

International Student Research Training Program

Background

City of Hope has more than 50 years of experience identifying college students possessing the potential to conduct innovative biomedical research and providing them with an intensive research experience where they participate as members of an active biomedical research group. In addition, our educational activities provide significant opportunities for student networking, development of critical thinking skills, interaction with world class scientists and science educators, workshops to enhance oral and written communication skills and introductions to research ethics. Our students develop the skill sets required to excel in research: critical thinking, choice of appropriate experimental controls, experimental design considerations and effective data organization and presentation through their individual work and/or accompanying lectures and workshops.

As part of our Eugene and Ruth Roberts Summer Student Academy, we participate in a Howard Hughes sponsored effort to document the effectiveness of student research experiences and it is clear that our program is “working” in the sense that students feel they understand how evidence based knowledge is generated. In addition, they report forming lasting bonds with other students representing a broad range of ethnic, economic and previous scientific backgrounds as well as their mentors and other research group personnel. We aim to shape the world view of our participants. For example, Alexandra Levine, M.D., City of Hope’s Chief Medical Officer, and an alumna of the program, credits a summer internship at City of Hope with starting her lifelong love of hematology research.

The Eugene and Ruth Roberts Summer Student Academy enrolled its first 2 students in 1960, and we estimate ~1600 more over the intervening 53 years. During the most recent 8 years (2006-2013) 150 mentors have guided a total of 577 students. Sixty six percent of our faculty mentors participate in the program in more than one summer, an indication of faculty enthusiasm and commitment. Due to the success of the Academy, we receive many requests from international students which we are currently unable to accommodate. We therefore wish to expand the current educational program of the Irell and Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences as well as the Eugene and Ruth Roberts Academy to be able to give international students the opportunity to perform research on campus throughout the year.

Program Overview

This program is a certificate program aimed to provide young undergraduate students with an opportunity for a "hands-on" research experience. We seek students possessing exceptional potential to perform biomedical research.

Students are generally expected to design and work on their own research projects in areas of overlapping interest with their mentor's research program. City of Hope faculty members, post doctoral associates and advanced graduate students act as mentors who provide valuable guidance and support while simultaneously encouraging independent thought and exploration. Students are required to communicate their research findings to their peers and mentors in a weekly student seminar series. An important objective of the program is to develop valuable oral and written communication skills, which are so important in becoming a successful scientist. Thus, students are required to produce a written report at the end of their project.

Program Requirements

Students are expected to:

1. Complete orientation, safety training and have City of Hope medical clearance
2. Complete a minimum of six (6) weeks of full time research (38-40 hours of laboratory performing research per week)
3. Attend weekly laboratory meetings and campus seminars (approximately 0-2 hours per week)
4. Prepare an oral and/or poster presentation
5. Submit a two to three page research report
6. Submit a learning experience questionnaire to the City of Hope administration

Upon completion of program, students receive certificate of completion.

Program Activities

The core component of this program is the time the students spend executing their research project, interacting with their mentors, other research personnel in the group and each other. The range of scientific projects is impressive and spans both the clinical and basic science research activities at City of Hope. Students meet weekly to discuss their research. We organize several additional meetings where City of Hope physicians or scientists talk about their research programs. Students must present their work at the program poster session or during a student presentation meeting. All students are required to submit a final written research report. We also host a robust lecture series providing students with a wide choice of lectures to attend.

Recruitment

We actively recruit students by visiting colleges and universities and educational diversity recruitment fairs. We also maintain a presence on Facebook as well as an internet site and rely on an extensive network of science professors, high school teachers and guidance/career counselors to recommend students.

Application Requirements

Applicants must:

1. Be at least 16 years old
2. Be enrolled in an undergraduate program outside the United States and must not be in the final year of study
3. Not be under any disciplinary sanction
4. Be willing to commit to a minimum of six (6) weeks of full time research
5. Have the requisite curiosity, creativity and interest in doing biomedical research
6. Provide additional requirements for international students whose English is not the native language:
7. Provide proof of verifiable English skill such as TOEFL score of 80 (ITB), TOEIC score of 605, or IELTS score of 6.5 or more
8. Provide proof of sufficient financial support for the entire period of program.

All applicants complete an application, which includes their biographical data, letters of recommendation, transcripts, CV, and personal statement.

Selection Processes

Our selection process involves both the faculty at their institution and the program coordinator at the City of Hope. The applications are then reviewed by a faculty committee whose selection criteria include academic performance and ability to speak and to write in English. Laboratories at the City of Hope which may be interested in hosting summer interns are solicited by the program coordinator. The information of the selected students is sent to interested professors and a matching process based on the student's research interests is conducted.

