

Student report for STEPS program

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I had a research internship under the supervision of Dr. Stephen O'Brien at Theodosius Dobzhansky Center for Genome Bioinformatics, Saint Petersburg State University in Autumn 2015. I applied for this opportunity because I had expected to acquire different perspectives towards research by having a research experience outside of Japan and to understand cultural differences between Russia and Japan. I enjoyed four weeks of my stay there for both academic and cultural aspects, am grateful for this STEPS program, and hope it will help many students to expand their horizons.

The research project I was engaged in was a part of comparative genomics of cat genomes, which I decided to work on after several discussions with Dr. O'Brien and their colleagues. This project was different from both my research project in UTokyo and what I wrote in my proposal because (1) I thought it is important to have many exposures as an undergraduate to cultivate a rigorous academic foundation and (2) my academic and research interest was on the way of development as an undergraduate. I was lucky that the lecture series I had in my department covered a wide range of research topics in genome biology and that I had acquired the basic knowledge to participate the new research project. With a support from senior researchers, I was able to contribute to the research project. It was pity that I stayed for only four weeks and could not find a time to continue the project after coming back to Japan.

In addition to my research project, I enjoyed academic experiences in the university. Dr. O'Brien and his collaborators hosted a workshop for "Genome Russia" research project during my stay, where scientists, medical practitioners, and anthropologists across the country share their experiences of blood sample collection and plan for data analysis. Since it was a domestic academic conference, most of the presentation are in Russian, but my friends in the laboratory had helped me to grasp the contents. It was a valuable opportunity to see how researchers try to provide accurate knowledge to the general public to gain a consensus for the

nation-wide research project. I also visited research progress meeting hosted at by bioinformatics research team at JetBrains, a Saint Petersburg-based private company. I learned that not only the national university but also many other entities including private companies has a major role in research in that city.

Social activities were also enjoyable thanks to a buddy system that supports international visiting students in Saint Petersburg State University. My buddy and her friend guided me various places inside and outside of town including Russian and Japanese restaurants, museums, churches, and Peterhof palace. Since they are not in the science major, we talked about the similarities and differences of both cultures and histories, hobbies, and our future career plans. I was very impressed by their hospitality as they helped me to see around every weekend although the buddy system is voluntary based. I hope UTokyo will also support the visiting students by providing a similar mentoring system.

Overall, I widened my perspectives through STEPS program by having extra research experiences aside from my thesis studies and cultural interactions in the historic city. These experiences helped me for my career development. I sincerely hope this program promotes interaction and mutual understanding among researchers and students in both Tokyo and Russia.

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