GSOE Students in Vienna: Reports from the JSC 2008

YUYING GOSSE, PH.D.
Director of Student Research and Scholarship, GSOE

In Fall 2008, 12 students from the Grove School of Engineering (GSOE) attended the Junior Scientist Conference (JSC) in Vienna, Austria. Established in 2005 as a joint effort between CCNY and the Vienna University of Technology, the Student-Centered International Research Conference series encourages students to start research early. The conference series provides students with opportunities to present their scientific work to a wider, international audience. A distinct feature of these conferences is that most plenary session speakers are selected from student presenters and the sessions are led by faculty members. The conferences also emphasize the importance of cultural exchange and international networking, and there is always a special social event accompanying the academic sessions.

Each partner hosts a conference in alternating years. In the U.S., the Einsteins in the City (EIC) has been held in 2005 and 2007, and in Europe, the JSC has also been held twice, in 2006 and 2008. These conferences serve as a public forum where student research and faculty mentoring are recognized. From student feedback, it has also been found that the conferences have inspired students to participate in research and have set the stage for faculty and students to collaborate internationally in their work.

The 2008 JSC in Vienna focused on three vibrant research areas: environmental science and energy; material science; and information and communication technology. One faculty speaker introduced and led each section, which consisted of five student speakers. Thirty students from CCNY and the New York City Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (NYC-LSAMP) attended this conference, and seven of them won awards for their outstanding posters. They all appreciated this unique experience and the following are some of the students’ reflections.

Rushane Dyer, an electrical engineering major, was selected by the JSC committee to give a talk entitled “Retrieval of Ocean Water Parameters from Satellite Imagery and their Dependence on Atmospheric Correction Models” in the plenary session. His talk was well received.

Rushane recalled that the conference was well organized, the speakers were interesting, and because the students had such diverse research areas, he learned many new things. He was especially impressed by a presentation on how to speed up real-time computer graphics. He also enjoyed the conference social event held at a winery in northern Austria. “I was able to experience a piece of Austrian culture through the various selections of food and music. Also, this event provided me with the perfect opportunity to mingle among my peers and learn more about their interests and backgrounds,” he said. Rushane also stated, “In terms of the impact this conference may have on my career, it was an excellent networking opportunity so I have met a lot of new people who are doing interesting research and in the future these people are the ones that I can form collaborations with!”

Miguel Bustamante, a Ph.D. candidate in electrical engineering, says, “I have been to many conferences, but nothing like this one, where the sharing and interacting with fellow scientists could influence the way we think in our final careers.”

Mechanical engineering Ph.D. student Nathan Hosannah says that JSC gave him the opportunity to answer a question he had been pondering since he first became a graduate student: “Could I see myself doing a post doctoral stint or teaching in a city where people who looked like me were so rare? This experience cemented in my being that I could.” He continues, “I think that Vienna presented to us what academic life could be: learning by interacting with people from different cultures in new and exciting places.”

Civil engineering Master’s student Alex Rosenthal was very impressed by the quality and enthusiasm of his fellow student researchers. “All the student presenters did a fantastic job, especially considering that for many of them it was the first time presenting in a public forum. It was really inspiring to see so many young scientists so engaged in what they were doing.”

Igor Labutov, a senior electrical engineering student who participated in the 2007 Einsteins in the City, said that the Vienna conference made a deep impression on him. Still today, when he sees his fellow conference participants in the hallways of City College, warm memories from the experience come back.

In April 2010, the third Einsteins in the City conference will be held at CCNY. It is expected that more than 200 students from the U.S. and Europe will come to CCNY for this experience of intellectual communication and cultural exchange.

Through ongoing collaboration between the United States and Europe, we expect to build this high-impact, sustainable student-centered conference series that will serve as a model for promoting student participation in research at all levels, and particularly at the undergraduate level.

The following three articles are selected from the presentations at the 2008 Junior Scientist Conference in Vienna.