

GWIS Travel Award Essay

Meghan Clark, Graduate Student Patrick Holland Lab

This February, Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) gave me the opportunity to attend the Bioinorganic Gordon Research Seminar held in Ventura, California. This was my first conference outside of the University of Rochester, and it was a great opportunity to meet other chemists and expand on my knowledge of bioinorganic chemistry.

The Bioinorganic Gordon Research Seminar is unusually small, attended by only about 75 graduate students. All conferees attend the same sequence of presentations, have every meal together, and take a three-hour break in the afternoon. Lastly, there are evening poster sessions. We stayed in the same hotel, and the organizers of the conference assigned roommates for each of us. The small atmosphere of the Gordon conference was one of my favorite aspects because it allowed me to get to know the other conferees quite well and become more familiar with the details of their work.

Another interesting aspect of this particular Gordon Research Seminar is that it overlapped for one night with the Metals in Biology Gordon Research Conference, which is attended mainly by professors. During this time, Karl Wieghardt, who is a well-known chemist, discussed various redox-active ligands. This first night was a great opportunity to meet established professors whose papers I'd already read. We discussed many unpublished results, and a number of professors gave me suggestions for future work based on their own unpublished data. This was a great opportunity to learn about chemistry that I couldn't have read about in papers.

I presented a poster entitled "Studies of Synthetic Iron-Sulfur Clusters in an Attempt to Model Nitrogenase Activity" during the three nights of poster sessions. My presentation showed how I have made low-coordinate iron-sulfur complexes in hopes of modeling the enzyme nitrogenase. I received great questions from other chemists regarding the biological aspect of my project and its relation to nitrogenase. These questions forced me out of my comfort zone and made me think about aspects of my project that I hadn't thought about before. Since my group focuses on synthesis and spectroscopy, I am not as versed in thinking about the biological relevance of my project. My interactions at this conference made me think about my project from new perspectives. Although I was presenting my own poster, having the poster session every night of the conference gave me a chance to see many other posters as well.

In conclusion, I want to thank GWIS for the opportunity to attend the Bioinorganic Gordon Research Seminar. The conference was a great opportunity to discuss new results with many chemists and also to get feedback on my own recent work. This conference provided a unique opportunity to meet with professors and graduate students outside of the university and allowed me to expand my thinking as a chemist.