

The 17th EMBL Ph.D Symposium “Just by Chance? – Randomness & Variability Shaping Biology –”

October 22 (Thu) – 24 (Sat), 2015

EMBL, Heidelberg

Two PhD students from SOKENDAI/NIBB were funded by NIBB to participate in the The 17th EMBL Ph.D Symposium “Just by Chance? – Randomness & Variability Shaping Biology –” (held on 22-24 October). Our students had the chance to give poster presentations at the symposium to introduce their current research. They also attended EMBL’s laboratories to exchange experimental information and discuss their research with PhD students, post-docs and PIs.

Comments from students (excerpts)

• Rie Ohashi

Various topics were provided in the Ph.D. Symposium, e.g. developmental biology, evolution, structural dynamics and bioinformatics. I was very interested in the programs because these topics covered “wet” (experimental biology) to “dry” (informatics), which reflects current biology. During the coffee breaks, students were proactive in their communications with each other. I presented my research in a poster session. My theme didn’t completely match the theme of the symposium, but many people came to my poster. I was nervous because I had to speak only in English. However, during the poster session, I felt that we were able to understand each other through the scientific topics, much better than through the topics during the coffee break, so it was an enjoyable time.

Afer the symposium I visited the laboratory of Dr. Anne Ephrussi, who aims to reveal the mechanism of local translation in *Drosophila* embryos. I introduced my research to the lab members in an informal seminar for about 40 min. After that, we discussed my work and their work with a few lab members. I was very glad that they asked many questions. However, it was difficult for me to understand their questions quickly, because their talking speed was very fast for me, so I had to ask people to repeat their questions to understand. We communicated with each other using not only language but also drawing pictures. I reflected on these points a lot during my lab visit, but it was still a very precious time for me. I will make use of this experience in the future.

On the last day, I visited Dr. Kota Miura, who is an image analysis coordinator at EMBL. He has been living in Germany for many years. I heard about the various differences between Europe and Japan, including how researchers perceive molecular biology in their research. I was very interested in that, and it was a meaningful experience.

I felt that I have to make more of an effort to survive as a researcher, but I strongly reaffirmed my commitment because of this EMBL visit. Finally, I would like to thank to the staff of NIBB and EMBL for supporting my visit.

• Yousef Kamrani

The aim of the EMBL PhD student symposium was “to explore the importance of randomness and variability in biology”; I realized that applying bioinformatics to biology research should be highlighted and it was a useful hint for me. The symposium attracted mostly early-stage PhD students and high-profile speakers spanning all continents with diverse backgrounds. The symposium program had been formulated with several lectures, short talks and a poster session. At the end of each day, we had a blackboard session and a panel discussion. At the blackboard discussions we could choose our topic of interest and sit down with speakers in a small group to share insights from their most recent research. This time was a great opportunity. Moreover, I was able to strengthen my network of connections with other scientists. After a three day tight schedule, I had a weekend to tour Heidelberg city. I passed through many historic treasures including Heidelberg’s Schloss (castle) and the Neckar River’s autumn colors absolutely invigorated me.

The second part of my program was a one week training course at the EMBL GeneCore facility headed by Dr. Vladimir Benes. I practiced a protocol provided by Dr. Bernd Klaus -a step by step method- using statistical bioinformatics to analyze high-throughput sequencing data such as DNA-Seq or RNA-Seq. I was supported technically by highly qualified staff in Dr. Benes’ group. The atmosphere of his lab was very relaxed and friendly. I am looking forward to having an opportunity again in the near future to visit EMBL.

