

Viktoriya Anokhina, PhD candidate in Biochemistry in the lab of Dr. Benjamin L. Miller
University of Rochester Graduate Women in Science Supported Travel Award
Gordon Research Seminar and Conference in Nucleosides, Nucleotides and Oligonucleotides,
Newport, RI, USA June 22– 28, 2019

I want to thank the Graduate Women in Science (GWIS) for supporting my travel to the Gordon Research Conference (GRC) and the preceding Gordon Research Seminar (GRS) on Nucleosides, Nucleotides, and Oligonucleotides (NNO).

GRCs are small, selective, specialized conferences where experts in the field from all over the world, along with graduate students and postdocs, present unpublished data during their talks and poster sessions, meet and exchange ideas, network, and start collaborations.

GRS are two-day conferences for scientists at their earlier career stages that precede the principal GRC. GRSs allow trainees to show their work to peers, to practice their scientific presentations in a relaxed setting, and network. GRS attendees become familiar with each other before the arrival of senior scientists. I presented a talk and poster at the GRS and a poster at the GRC entitled "Improving the efficiency of HIV-1 FSS-targeting compounds". During the first day of the GRS, in addition to talks of earlier-career scientists, Mark Saltzman, professor at Yale University, presented his keynote lecture, "Polymer Nanomaterials as Delivery Systems for Oligonucleotides." At the end of the oral presentations, we had a short career panel where John Randolph from Roche Molecular Systems, Jessica Rouge, an assistant professor from the University of Connecticut, and Mark Saltzman, shared their career paths with us. It was especially helpful because some of them had moved from academia to industry and back.

At the end of the GRS, we were supposed to elect who will serve as future co-chairs for the GRS in 2021 (the NNO conference happens once every two years). Attendees vote anonymously, and organizers announced at the end of the second day that I had been elected to serve as a co-chair for GRS 2021. I am excited about the opportunity to be part of an organizing committee for the conference. I think that serving in this role will advance my professional development.

During the GRC, I had a chance to interact with professors who I had met before, at the University of Rochester or other scientific symposiums. They included Drs. Amanda Hargrove, Jay Schneecloth, Eriks Rozners, and Cynthia Burrows. Also, I was introduced to professors who were new to me during informal interactions. One unique opportunity that we had during our GRC was casual lunch with representatives from different careers, such as careers in academia, industry, publishing, government agencies or science policy. Networking and discussions at the GRC feel natural and enjoyable because most happen in informal settings: over meals when one can eat with new participants, and at the end of the day when people mingle for discussion over a glass of wine.

This conference was at the right moment in my PhD training. I had the opportunity to share my research and get valuable feedback from experts in the field, have discussions with professors during which they gave advice on next career steps; network with my peers, and maintain collaborations as well as start new ones. Overall, I highly recommend the GRC for current trainees. It allows participants to broaden their scientific scope and get valuable research advice. I am also profoundly grateful to GWIS for the chance to attend this conference, which I view as being crucial for my scientific and professional development.