8th Spring School on Immunology, Ettal, Germany, March 11-16, 2012

Organized by the German Society for Immunology (DGfI)

For the 8th year, DGfI has hosted the ‘Spring School on Immunology’ in Ettal, Bavaria. In the charming setting of an old cloister, 60 doctoral students and 25 lecturers, experts in their field, come together to discuss the latest developments in Immunology. The Spring School has become well known not only in Germany but also in the international scientific community. The School attracts renowned international speakers to join the leading immunologists from Germany.

The course is now in high demand, with twice as many applications as available. The direct and intense contact between young students and renowned immunologists leads to lively discussion, often till late at night, and gives the students excellent opportunities for networking early on in their career. Of course there are countless discussions between the students themselves, which surely lead to many co-operations and even friendships. Last year, for the first time, DGfI was able to invite 3 young scientists from developing countries, in co-sponsorship with IUlS. This year again, 3 students attended the course and their testimonies follow:

- Jan Stuchlý, PhD student, 2nd Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

“The 8th Spring School of Immunology in Ettal was a wonderful experience. It was perfectly organized and I found all lectures interesting – even those lectures beyond my knowledge (probably thanks to skilled lecturers). What I found the most appealing were the “Questions & Answers” sessions after each block of lectures.

The main benefit for me is probably not usual. – I am a mathematician by education, although I have studied medicine for a couple of years and have now been studying Immunology for 3 years, and my work is usually rather theoretical. During the lectures I have seen many possibilities where it would be possible to apply rigorous mathematical treatment to improve the understanding of biology. The program of this meeting lead me through various parts of immunology, which I had neglected so far in my research; those lectures made me enjoy this field again. I regret only that Thomas Höfer could not come (considering the slides of his intended talk, it would have ben most absorbing for me to discuss the topic of mathematical biology with him). Nevertheless I was able to learn about another lab working in the field of theoretical immunology.

Another benefit for me was the “practical” - the possibility of getting information about large number of cytokine samples of interest. Overall I have to say, that the Spring School in Ettal was definitely one of the best meetings I have ever attended. The proof is, that despite the early start (– I am used to getting up much later) and the demanding program I was not tired during the whole week.

I would like to thank all organizers, lecturers and participant for a really pleasant week!”
"My participation in The Spring School on Immunology in Ettal was very useful for many reasons. First, the vast majority of students present at the school were doing their research in Germany. By interacting with them I was able to compare my work and generally the typical work flow at my home lab to those in Germany. Personally, that was very useful and it should be very helpful for everybody coming from “scientifically less developed countries”. Having opportunity to hear the talks from the top scientists in their fields was great and not to mention what privilege it was to have Mr. Jules Hoffmann among them. First hand communication with the lecturers in the “Questions & Answers” sessions was great, as we could discuss anything with them, considering career planning, their scientific development or issues related to the specific research area. Overall, my impressions of this School on Immunology are great. This kind of events always broaden my horizons and make me think with much more positive criticism when it comes to my scientific work and development."

- Sheila Ommeh, Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa (BecA), Nairobi, Kenya

"Generally, the course was really great. It was an excellent opportunity for me to meet leading researchers in the field as well as Nobel laureates. The first day was very interesting since I got a lot of insights and the latest information regarding Innate Immunity. Since I work in this area, this day format was very useful for me and I was able to get useful pointers regarding my own research.

The second and last days were a bit complicated for me since I do not directly work with adaptive immunity, autoimmunity and related diseases. Some of the topics presented were very specific and therefore it was not easy to follow. The third day was the most interesting since I came to appreciate the emerging fields in immunology especially epigenetics. And from the poster sessions, I got very useful contributions regarding some of the expression patterns from the results, which were attributed to epigenetic factors."
I also enjoyed the poster sessions as well as the meeting with different companies for different products. However, I was somewhat disappointed with the practical session, which in my view did not seem to cater to everyone’s needs since we were all at different stages of learning.

