It's difficult to imagine a more inspiring study experience than the 12 weeks I spent as a Summer Research Scholar at one of the world's most prestigious eye research institutes this summer. Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to be chosen from a pool of eager Year 2 and 3 students enrolled in the BSc (Hons) in Applied Biology with Biotechnology to receive Undergraduate Summer Research Abroad (USRA) sponsorship for an internship at Schepens Eye Research Institute, Harvard University. From studying at a world-class institution to making key contacts in the world of eye research, every aspect of the internship enhanced my skills, confidence and future career prospects.

None of this would have been possible without the generosity of PolyU's Global Engagement Office (GEO), which established USRA to provide passionate undergraduates like me with summer learning opportunities in the finest research laboratories worldwide. I'm equally grateful to the Department of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology, which not only nominated me to receive the award but also applied for the funding on my behalf. As it's difficult enough for graduates to obtain funding for overseas research, let alone undergraduates, imagine my surprise when I learned midway through February that I'd soon be travelling halfway across the world to learn from some of the foremost experts in my field!

The Schepens Eye Research Institute is internationally renowned for research on eye diseases and optic nerve regeneration, and it was easy for me to see why. Our training was organised by Dr Chen Dong-Feng, a specialist in the molecular mechanisms of central nervous system axon regeneration, and Dr Darlene Dartt, a leading expert in dry eye diseases. With the guidance and encouragement of a mentor, who showed me the importance of learning from my mistakes, I carried out two of my own research projects. One was on the use of electrical stimulation to help improve visual function for patients with untreatable blindness, and in the other I helped to design a bioengineered scaffold to promote optic nerve regeneration. In the process, I gained skills that will be invaluable to my future studies and career, from extracting cells from mouse eyeballs to antibody staining and cryosectioning.

Outside the laboratory, I had the chance to get to know the buzzing city of Boston, which seems to be tailor-made for university students! Living there can be summed up in a single word: convenient. Everything I needed – from restaurants to laundry services – was within a 5-10 minute walk or train journey.

With help from the Department, I and the other interns found just the right accommodation. The GEO's funding allowed me to invest all of my energy in the internship, without worrying about the financial side.

It was a privilege for me to contribute – even if just for a summer! – to the pioneering research of this globally renowned institute, which seeks to improve eye care and health for local, national and global communities. I am grateful to both the GEO and my Department for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.