

Graduate Women in Science Travel Award Report – Spring 2012

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The generous funding from Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) travel award enabled me to attend the American Association for Cancer Research Special Conference on Tumor Immunology, that was held in Miami, FL, from December 2nd to 5th. This is a smaller conference that takes place every other year, and the theme of this year's conference was "Multidisciplinary Science Driving Basic and Clinical Advances".

It was my first time at a conference that specifically focused on my field of research, so I particularly appreciated how every talk was very interesting to me. Despite being a smaller conference, the main speakers at this conference were all distinguished, well-known scientists of the field. I even had the honor of talking to a few of them, including Dr. Glenn Dranoff, Dr. Charles Drake and Dr. Weiping Zou, over the opening night reception, breakfasts and coffee breaks. The smaller size of the conference, about 400 attendees, really facilitated interaction and networking. I was also pleasantly surprised by how international the crowd was. Many investigators and students I talked to came all the way from New Zealand, Australia, Asia and Europe.

For me, the highlight of this conference was the two poster sessions. When I first learned that the poster sessions were each three hours, I was a little worried that people might start to leave after the first couple of hours, and that I was going to feel exhausted after standing by my poster for so long. On the contrary, not only did the three hours fly by, I even stayed past the allocated time because there were more people coming by my poster to ask questions. Discussions at this poster session were livelier than at any of the others I have presented. Many people commented on how interesting they found my research, which was strong encouragement to me. Since I was not slated to present at the second poster session, I made use of the opportunity to talk with many of those who did present. Some of the information I learned was directly applicable to the studies of my lab-mates, and I shared my new knowledge with them when I returned.

This conference also allowed me to learn about the current research areas of a few of the investigators with whom I am considering pursuing post-doctoral work. In addition, the theme of this year's conference confirmed my interest in translational cancer research.

Overall, I thought this was one of the best conferences that I have ever attended because I learned a lot and networked with many people. This may be the most rewarding point in my graduate career so far. I am truly grateful to GWIS for giving me the opportunity to be able to make the trip to Miami for this conference.