Overall, I would recommend the course to my fellow colleagues back in Kenya and Africa and I sincerely wish to thank the IUIS for giving me the scholarship. However, I would wish to see more international faces since I was the only African in the course, but there were many people from Asia.

Many thanks for the opportunity.”

AAI 2012 Introductory Course in Immunology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, July 14-19, 2012

Course directors: Christopher A. Hunter Terri M. Laufer

Fatoumatta Darboe, Master student, Medical Research Council Laboratories, Banjul, The Gambia.

“I am an MPhil student at the MRC, The Gambia Unit. I won the IUIS scholarship award to attend the AAI introductory course in Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania. The Immunology course was divided into two parts. The first part of the lecture series included the basics of immunology and history. The second part was about recent and future trends. I have never attended a course focused solely on Immunology before. Attending this course has made me appreciate the other existing fields of immunology and not just the vaccine response bit, which is the focus of my work. The course is suitable for everyone who is interested in Immunology, be it in industry, research and even biotechnology. What with world renowned scientists flying in to give lectures and answering all those questions that I thought were too complex for me to answer! I’ll say nothing beats that!”
Dr Armen Sanosyan, Resident in Clinical Immunology and Allergology,
Department of Clinical Immunology and Allergology, Heratsi Yerevan State Medical University, Yerevan, Armenia.

“By virtue of IUIS and AAI, I had a chance to participate in the 2012 AAI Introductory Immunology Summer course. As I expected, it was really a high-level course saturated with not only Introductory perspective of the immune system function but going much beyond the scope just to be called Introductory. The course itself consisted of two parts: basic and clinical Immunology. Lecturers were highly prepared and the material was delivered clearly. We had opportunity to interrupt by questions almost all lecturers and our questions mostly were clearly answered. Besides just reviewing functions of the immune system, lecturers gave us knowledge about research development, different techniques involved in the assessment of diverse immune functions and the clinical relevance of recent discoveries in that field.

The program was highly organized. During breaks, we had opportunity to communicate with each other and faculty as well. The audience consisted of different specialists from biologists and MDs to Pharmaceutical researchers and, all objectives were met. I want to emphasize my own satisfaction. As I was involved for the first time in such a program, it was highly informative, full of new research and clinical approaches. I appreciate the efforts of IUIS and AAI to provide me with all necessary means for travel, hotel, registration and well being in such a wonderful seminar.”

Dr. Caroline Amolo Ogwang, Research Medical Officer, KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Kenya, was also selected by the IUIS Education Committee but was supported by the IUIS Gender Equality and Career Development Committee (GEC). You can find her report on the GECD website.
AAI 2012 Advanced Course in Immunology, Seaport World Trade Center, Boston, USA, July 29 - Aug. 3, 2012

Course Director: Dr Leslie J. Berg, University of Massachusetts Medical School

Dr Hannah Ohunene Ajoge, Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

“I applied for the Advanced Immunology course while applying for postdoctoral positions in laboratories (including immunology based laboratories). My PhD research involved aspects of epidemiology, virology, immunology and bioinformatics, thus I needed more grounding in immunology if am to fit in a pure immunology lab. Though I now have a postdoc appointment in a bioinformatics lab which deals basically with aspects of HIV virology, the knowledge I have acquired will be useful in the future in planning research activities; my career/research aim has always been to be involved in meaningful scientific research with a focus on computational, molecular and immunological analysis of infectious diseases (especially HIV), relevant to my country and other developing countries.

At the advanced course, some of the lectures were a reminder and revision of my basic immunology knowledge. Others were less familiar and helped me get a grasp of several aspects I had been naive about as well as laboratory applications of some of the lectures. Notably, I was specifically exposed in depth to the role of NK Cells (by Yokoyama WM) and dendritic cells (by Turley SJ) as well as the latest insight into asthma (by Elias JA). Hitherto, my knowledge of cytokines was much limited, but at the end of the course I became more familiar with the nomenclature and their interwoven roles in the different pathways.

