

GWIS Travel Award Report
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The Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) Travel Award funded my attendance at the 11th Congress of the International Society of Developmental and Comparative Immunology (ISDCI), which was held in Prague, Czech Republic from June 28th to July 4th. This Congress is held once every three years. It is the only venue where experts and students in the comparative immunology field get together and interact, share ideas, and explore exciting new research.

This Congress was a great milestone of my graduate career – there, I presented my first oral presentation outside of the University of Rochester and this was my last chance to present my Ph.D. research at an ISDCI. The title of my talk was “Roles of MHC class Ia and class Ib in CD8 T cell function”. My talk was held during the major histocompatibility (MHC) session. Before my presentation I was very nervous. However, after starting I was very excited to be able to share my research with a large audience at an international scale. Also, I was very pleasantly surprised that many of the leading scientists of our field were very interested in my research. There was special interest in my generating transgenic *Xenopus laevis* that have modulated expression of MHC class I genes, which will allow us to study the involvement of these genes in CD8 T-cell function *in vivo*. I was approached by a number of scientists, including Dr. Martin Flajnik and Dr. Eva Bengten, who wanted to discuss my results in detail as well as offer their suggestions for future research. In addition, my conversation with Dr. Bengten may lead to a collaboration. She is very interested in using our siRNA strategy to down-regulate certain immunologically relevant genes in the channel catfish.

In addition, this Congress allowed me to familiarize myself with many different topics of developmental and comparative immunology that are not directly in my field of expertise. Some of the sessions that I enjoyed the most included T- and B-cell Receptors and Function, Immunoglobulin Superfamily and its Evolution, Immune Effector Molecules, and the MHC. Furthermore, since this was a week-long Congress, we were privileged to have some of the most influential plenary speakers from our field as well as from other areas of immunology. For instance, the Congress opened up with a plenary lecture by Dr. Richard Flavell, who is an expert in the new and very popular field of inflammasome research. In addition, the plenary talks of Dr. Shizuo Akira (negative regulation in toll-like receptor responses) and Dr. Dietmar Schmucker (diverse immune receptors in arthropods) were scientifically very stimulating and made me realize that we, as scientists, sometime have to look “outside the box” and let our model organisms lead us to an answer that we may not have had a question for in the beginning.

This Congress also provided us with numerous opportunities for interacting with many different participants. There were many coffee breaks in between sessions where we were able to talk to speakers. There was also plenty of time for scientific discussions during lunches, which all 350 participants attended. Furthermore, there were two different poster sessions and many social activities where we were able to get to know each other and discuss possible post-doctorate opportunities. In addition to making new contacts, I also had an opportunity to talk with our current collaborators and discuss our research as well as new ideas that stemmed from the Congress.

In summary, I am grateful to GWIS for allowing me the opportunity to attend this ISDCI Congress as well as to my advisor, Dr. Jacques Robert, for all of his support and encouragement.