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Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) Travel Report

I was fortunate enough to attend the April 2016 Keystone Symposium on Myeloid Cells (D3) at Ireland's National Event Center in Killarney, Ireland. I am very appreciative of the financial support provided by Graduate Women in Science (GWIS), which made this opportunity possible for me. Not only was this the first international conference that I've attended, but it was also my first time traveling outside the United States. This Symposium covered various aspects of myeloid cell biology, including instruction of the adaptive immune response by innate immunity in health and disease as well as medical interventions used in the clinic.

This Symposium occurred at a pivotal time in my graduate school training since my project had just taken a more clinical focus on inflammatory monocytes, which is a type of myeloid cell that is not widely studied in our department. Talks for each day were organized into general topics. These included "Origins and Diversity" and "Mechanisms of Differentiation and Activation", through which I gained important knowledge from experts in the field on the origins of monocytes and their potential for diverse and specialized roles in tissues. I was then able to share this knowledge with my lab, which was just beginning to focus more specifically on myeloid cell populations in cancer. My favorite session, "Myeloid Cells in Disease Models", highlighted the work of researchers around the world who shared my interests. Gretchen E. Diehl spoke about crosstalk between intestinal myeloid cells and the microbiota in one of my favorite talks. Her talk had relevance to a side project of mine – a collaboration with the Gill lab here at the URM in which we are studying the relationship between the microbiota and the immune response in human head and neck cancer. As a result of her talk, I returned with new ideas and a refreshing outlook on our work.

The three poster sessions provided additional opportunities for me to talk with and learn from researchers from around the world (including Germany, France, Netherlands, UK, Italy, and Singapore) about new techniques and ongoing research involving myeloid cells in disease. Importantly, I had the chance to present a poster of my work entitled, "Intratumoral Inflammatory Monocytes Following Radiotherapy: Implications for Immunotherapy" that was very well received. This led to many helpful discussions and also proved to be a very valuable networking opportunity since I was just beginning to search for postdoc opportunities.

Attending this large, international Keystone Symposium was one of the most impactful experiences that I have had during my graduate school training. It left me with new ideas, important network connections in my field, renewed fervor, and an increased sense of confidence in my work and in myself. Once again I would like to thank the GWIS organizers for the support I received that made attending this Symposium possible.