The course was excellent, but if asked for possible improvements, I would suggest that the first three days summarize the whole course with less repetition of the same aspects, and then the remaining three days should be divided into concurrent mini-blocks of lectures of thorough specialization in different aspects. So that a student from a B-cell lab (who properly needs more grasp of B cell biology) can concentrate more on recent findings in B cell biology OR an expert in B cell biology who wants to do some dendritic cell work (and will not really develop much on his previous knowledge in B cell biology) can attend dendritic classes where he is taught extensively. In conclusion I will recommend this course to graduate students, postdocs and early-career investigators who need to strengthen their knowledge in immunology, or those changing field to immunology or changing from one aspect to another.”

Dr Gayane Manukyan, Lecturer, Group of Molecular and Cellular Immunology, Institute of Molecular Biology, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia

“I had such a worthwhile time and experience at the 2012 Advanced Immunology Course. It was a great opportunity for me to have been selected for a travel award. I would like to say thanks to the AAI and IUIS, who gave me the funding. I valued the opportunity to study in such a rich and diverse environment. It was a huge benefit academically to be able to exchange ideas with PhD students and scientists from different fields of science. It was also a tremendous learning experience to interact with people from such a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Learning about the latest trends in fundamental and molecular immunology was very enlightening and inspiring, especially that the lectures came from the prominent people in the field. Of great interest to me were the lectures about NK cells, dendritic cells, MHC-restricted antigen presentation to T cells, and vaccines. Many questions arose and lecturers answered all of them. Moreover, I had the chance to discuss several topics with lecturers concerning my scientific interests, and received very helpful comments. The most important benefit for me was the understanding that I should revise my own lectures and improve them in light of the new information.

In general, the Advanced Immunology Course has given me more than I thought I would get and within a short period of time. My views have broadened and I am better equipped in the field of molecular immunology. With this I hope to make my contributions to my country Armenia and to the world at large.”
Tamrat Abebe Zeleke, Lecturer and PhD student, Department of Microbiology, Immunology & Parasitology, Addis Ababa University College of Health Sciences School of Medicine, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

“I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to UIIS for offering me a travel grant and to AAI for course registration and accommodation for attendance at this very gratifying and breath taking Advanced Immunology Course of 2012 held at the Boston World Trade Centre. The welcome and overview given by Dr. Leslie J. Berg were very useful in answering important questions like: Who are the attendees, speakers and organizers? How to interact with the speakers? What are the missions of AAI & UIIS?

The major goal of the course was to expand or update the understanding of the field of immunology of the attendees. Since the course content was consistent with this goal, I was able to expand my knowledge, update my understanding of immunology and even clarify ambiguities. I am working on infectious disease immunology and I was disappointed by the fact that the speaker on Immune Response to Pathogens was not able to attend. However, the other lectures enabled me to see how much the questions I am asking in my research are relevant to the field of immunology.

Since most of the speakers were leading experts in the field, their knowledge about the subject matter was unquestionable, the speakers’ ability to communicate the subject was also absolute and their presentations have positively impacted on my understanding of material. Even though the size of the class was very large, the speakers took enough time to explain the questions arising during and after the lectures. This created a very good forum to learn from one another. I appreciated the enthusiasm of the speakers to share their knowledge and experience. Furthermore, even if the speakers’ ability to relate concepts was overall excellent, the speaker on B cell development was exceptional. However, there were two speakers (indicated that in the evaluation form) who despite being highly knowledgeable, had a poor delivery style.

The amount of material covered and the pace were appropriate. However, less emphasis was given to the development of skills. Otherwise the course content was arranged in a clear, logical and orderly manner, did cover most of the topics expected, did explain the concept and information very well, was of appropriate level of difficulty, and has made me feel more confident in the subject.