Social and Intercultural Activities

In order to foster a community atmosphere among domestic (Academy students) and international students (ISeRT students), a number of social activities are offered including, but not limited to, the following:

- **BBQ/Petribowl:** This social activity is a tournament-style event, consisting of team competitions. Students carry stacks of petri dishes to the finish line, balance beakers of water on their heads, or pipette tips into a bucket. Winning teams are awarded prizes and bragging rights all while enjoying a barbeque lunch.
- **Movie Night:** Students get together to watch a couple of movies and feast on candy, popcorn and chips. Students and postdoctoral fellows, both domestic and international, are invited to attend this event.
- **International Afternoon Tea:** Students who arrive in the spring time will have an opportunity to attend this annual event, which emphasizes intercultural learning and friendship. The special theme of this event is “how do you enjoy your tea and afternoon snacks?” Through this social event, students will get to learn more about one another through international food and fun activities. Students will join Irell and Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences’ students, Eugene and Ruth Roberts Summer Academy’s students, other visiting students on campus, and postdoctoral fellows both domestic and international.
- **Summer ‘n Ice:** Students who arrive in the summer will have an opportunity to attend this annual event, which emphasizes intercultural learning and friendship. The special theme of this event is “how to beat the heat in summer?” Through this social event, students will get to learn more about a featured culture and people through food, music, and presentation. Students will also have an opportunity to host this event to feature their own culture. Students will join Irell and Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences’ students, Eugene and Ruth Roberts Summer Academy’s students, other visiting students on campus, and postdoctoral fellows both domestic and international.
- **International Holidays Party:** Students who arrive in the fall will have an opportunity to attend this annual event, which emphasizes intercultural learning and friendship. The special theme of this event is “No matter what you celebrate, let’s celebrate together!” Through this social event, students will get to learn more about how different cultures celebrate the holidays and enjoy each other’s company through American food and fun intercultural activities. Students will join Irell and Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences’ students, Eugene and Ruth Roberts Summer Academy’s students, other visiting students on campus, and postdoctoral fellows both domestic and international.

Students will also be invited to attend other campus-wide activities such as Diversity Day, Science Week, Walk for Hope, Halloween Parade, and many more, which happen throughout the year.

Frequently Asked Questions -- International Students Only:

What to expect once students are accepted into the Program?

Students will receive a Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Status (generally known as Form I-20) from the Irell and Manella Graduate School of Biological Sciences for their F-1 visa application. Students will work with City of Hope's HR - Immigration Services on the visa processing and arrival into the United States.

After arrival, each student must check-in with the HR - Immigration Services in person. At that time, they must present proof of health insurance and complete a check-in form. Students will then be invited to attend New F-1 Students Orientation offered by City of Hope's HR -Immigration Services.

In addition to the immigration check-in, they must also participate in an on-boarding process including health clearance and safety training. This process is done electronically and can be done even before arrival. For the health clearance, they will be asked to submit health questionnaires and immunization documents before the program begins. For the safety training, they will be directed to an online safety training program and must pass a safety test.

After the on-boarding process is complete, the students will go to their laboratory where the main training will occur. The laboratory mentor will teach the student techniques, how to use scientific equipment, design experiments and understand the theories behind the research project. The students will be expected to attend the seminar series and also the weekly student meetings.

Is there a deadline for the application?

Since international students may have different "summer" break period, there is no deadline for the program. However, because of the visa processing and on-boarding procedures, students are encouraged to apply 4-6 months before the scheduled program start date.

How long does the F-1 visa processing?

F-1 visa processing depends on the consulate/embassy's processing time. The average time ranges from 1 to 4 weeks. For the latest visa wait time for interview appointments and processing, see: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html.

What is “sufficient amount of financial support”?

Each year, the sufficient amount of financial support will change depending on costs of living. However, for the year 2013, the sufficient amount of financial support has been set at \$615 per week (\$32,000 per year).

How can I submit a proof of financial support?

If personal funds will be used, you can submit an updated bank statement in English showing your name and amount of available funds in U.S. Dollars.

Can anyone else support me financially?

Yes, the financial support can also come from parents, family, school, and/or other types of sponsorship. For individual sponsorship (parents, family member, or any individual), submit their bank statement in English showing your name and amount of available fund in U.S. Dollars. For institutional sponsorship (school, scholarship program, institution, etc.), submit a sponsorship letter in English showing your name, period of support, and the amount of financial support in U.S. Dollars.

Do students get paid?

No.

Does City of Hope provide housing?

No. Students are responsible for securing their own housing and transportation.

Can my family come to the United States with me?

Only spouse and children under 21 years of age are eligible for F-2 dependent visa. Each dependent will get his or her own Form I-20 and visa. Submit your request to City of Hope's HR - Immigration Services.

Other family members may apply for visitor (B-1/B-2) visa or any other visas that they may be eligible for.