only managed one). Drinks flowed freely to stimulate networking, animated discussions and on the last night, awkward yet very fun scientist dancing. I would encourage anyone thinking of attending a Gordon Conference to definitely go, and especially if you are an early career researcher, to go to the associated seminar.

The inaugural Research Seminar preceded the main conference, and was attended by approximately 50 early career researchers. The seminar was specifically designed for students and post-doc researchers to interact and share their research "without scary professors around", and it was a great, supportive environment which encouraged students and post-docs to ask questions of each other. This atmosphere continued into the rest of the conference, with the early career researchers continuing to
interact easily with the other 100 people (including "scary professors") who arrived for the main conference.

The Research Seminar commenced with an amazing plenary from Michael Levin, who trained as a computer scientist interested in artificial intelligence, but who now uses bio-electrical signalling to stimulate tissue regrowth and control the pattern/shape of new tissue. I felt that his talk answered some of the big questions I had with my own project and I was able to discuss some of my ideas and findings with him at the social session that evening. There were also several people at the conference talking about the relationship between nervous tissue and healing, which is an area of research which I am starting to work in now.

The Seminar also had a mentoring component which touched on topics such as: identifying and doing what you are passionate about; research/teaching balance and exposure to new research students; making connections with people from different backgrounds (mathematics, computer scientists); working in different model systems; scheduling your time (identifying what is important and what you can let slide or say no to with your mentor’s assistance); and establishing your independent career (ensure your project has a different line from your supervisor so that you can become independent and then train students/staff and learn to let go so they can do research for you).

The main conference was attended by 150 researchers, including international leaders in the field of tissue repair and regeneration, who were all very approachable and friendly.

The conference had a stimulating program which focused on:

- identifying tissue damage and tissue regeneration signals;
- regeneration genes/proteins;
- misregulated healing;
- inflammation and different models of wound healing/regeneration.

How I participated in the conference and the benefits received:

I presented my work at the conference as a poster, and had many researchers approach me to ask me questions about my research and suggest new pathways that maybe I could take. I found this interaction incredibly useful and it has given me some ideas of new directions I can take my work in the future.

People were interested in the work I presented, the methods I used and my findings. I was able to offer people advice with regards to techniques they are setting up in their labs and give them my contact details if they need any future information/help.

By being exposed to internationally leading research in the field, I now know what the hot topics of interest are (e.g. damage signals), and what new techniques are being used to study them (e.g. screening with arrays, miRNAs). I can now make sure that I incorporate these ideas into my own research to make it more internationally competitive. I also took many notes through the different talks and have been referring to them since I came back, to remind myself of what others are doing and how I can learn from them.

I was also able to talk to the organisers of the Research Seminar about various aspects of organising a conference for early career researchers and students, including the mentoring component of the
seminar, getting sponsorship, and how to select speakers and plenary speakers. This information will help me to organise the Australasian Wound and Tissue Repair Society (AWTRS) Masterclass Day next year in May, which will be similar in structure to the Research Seminar. (See: http://awtrasad2012.mtci.com.au/)

Networking with other early career researchers and people who have just established their own labs was incredibly helpful by seeing what had worked for them and how they had progressed in their careers to date. Everyone was very friendly and willing to establish future links and contacts and share any advice they could offer with regards to establishing yourself as an independent researcher, and doing quality research.

I would like to thank The CASS Foundation for the Travel Grant which enabled me to attend this seminar and conference.