Finally, I would like to say thank you, for giving me this superb chance to attend this very prestigious course. Another important message I have is this kind of opportunity should also be given to my fellow young African trainees and scientists who have interest to expand or update their understanding of the field and I strongly recommend my colleagues to attend these well-organized courses.
4th EFIS-EJI South Eastern European Immunology School (SEEIS2012) in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, September 21-24, 2012

Course Organisers: Dr Bernhard Fleischer, Hamburg, Dr Hannes Stockinger, Vienna, Dr Moncef Zouali, Paris, Dr Hans-Joachim Seitz, Hamburg

The primary aim of this summer school was to teach immunology to students and young investigators in immunology from South-East Europe. This region still needs help to establish a state-of-the-art immunology. Infrastructure and equipment in most of the institutes in the South of this region are underdeveloped, but immunological societies in these countries have been or are being formed. Another aim of the school was to foster contact of these young investigators with other immunological societies. They met foreign speakers both from nearby and more distant countries. The region also urgently needs a network of immunologists between East European countries.

We had 55 participants from 9 countries: Albania (6), Austria (1, originally from Sarajevo), Bosnia & Herzegovina (17), Croatia (6), Macedonia (2), Serbia (14), Romania (3) Bulgaria (5) and Ukraine (1). One participant from Kosovo had to cancel her participation due to visa problems. The participants were extremely motivated and grateful for this opportunity to meet foreign speakers. It was especially positive that the young immunologists coming from countries that had been at war only 20 years before could easily discuss science and even sing folk songs in the evening together. Due to the generous help of IUIS we could finance the entire costs for the students, i.e. accommodation, subsistence and travel.

For the location of the school, we had chosen a small hostel (Hostel Feri, www.feri.ba) in the Igman Mountains, about 25 km from the center of Sarajevo. This remote place had the advantage that all participants were together with the faculty in one place and nobody could escape. There were no other guests in the hostel. The hostel is near the facilities of the 1984 Olympic Winter Games that were destroyed in the civil war in the nineties. In fact, the soot-blackened ruins of hotels and other buildings could be seen and some surrounding areas were still infested with land mines.

Lectures dealt with current concepts in Immunology, that are of special importance for basic but also for clinical immunology as many participants had a medical background. Plenary lectures were held in the morning. To provide an optimal discussion the participants formed small working groups in the afternoon according to their knowledge and interests that were guided by the speakers. Methodological aspects and new concepts were discussed in these working groups. Due to the support by Euroimmun, microscopes were provided for a training session in practical immune diagnostics. The faculty consisted of lecturers from Austria (H. Stockinger, G. Stanek), Bulgaria (A. Tchorbanov), Croatia (B. Polic), Finland (S. Meri), France (M. Zouali), Germany (B. Fleischer, A. Gospox, H.J. Seitz, H.W. Mittrucker), and India (NK Mehra). Presentation of the work of the young investigators themselves in a special poster session including a short oral plenary summary was an important part of the school and took place on one entire evening. The website of the school is accessible at www.bnitm.de/seeis2012.
8th FAIS Conference, Durban, South Africa, December 2-5, 2012

Course Organizers: South African Society of Immunology and FAIS

The 8th FAIS conference in Durban was attended by 162 delegates, including 60 students and postdoctoral fellows from different parts of the world. 30 students and postdocs from South Africa were awarded local travel scholarships via a grant from the National Research Foundation (NRF).

FAIS organizing committee received 50 applications for international travel scholarships aimed at young African-based students and postdocs. 15 travel scholarships were given to trainees from East, West, North and South African countries. They were from Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The international travel scholarships were supported by a grant awarded to the FAIS conference by the International Union of Immunological Societies (IUIS).

All students and postdoctoral fellow attendees were given the opportunity to present their work at the FAIS conference. 12 students and postdocs were selected to give oral presentations in the plenary sessions while the rest presented in the poster sessions.

The 8th FAIS conference had one-day workshops on basic immunology lectures and flow cytometry aimed specifically at young students and scientists. A special session on Women in Science was also included in the conference program. Most students attended these workshops.

