Introduce someone to research with a Summer Vacation Studentship

The next application deadline for Summer Vacation Studentships is 28 February 2007. Forms, rules and guidelines can be found at http://www.biochemistry.org/education/vacation.htm

The Learning Curve feature in the August 2006 issue of The Biochemist provided a snapshot of the Society’s Summer Vacation Studentship Awards and the expectations of the ten students about to embark upon 8-week research projects at institutions across the globe. In this follow-up article, I catch up with the undergraduates and their supervisors to find out how they each benefited from a summer in the laboratory.

The supervisors

Rebecca Porter
(Department of Dermatology, University of Cardiff)
“We benefited a lot from the studentship. John [Mason] produced work that we couldn’t have otherwise generated in 8 weeks. My postdoc had the valuable experience of supervising and running a project—an important part of training to become a group leader. We would thoroughly recommend the scheme to other labs.”

Patricia Martin
(Department of Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University)
“Ann-Marie [Allen] made important progress in the lab that will greatly assist a new PhD student. An application to secure funding for this project will also follow. Studentships are an excellent way to attract motivated undergraduate students to gain research experience.

Alice Rothnie
(Cancer Research Institute, Queen’s University)
“As a postdoctoral fellow I am still relatively early on in my career. I gained valuable experience both in supervising a student and writing the proposal (in which strong emphasis is given to the student, their project and available support, rather than focusing heavily on the supervisor’s CV). The Society’s scheme is rare in allowing the studentship to be taken up outside of Europe. I encourage other labs to take on summer students; I would do again as it was really rewarding.”

Sophie Jackson
(Department of Chemistry, University of Cambridge)
“With the additional resource of a summer student we extended our studies, based on very recent publications. The PhD students all gained valuable experience in supervising and training. Shreyas [Mukund] was excellent and asked all the basic questions usually skipped over, thus making the PhD students think hard about the technical problems which were subsequently solved.”

Philip J. Reeves
(Department of Biological Sciences, University of Essex)
“As a new investigator it is often difficult to secure long-term funding in the absence of preliminary data. The studentship helped us move projects along to a stage where we can soon apply for a significant research grant. I strongly endorse this excellent scheme and I hope it can be expanded to provide similar research opportunities for talented, keen students at such an early, but influential, stage of their scientific development. It was a pleasure to supervise Kieron [South], who quickly mastered techniques and became relatively independent both in the planning and execution of experiments.”

Paul Jarvis
(Department of Biology, University of Leicester)
“The grant has been extremely useful, since it provided a mechanism for us to retain an excellent student over the summer. Nick [Putz] had been working with us on the Erasmus programme and would otherwise have

Students and Supervisors

by Hannah Baker
(Professional Education Projects Manager)

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Kieron South  
(University of Essex)  
“I feel fortunate to have been given the opportunity to collaborate on such interesting work. The benefits were mostly in the development of my practical skills, initiative and communicating with the team. I now have confidence in my ability as a scientist and reinforced my enthusiasm towards a career in research.”

Nick Putz  
(University of Leicester)  
“I learnt and applied various amazing techniques, gaining a deeper insight into the theory behind the experiments — more than any lecture could provide me with. It was a chance to get a feel for serious research. A vital skill was to cope with failed experiments and to use their outcomes to improve them.”

Ben Davis  
(University of Nottingham)  
“I've had the opportunity to experience life in an internationally-active research laboratory and develop skills essential for a career in research, for example, improving my time management in preparing and running experiments simultaneously to minimize ‘dead time’ and valuable experience with scientific equipment, normally inaccessible to undergraduates.”

Emma Hall  
(Edinburgh University)  
“I've now decided to pursue a career in biological research. It was great being able to travel to and work in the USA and experience a different culture. My supervisor's limitless patience and advice in the face of my continuous questioning created a positive working environment. It has been an enjoyable and beneficial way to spend my summer.”

Ann-Marie Allen  
(Glasgow Caledonian University)  
“I achieved so much in terms of practical skills and confidence. Because of my results, a new project will also be initiated. The insight I gained into the biochemical world challenged my way of thinking and alerted me to all the possible underlying features related to pathological disease processes.”

Robert Brogan  
(University of Glasgow)  
“The studentship let me experience hands on research, allowing me to understand the problems and challenges faced by medical researchers and to be more critical of published research. This will help me chose my future career track following the completion of my medical studies.”

Kate Starr  
(Nottingham University)  
“I have increased my confidence and knowledge, developed many technical skills, learnt how to record data and read many current articles. There was opportunity to discuss work with my supervisor and in lab meetings. I developed my presentation skills through public speaking when attending a conference with a poster.”

Phil Mason  
(Haematology Division, Washington University Medical School)  
“A good summer student will bring two major advantages to the lab: first and foremost a bright, open mind to bear on the scientific problem. This is stimulating, refreshing and contributes positively to the work of the lab. Secondly, the position creates opportunity to do risky and innovative experiments. This makes room for the more curiosity-driven research we always want to do, instead of the pressured paper/grant driven research we must do. The method of application selection based on peer review could not be better.”

The students

John Mason  
(Cardiff University)  
“This studentship provided a real insight into research, demonstrating how much time researchers invest in order to produce consistent and publishable results. I carried out many techniques and procedures that will be extremely valuable in my final project and I now have impressive material to include in my statement for postgraduate medicine.”

Shreyas Mukund  
(University of Cambridge)  
“With the continual need to update and alter my investigations, I gained a better understanding of experimental design. The interdisciplinary environment of this cutting-edge lab made it easier to understand the physical basis of the techniques, alongside the biochemical significance of the results.”

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(Haematology Division, Washington University Medical School)  
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The Biochemist — December 2006. © 2006 Biochemical Society