



## Biotechnology and Russian Program

Jeff Sich, George Washington University

Over the past 50 years, the conduct of research has changed dramatically. The time between discovery, development, and commercialization has been compressed and science has grown more complex. The boundaries between disciplines have been blurred and international collaborations have become increasingly necessary to bring about the advances we have come to expect. In an effort to foster international scientific alliances and offer undergraduate science students the opportunity to experience Russian culture, The George Washington University and Lomonsov Moscow State University recently established the “Biotechnology and Russian Program,” a five-week summer program in Moscow that allows five to six students, from ASEEES member institutions, to practice cutting-edge science in another language and culture.

According to program director, Michael Bukrinsky, M.D., Ph.D., interim chair and professor of Microbiology, Immunology, and Tropical Medicine in GW’s School of Medicine and Health Sciences, the program “provides undergraduate life science majors with a first-hand experience in the Russian research environment, an introduction to the culture of science at our partner Moscow State University, and additional Russian language training. Students have an opportunity to initiate personal relationships that will better enable them to collaborate with foreign scientists in the future.”

In 2011, Sarah Blucher (Princeton), Krizia Gupiteo (NYU), Braden Larson (U of Oregon), Thomas Parmer (Indiana U), and Matthew Regner (U of Wisconsin-Madison) were nominated by their school and chosen by program leaders to participate in the pilot program. During their residence in Moscow, students received intensive Russian language instruction at the Russian Language Centre of Moscow State. The students also “took up residence” in the Department of Molecular Biology where they attended seminars, toured biotechnology companies, and worked side-by-side with their Russian counterparts to isolate novel fluorescence genes from coral. Students explored Moscow and St. Petersburg and experienced the cities’ cultural offerings.

“I never thought that I would have the chance to live in Moscow and practice Russian with native speakers,” said Krizia Gupiteo. “It was a unique opportunity to be immersed in the language and culture, as well as the scientific community at Moscow State. It was interesting to see the hands-on approach to learning in the biotechnology laboratory component. Overall, this program provided many great experiences, and I encourage students to apply.”

The program is funded the U.S.-Russia Program of the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The U.S.-Russia Program supports partnerships and educational opportunities between higher education institutions from the two countries, particularly in the areas of foreign language learning.

“We have created a unique educational program, in terms of programmatic breadth and content. The students were acquainted with scientific life of the University and the educational process, while at the same time, they enjoyed festivals, attended scientific lectures, and research thesis defenses by biology undergraduates. All in all, in my opinion, it is hard to overestimate the value that both faculty and students acquired due to this program,” said Tatyana S. Kalebina, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Department of Molecular Biology in the Faculty of Biology at Lomonsov Moscow State University.

Each participant receives round-trip airfare from his/her home city to Moscow, room and board, and tuition for language and science courses. The grant also supports a visit each year by an advanced Moscow State student to D.C., to conduct part of his/her thesis research at GW.

Application materials for Summer 2012 will be mailed to ASEEES institutions. Tentative dates for the program are May 17-June 23. Additional information is available at [www.gwumc.edu/Microbiology](http://www.gwumc.edu/Microbiology). Questions may be directed to Jeffrey Sich, Ph.D., Program Co-Director, Associate Professor and Director of Educational Programs, Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Tropical Medicine at GW’s School of Medicine and Health Sciences - ([jsich@gwu.edu](mailto:jsich@gwu.edu) or 202-994-7613).