Some of the testimonies obtained by the awardees are below:
"Attending the 8th FAIS conference was a remarkable experience for me as an Immunology student. The conference provided a great platform for interaction with mentors. The ladies’ session was particularly helpful. It really helps to meet people who have walked the same career path that we are pursuing.”
Sheron Dzoro, Zimbabwe

"The organization and the conference venue were excellent. Personally, this conference has allowed me to open several opportunities, to start new challenges. The objectives of the event were clearly stated and met my expectations. In the end, I want to thank the organizers in awarding the successful FAIS Scholarship."
Agrebi Nourhen, Tunisia

“8th FAIS Conference empowered me as a Research Scientist by exchange of expertise and experiences in Immunology, an area deficient in our country. I was able to create useful networks with fellow-minded Researchers, with possible future collaborative research. It provided a life-changing experience of meeting with the big names of Immunology”.
Shem Peter Muturi, Kenya

“I believe that the 8th FAIS Conference supported my present and future scientific career through giving me new ideas, inspirational thinking about my present and future projects to update my knowledge of Immunology. Also, the 8th FAIS Conference contributed to my personal and scientific development through the opportunity to meet different participants from all parts of the world, with different experiences.”
Ahmed Adel, Egypt

“I wish to express my utmost gratitude for the scholarship to participate in the 8th FAIS Conference in Durban. The workshops on publishing, getting funded and career choices facilitated the navigation of some of the challenges I was facing in career advancement and the workshop in Gender Equality provided a unique opportunity to share experiences with fellow ‘career women’. I also enjoyed the networking opportunities afforded by the poster sessions and conference dinner.”
Barbara Burmen, Kenya

I was very pleased to participate in the 8th FAIS conference and to present my work in this interesting meeting. Indeed, this meeting allowed me to share on both the wealth of his program and the quality of the speakers who participated”.
Wafa Kammoun, Tunisia
“I got an opportunity to relate, network and discuss other people’s research and methodologies and also was able to disseminate my research findings. I formulated contacts for future collaborations and was particularly happy to attend the Women in Science breakfast meeting, which was a very good opportunity to share with the senior and junior women in science and learn from the challenges of others. I also attended the session on the research process – getting funded, publishing and career choices; very good advice for us students, postdocs and early career scientists.”

Jacqueline Kyosiimire, Uganda

“Attending the FAIS conference was so awesome, so eye opening and stimulating. The program was well arranged, from the BD lectures on new lab equipment to the plenary sessions and the poster sessions that were highly interactive. I made new contacts with people in my area of research and met and discussed with the gurus in the field particularly Maria Yazdanbashki and Rick Maizels who had walked the path before.”

Noah Paul, Zimbabwe

“The 8th FAIS conference has had a great impact in developing my professional reputation and career choices. It has exposed me to what others have accomplished, research areas with controversies and new areas for immunological research. I also had the exposure to organizations from whom I can seek funding, how to apply for it, and after performing the research and obtaining reliable results, how to get it published.”

Augustina Frinpong, Ghana
The Singapore Immunology Network (SIgN) and the Immunology Frontier Research Center (IFReC) at Osaka University organized the 2nd NIF (Network of Immunology Frontier) Winter School on Advanced Immunology. It was held in Amara Sanctuary Resort, Sentosa, Singapore and was a great success. The meeting was organized by SIgN (BMSI A*STAR) and supported by Biomedical Research Council, Singapore Society for Immunology (SgSI), IUIS, British High Commission Singapore, FIMSA and Institut Français. Chairman A*STAR, Mr Lim Chuan Poh, was the guest-of-honor. 20 leading immunologists from around the world delivered lectures at the school, which was attended by 29 postdoctoral and 25 advanced PhD students from 18 different countries including USA, UK, China, Australia, Japan and Singapore. These 54 participants were selected from 256 applicants. Apart from attending lectures by our invited speakers, all participants had the opportunity to present their posters and give an oral presentation. There were a total of 35 travel fellowships awarded by SIgN, FIMSA and IUIS. The IUIS Education Committee funded two students to attend the course: Guilherme Ferreira Silveira, a PhD Student in Bioscience and Biotechnology from the Carlos Chagas Institute, Paraná, Brazil and One Bridget Dintwe PhD student from Botswana, studying at The University of Cape Town, South Africa and who won a “Best Presentation” prize.

