

Irina Chernyakov

The GWIS travel award funded my travel to the 2006 meeting of the RNA Society. It was my first opportunity to go to an international science conference, and it was a unique learning experience both on an academic and personal level. On the academic level, I attended a variety of seminars, learned about current research topics of interest, and presented my own data. On a more personal level, I met and exchanged ideas with students and faculty from the world of RNA biology.

Attending the numerous seminars during the course of the conference expanded my horizon dramatically. For my purposes, I can divide the seminars into three categories: ones that pertained to my own research, ones whose topics I was at least somewhat familiar with and ones that were completely new to me. Needless to say, most seminars fell into the two latter categories, and all three were immensely valuable. Not only did I learn more than I could have imagined about the different questions that are currently being investigated, I also learned a lot about how a good seminar should be organized and presented.

One of the most valuable experiences of the conference was presenting my own research at one of the poster sessions. I reported on my efforts to characterize a novel tRNA degradation pathway that had been identified in our lab. I was surprised by the number of people, both students, post docs and faculty, who came up to me to ask about my data and to offer their perspective. It was great to be able to speak with faculty from other universities about my research, and this was the only opportunity to do so. As a result, I got several new ideas about experiments that I can do to help me in my research.

Finally, I also really enjoyed the social aspect of the conference. Just meeting and hanging out with students and post docs from other labs, and also speaking with faculty from other universities. I went to a mentor lunch where we discussed possible career choices and the challenges that exist for graduate students and post docs, and got some advice on how to overcome them. In the end, it helped me better understand how the science world works and where I want to be within it.