



The DBM PhD Club

The DBM is a scary place. Only some time after we, the PhD students, join the DBM for a doctoral study, do we realize how big the DBM actually is, with close to 60 research groups divided into four focal research areas at five different locations. Numerous seminars and lectures are supposed to help us through this jungle of labs and people, but this is often tough and not easy. That is why there was a need to create a department-wide PhD students' club that facilitates knowledge transfer and communication among folks of our kind. In autumn 2012 the two existing student clubs at DBM Mattenstrasse and the ZLF merged to become the official DBM PhD Club. The merge was facilitated due to the fact that both clubs had very similar motivations and ambitions, which included the organization of a few high quality

events each year that are focused on the presentation of research and career development.

This united DBM PhD Club enabled communication between students at the five different DBM locations in a unified form, and significantly simplified contact between the DBM directorate and Students' Clubs. Soon thereafter, one of our students created a logo, which highlights the connection of the students at the five DBM locations through the one students' club; keeping a similar style to the official DBM logo, the department we belong to.

The DBM PhD Club is coordinated by PhD students from the different locations and focal research areas:

Name (Doctoral Year)	Research Group	Location	Focal Area
Carlos Mayer (4th)	Pediatric Immunology	Mattenstrasse	Immunology
Frédéric Laurent (4th)	Developmental Genetics	Mattenstrasse	Stem Cell
Kea Martin (3rd)	Cancer Immunology	Hebelstrasse	Immunology
Maren Diepenbruck (4th)	Biochemistry and Genetics	Mattenstrasse	Oncology
Fabrizio Botindari (4th)	Cancer and Immunobiology	Mattenstrasse	Immunology
Anna Engler (2nd)	Embryology and Stem Cell Biology	Mattenstrasse	Neurobiology
Vincent Prêtre (2nd)	Medical Oncology	Hebelstrasse	Oncology
Konstantin Kletenkov (2nd)	Molecular Virology	Petersplatz	Immunology

Together with the DBM PhD coordinator (Nicole Schaeren-Wiemers) special activities have been established to support and promote the PhDs at the DBM in their scientific careers. The two major annual activities of the DBM PhD Club are the Scientific DBM PhD Winter Retreat and the Career day. In addition, several smaller social activities are organized. Detailed information can be found on the DBM Education/PhD-website: <http://biomedizin.unibas.ch/education/phd/phd-club/>.

Scientific Winter Retreat

In 2012, the PhD students of the DBM Mattenstrasse had the opportunity to experience the first Scientific Winter Retreat in Saas Grund (VS). During the two days of the event, they had the possibility to interact with the other students in a scientific meeting-like atmosphere, presenting the contents of their own research projects and sharing common interests among the different topics. This has been a great opportunity for everyone to prac-



tice their own communication skills and to interact with people at the same level of experience and at the same stages of their scientific career.

In March 2013 the Scientific Winter Retreat was extended to all PhD students of the DBM. By increasing the number of participants we aimed to enhance the possibility for the students to interact with more colleagues in their respective fields and to get a comprehensive overview of the different scientific topics within the DBM. We strongly believe that the Scientific Winter Retreat is an outstanding opportunity for all students to actively present and promote themselves and their work within the student community. In that spirit we also invited Master students and MD/PhD students to participate.

Goals

The following goals were initially outlined: 1. Present own research in a talk or a poster; 2. Participate in scientific discussions, and 3. Get insights into less familiar research fields.

At our first retreat in March 2013, we were strongly focusing on providing all necessary means for every stu-



dent to have an optimal opportunity to present her or his own research. The program included six presentation sessions grouped by the focal areas, each consisting of three to four 20 minutes-long presentations. In addition, two poster sessions offered all non-orally presenting students a platform to display and present their research. The oral presentations and posters, presented in various sessions throughout the retreat, created a stimulating environment that offered everybody the opportunity to participate actively by asking questions and discussing answers. We observed that many students felt much more comfortable to actively contribute with questions and comments as compared to other institutional events.

The DBM is a complex department that conducts research in a broad variety of research fields. As a young researcher it is not always easy to get a proper overview over the complete range of research activities at the department. Therefore, all presentations at the Winter Retreat included a more general introduction of that specific group's research activity, prior to presentation of the speaker's personal project. This broader introduction aimed to fill possible gaps in knowledge in order to facilitate everybody's contribution to the discussions. Most presentations followed this important structure.

