

International Travel Award – Attendee’s Experience Letter

Blake N. Johnson – June 15, 2011

As a recipient of the International Travel Award through the Office of International Programs I was able to attend a conference organized by experts in my field that I otherwise might not have been able to experience. At the time of the conference I was finishing my third year as a PhD candidate in the Department of Chemical Engineering. My PhD work is focused on developing biosensing technology and applications as a member Prof. Raj Mutharasan’s Biosensing group. During the first three years of my studies, I had various publications in peer-reviewed journals as first author, collaborated in other peer-reviewed publications as a secondary author, and attended a conference of experts in my field in Boston, MA to present my work during my second year. Since I have aspirations to ultimately join the academic ranks as a member and leader in my field as a faculty member at a university one day, my adviser and I jumped at the opportunity for me to attend the Nano-mechanical Cantilever Conference in Dublin, Ireland during May 13th – 15th, 2011.

As stated earlier, the conference was not oriented towards broad topics as is the typical conference design when hosted by large professional societies (e.g. ACS, AIChE), but was hosted by the focused community of those who use electromechanical devices, specifically cantilever structures, for biosensing applications. Thus, it was not only a valuable opportunity for me because I acquired new skills and knowledge that I could integrate into my current research projects, making them more significant, but was also a great chance for me to develop a network with other experts in my field that I can draw upon for future collaborations, academic positions, and consultation in research endeavors. While at the conference, I presented a poster that summarized some of the significant work that my group and I had done at Drexel University. Communication with my peers during the session was a great opportunity to both communicate the ways our research has significance to other groups’ research but also to receive feedback from other experts that has enriched our research. We have already begun to implement ideas into our research that came as a result of this experience.

In addition to the valuable contribution the conference had to my research and academic experience at Drexel University, it also provided me with the opportunity to observe the nature of scientific research in an international setting. This was significant since I would like to do research in an international setting at one point in my career. Attending the conference in an international location also was a great experience to both share American culture with foreign scientists and population, and to learn more about Irish culture with respect to both research philosophy as well as general lifestyle. It was a great opportunity to be an ambassador for Drexel University at this international conference and showcase how Drexel University is currently making a valuable contribution to the scientific community. I thank the Office of International Programs very much for such an opportunity. –B.N. Johnson

