

Report: The 51<sup>st</sup> *Drosophila* Conference  
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The GWIS travel award gave me the opportunity to attend and present my research in the form of a poster at the 51<sup>st</sup> *Drosophila* Conference in Washington DC. This conference is held annually and is the biggest event for the *Drosophila* community, drawing many well-known scientists from around the world. There were over 1600 researchers who attended the meeting, covering a wide range of topics from cell proliferation, to cancer research, to evolution. While the sheer size of the event may be considered as overwhelming, it turned out to be an advantage point.

The conference kick-started with a forum that was chaired by Dr. Hugo Bellen and consisted of six other formidable researchers in the field presenting a brief history of *Drosophila* as a useful research model organism. Among them, Dr. Thom Kaufmann cleverly divided the scientific timeline into the eras of “B.C.” (Before Cloning) and the “A.D.” (After DNA Sequencing). Dr. Gerry Rubin and Dr. Alan Spradling described the importance and the cloning of the *white* gene and how *white* and the discovery of the transposable P element paved the way for a comprehensive gene disruption project -- the *Drosophila* Genome Project. Drs. Sue Celniker and Norbert Perrimon later took the stage and described two new exciting projects. Dr. Celniker announced a project called modENCODE, which is a database of ChIP-seq and RNA-seq that serves as a genome encyclopedia of model organisms. Dr. Perrimon described his effort in the massive genetic screening using RNAi covering the whole genome of the fly, which will be added to the genetic tool bag of the *Drosophila* researchers. Dr. William Gelbart closed the session by telling the audience the history of FlyBase, starting from the “Red Book” (entitled “the Genome of *Drosophila melanogaster*) to the web-based database that exists today. The forum presented the history in a fun and informative way. But more importantly, it also reminded us of the effort behind the tools that we use daily, and may take for granted.

The most rewarding part of the conference for me was none other than the poster session. There were a staggering 900 posters in the exhibition covering a diverse range of topics, including cell biology, stem cells, RNA biology, neural physiology and behavior, and evolution. My poster was under the category of “Chromatin and Epigenetics”. I took advantage of my close proximity to other graduate students and post-docs, who are also studying various aspects of epigenetics, to exchange research ideas. Furthermore, I was able to discuss my research with many people from a variety of backgrounds, and received a lot of useful feedback and insightful suggestions. When I was not presenting, I visited as many interesting posters as possible. It was amazing to be able to learn first-hand from the poster presenters about so many exciting studies using *Drosophila* as a model organism. In some cases, it was also very fulfilling for me to be able to offer some of my insights to the poster presenters.

All in all, my first international conference was very successful and productive. It was inspiring, stimulating, and also very encouraging to see how supportive the *Drosophila* community is. My passion for science was reassured. Therefore, now that I have returned to the lab, I feel rejuvenated and plan to transpire this energy to my research.