

2014 AC21 Special Project Fund

Project: Pilot-Project – creating greater international PhD student mobility through short term exchange opportunities

REPORT

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The aim of this project was to stimulate international exchange and to seed research collaboration through a short-term but structured visit by PhD and Masters students from the **University of Freiburg Spemann Graduate School of Biology and Medicine** and **Nagoya University School of Medicine & Graduate School of Medicine** to **The University of Adelaide's Faculty of Health Sciences**.

In total, ten PhD and Masters students from Germany and Japan – none of whom had visited Australia before – took part in a two-week program of research-related activities, networking opportunities, presentations, our annual conference, and short term placements at South Australian research organisations. Highlights of the students' involvements included:

- Presenting their research projects to Adelaide PhD students and senior academics at a Research Presentation Day.
- Poster presentations at Adelaide's Florey International Research Conference (a jury of senior international academics reviewed the submissions, and Natalie Stickel from the University of Freiburg and Nozomu Kawashima from Nagoya University were awarded \$500 each for the best international visitor poster presentations.)
- Four days spent in research groups at the recently opened *South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute*, *The Hanson Institute*, *Adelaide's Women's & Children's Hospital* and *Adelaide University's Medical School*. Being placed at research centres undertaking research in a similar field to their own, the students had the opportunity to become immersed in these institutes' research activities, as well as to learn new techniques.
- Participations in a panel discussion with Fiona Wood – world-renowned plastic surgeon, member of the Order of Australia and former holder of *The Australian of the Year* – regarding burns treatment, the psychological impact on burns victims, and fire protection and disaster management.

In addition to these research- and networking-rich activities, the students benefitted from welcome and farewell receptions, social events, and sightseeing tours, enabling them to meet with the culturally diverse Australian population and to see and experience South Australia's famous wine regions, national parks and wildlife.

Student participant feedback included the comments:

- *...really good researchers [who] have expertise in fields and techniques that we don't have in Freiburg. It is also a great working atmosphere and a beautiful city...*
- *It was a great opportunity to get in contact with many international researchers, present your research abroad and learn about ongoing research in your own field... ...can only be recommended to future students.*
- *...a unique chance to participate in a new program of exchanges which could be helpful for me to experience the working atmosphere, labs and people in Australia...*
- *...a good opportunity to meet international students, PIs and potential collaborators – a chance to present my research in an international environment and to learn about research at Adelaide and Nagoya University.*
- *I did establish a lot of contacts, which will hopefully help me in my future career.*
- *A lot of interesting lab visits, talks, lectures & the conference. But also enough time to explore Adelaide and the region. The organised tours were amazing!*
- *It was a great experience... Most important to me is that I learned about how to apply for a PhD and the possibilities I have here.*
- *I definitely recommend a future visit to my colleagues...*
- *People here are friendly and there is great rapport and interaction in the labs. Also, researchers here are passionate both in their work and in enjoying their after hours...*
- *'It is a great pleasure for me to visit the University of Adelaide. There are many great scientists and interesting works here. Having collaboration with the University of Adelaide makes our scientific background even stronger. If there is a chance, I will recommend a future visit to the University of Adelaide to my friends/colleagues without hesitation*
- *There are not so many chances to visit another countries, universities or laboratories. So I strongly recommend this to my friends or colleagues. This kind of activity has many positive effects such as giving wide vision of study and communication skills.*

Outcome and Future

This project has undoubtedly facilitated and stimulated contact between PhD students and researchers from the AC21 universities of Freiburg, Adelaide and Nagoya, has given PhD students valuable insights into mobility opportunities, different research and social cultures, and built bridges which will encourage and enable PhD student and academic exchange and research opportunities.

The three universities are committed to making this collaboration sustainable:

- The University of Freiburg has invited up to 15 Adelaide and Nagoya students to participate in their international conference in March 2015. Adelaide and Nagoya

students will have the opportunity to attend satellite workshops and practical courses and present their posters and visit host research groups.

- It is anticipated that Nagoya University will be hosting a very similar PhD student program in 2016.
- Adelaide and Nagoya are planning to establish a Joint PhD degree program in 2015. A Memorandum of Understanding is currently in negotiation.
- Future academic exchanges are planned and taskforces established to attract research and project funding from national and international organisations.

We also believe that one of the most important benefits of the project was the students' enthusiasm post-visit, and the very real value in them becoming advocates and ambassadors for research mobility and overseas opportunities.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the AC21 General Secretariat and the AC21 Special Project Fund for their generous financial support, without which this project, and its outcomes, could not have occurred. The AC21 funding facilitated a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our relationship with Freiburg and Nagoya.

Appendices

Participating Exchange students

Freiburg - Natalie Stickel (PhD student), Annika Hausmann (Masters student), Chiara Pazzagli (PhD student), Thorsten Kaltenbacher (Masters student)

Nagoya - Mizuho Hiramatsu-Ito (PhD student), Jingrui Xing (PhD student), Nozomu Kawashima (PhD student), Shoma Tsubota (PhD student), Mohammed Ahmed Mansour (PhD student), Gewen Tan (PhD student)

Attachments

Presentation Day Flyer 2014

Florey International Postgraduate Research Conference

Program for Freiburg & Nagoya Visiting Research Students