Location

We found a location that fully met our requirements for the presentations (i.e. sufficient space and lighting for the projected presentations as well as for the poster sessions), and that was possibly located in the Alps near a winter sports area for the last day of the retreat. We were fortunate to find the Hotel Viktoria in Hasliberg (BE) that fully satisfied our requirements for the scientific presentations and offered twin (and few single) bedrooms for everybody to feel comfortable. In addition, the hotel personnel showed a professional, pro-active behaviour that supported the smooth realization of the planned program. The Hotel catered all food, which included all main meals (breakfasts, lunches, dinners) as well as the coffee breaks and the apéro on the last evening. Their varied buffet offered food for people with different diets to almost everybody's satisfaction.

After careful evaluation of the transportation options (i.e. train, bus or individual journey) with our criteria



(i.e. costs, travel time, possibility to transport material and luggage) we decided to rent two buses. This option was not only the cheapest one, but also gave us enough flexibility in the timing, as well as the number of persons and quantity of material transported. The two buses picked everybody up on Thursday at Petersplatz, transported us to the Hotel Viktoria at Hasliberg Reuti, and brought us back on Saturday in two punctual and unproblematic journeys.

Program

The presentations were based upon the abstract submitted by every student. 19 students were selected for an oral presentation of 15 minutes in 6 sessions, whereas the others presented their work on a poster. Usually, PhD students in their 3rd and 4th year were selected for an oral presentation. In addition, on each day a keynote speaker was invited. At the end of the 2-day scientific meeting all students were participating in voting for the best presentation and best poster prize.



Credit points

The scientific winter retreat is accredited for one day education of the postgraduate PhD program and for 1.5 days (in 2013) and 1 day (in 2014) continuous education for animal experimentation.

Finances

The aim of the organizing committee is to avoid having a financial contribution from the students as much as possible. We are convinced that the opportunity to present her or his own research by an oral presentation or by a poster would be sufficient to guarantee the necessary commitment expected from each participant. Therefore, we always aim to finance this retreat as far as possible by sponsorships from different sources (e.g. Pharma, University). The Nachwuchsförderungsfonds of the University of Basel kindly provided 10'000.- CHF that covered a substantial amount of the expenses of the Scientific Winter Retreat. Further, we obtained a financial contribution from a variety of private companies. In 2013, the DBM paid the deficit, whereas in 2014 we covered all expenses. We are very thankful for this support.

Career Day

Working in a University environment, students interact mostly with scientists whose experiences are mostly acquired in an academic environment. There are, however, many other options and potential working areas open to people with a PhD in Biology that students are generally not aware of, or do not consider, due to lack of



information. In order to offer them the possibility to discuss their future professional possibilities and to learn skills to prepare them for the work market, the DBM PhD Club organizes a Career Day that aims to focus on the post-graduation careers of the young researchers by providing students with practical knowledge through a combination of presentations and workshops.

On October 3rd, 2013 the DBM PhD Career Day took place at the Villa Wenkenhof in Riehen. 40 PhD students

took the opportunity to listen to the following talks of Prof. Dr. **Regine Landmann** (Vice Dean Career Development, Medical Faculty, University of Basel) about *"Your career: What will you be? By which way, when and where?"*, of Prof. Dr. **Mike Hall** (Vice Director Biozentrum, Research Group Leader, and member of the SNF Scientific Board) about *"Funding schemes of the SNF"*, and of Dr. **Ulrich Mühlner** (Director Corporate Strategy, Novartis) *"From the lab coat to the business suit - how a PhD enables you to enter the business world"*.

Further the following four workshops were offered:

<u>Scientific writing</u>	Dr. Marie St-Pierre, Research Associate, Hepatology, Dept. Clinical Research, University of Bern
<u>CV + Interview</u>	Dr. Birgit Müller, Career Service Center, University of Basel
<u>Grant Information</u>	Dr. Caroline Peneff, International Grants Office, University of Basel
<u>Stress Management</u>	Dr. Markus Diem, Head Student Advisory Service, University of Basel

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Nicole Schaeren-Wiemers
PhD Coordinator

