



Report of the GSCN non-PI Meeting

Ulm, 12 Sep. 2023

This year's gathering of non-PI researchers was hosted by Ulm University. The session included twelve German institution delegates and two from international research centers, convening prior to the main conference. The participants ranged from first-year doctoral students to postdocs with several years of experience, so that the entire spectrum of early career researchers was covered. Additionally, a seasoned principal investigator and an accomplished entrepreneur participated in the career-oriented segment. Their presence provided attendees insights into both academic and entrepreneurial career trajectories. Prof. Geiger from Ulm University's Institute of Molecular Medicine and Dr. Birgit Stelzer from the Entrepreneurs Campus at Ulm University, shared their professional journeys, pivotal challenges, successful outcomes, and offered advice to emerging scientists. Dr. Stelzer also highlighted startup opportunities at Ulm University, while Dr. Germán Camargo Ortega from ETH Zurich introduced the GSCN mentorship program.

The insights gained at this meeting are particularly beneficial for early-career researchers, aiding in their scientific endeavors and laboratory advancements. The repeat attendance and the intent of many first-time participants to return next year reflect the event's effectiveness in fostering connections among non-PI scientists from local and international backgrounds.

The gathering also facilitated passionate, informal exchanges among up-and-coming scientists regarding various scientific hurdles and methodological issues. The presentations were organized by topic, aiding in smoother discourse and quicker networking within their specialties. The topics ranged from drosophila to vertebrate development and human stem cell based systems to model organ development and disease. Initial talks covered research themes, crucial methodologies, cutting-edge cell culture and molecular biology tools, and provided a platform for addressing unresolved questions. This pre-conference meeting is pivotal for young researchers to establish connections for more effortless interaction during the subsequent conference days.

In keeping with tradition, the session culminated with a communal dinner featuring the region's traditional cuisine in the historic city center.

General comments:

This year's attendance, while not reaching last year's peak, surpassed that of past online sessions and even some of the earlier in-person events. Despite the slightly reduced headcount, the engagement and dialogue remained vibrant, with a mix of both familiar faces and numerous first-time attendees enriching the discussions. Predominantly, the participants hailed from German institutions, with a modest representation from neighboring countries like Switzerland and Austria. This pattern underscores the event's appeal to the national scientific community, yet also highlights an opportunity for growth. To broaden our international reach and enhance the visibility of the GSCN, it is clear that we could benefit from intensified international marketing efforts.

Comments and conclusion on the Academic Term Contract Act:

Reflecting on the conversations at the non-PI meeting, it's becoming clear that young scientists are increasingly recognizing the advantages of working at non-academic research organizations. These benefits include stable employment, compensation for overtime, and a better work-life balance that allows for more family time, savings, and improved living conditions. As a result, the option to transition into a corporate role after, or perhaps even before, completing their Ph.D. studies is gaining appeal among many young researchers over a traditional academic path.

The absence of prospects for permanent positions for senior postdoctoral researchers is causing financial uncertainty, contributing to stress, and potentially compromising their well-being and the caliber of their work. If not addressed, this could result in a significant brain drain for Germany, with talented young researchers opting for non-academic roles or relocating to other countries that offer a more favorable quality of life and career stability.

Future improvements:

No big future improvements at this point. We recommend further inviting established PIs, non-academic researchers, and/or company founders to share his/her experiences and strategies.

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