The 3rd NIF Winter School on Advanced Immunology will be held from January 19 to 23, 2014, at the Awaji Yumebutai International Conference Center on Awaji Island, Hyogo, Japan. For further information, please visit the School’s website: http://ifrec-sign-winterschool.org/index.html
9th Spring School of Immunology, Ettal Germany (March 10-15, 2013)

Organized by the German Society for Immunology (DGfI)

Ashish Aggarwal, Research Scholar, Immunology Group
Department of Biochemistry, Panjab University Chandigarh, India

For the 9th year, DGfI had successfully hosted the Spring School on Immunology in Ettal, Bavaria. It was well planned, perfectly organized and in proximity with natural wonders and scenic beauty. The program of this meeting was instrumental to provide the insights of each and every topic of immunology. I found all lectures very interesting especially the one related to the advancement of techniques in immunology. Each day dedicated to a set of lectures of a particular broad topic was great. Understanding of different areas makes me aware of their role in my specific research interest. Now I could broadly understand the overall interactions among different biomolecules.

In my opinion the heart of the school was the “Question & Answer session” at the end of each day’s lectures and just before the dinner. One on one discussion with the speaker was great where I was able to discuss the topics of my research as well as various other career opportunities for me.

The poster sessions were excellent, where the understanding of the current research, going across the globe, was the best part to know. Also, the interactions with the company persons at their respective counters were also very fruitful. However, I was somewhat disappointed with the practical session which needs more attention during future meetings.

The interactions with the other students made a significant impact on my own laboratory work. It was great to know about their work culture. More importantly, I felt as a unit there, where my network gets bigger and filled with the great researchers around the world. Overall I have to say, that the Spring School in Ettal was definitely one of the best schools I have ever attended. I would definitely recommend the school to my fellow colleagues back in India. I sincerely wish to thank the DGfI and IUIS for giving me the scholarships to be a part of such a wonderful gathering.
Maja Lenartić, PhD Student, Department of Histology and Embryology  
School of Medicine, University of Rijeka, Croatia  
I loved Ettal itself, the company, atmosphere and lecturers. Everything was very well organized. I was so happy staying there and learning so many new things each day.  
It was really nice that we had lectures only in the morning so that we don't get fed up; so I was actually focused on most of the talks all the time. And the afternoon question sessions were great. People would ask such interesting questions and professors were always trying their best to answer, mainly with their own theories, but it was really interesting to hear those as well, even more interesting than to just hear what was observed in some papers. haha!  
I am working on B cells, primarily B1a cells so it was good that we had talks on B cells and also I was able to ask those lecturers what they think about B1a cells (development and function, since what is already known is a bit in collision with what I have found so far during my own research). They had good remarks and gave me good advice; really useful poster sessions, too.  
All in all, I went home happy and content knowing I had spent a really useful week in a beautiful little place called Ettal. Thank you once more for inviting me. Goodbye from Croatia.

Urszula Skalska, PhD, Department of Pathophysiology and Immunology,  
Institute of Rheumatology, Warsaw, Poland  
The School was very interesting, challenging and stimulating. Every day we listened to 5 lectures and participated in “Questions and Answers” sessions during which we could ask the lecturers about whatever we wanted to. During two posters sessions all participants presented their results, which enabled me to compare my work with work of students from other countries. The social program was also quite interesting and the food and accommodation - wonderful!  
I would like to thank IUIS for giving me the opportunity to participate in this School.