

The India Alliance's Science and Communication Workshop for Junior Faculty Members Kolkata, 23-25 April 2011

Introduction

The third Science and communication workshop by India Alliance was hosted at Kolkata. For the first time, it was conducted for junior faculty members from all over India who were beginning their scientific careers as independent investigators. The two and a half day workshop covered interactive sessions on personal effectiveness and grants writing. The participants also had a chance to interact with the India Alliance Committee members. Prior to the workshop, the participants were requested to provide a research proposal that was evaluated by a peer group of exemplary scientists, some of whom were also members of the India Alliance's selection Committee. These evaluations were sent to the participants online.

Objectives

The sessions were developed to guide young faculties to effectively manage their time between teaching, research and family. A session on personnel management was designed to fit their needs to respond to their laboratory and institutional members. The grants writing session was designed to be a more interactive question and answer session. Additionally other modules such as presentation skills, dining etiquette and learning from choices were retained similar to the previous workshops held at Hyderabad in 2010 and Varanasi in 2011.

Personal Effectiveness

The following sections were covered in the one and a half day session:

➤ **Presentation skills**

A four minute verbal presentation was made by the faculty members which was video recorded. The video clip was then replayed and the participants received important feedback regarding proper body language and audience evaluation. This exercise provided a practical approach towards understanding the minute details needed to make a confident presentation while engaging the audience.

➤ **Dining Etiquette**

A five course continental dinner was catered for the participants. Importance was given to hone conversation skills at International gatherings while proficiently completing a meal using international cutlery.

➤ **Time and Personnel Management**

Through an interactive game, the participants were led to formulate individual plans suiting their needs for prioritizing time between various personal and professional activities from their lives. As junior faculty members are required to manage personnel in their laboratories, class rooms or in their administrative units, a session was dedicated on how to interpret the reactions of people and guide them with suitable advice.

➤ **Exchanging Feedback**

In this session, participants were apprised of the various methods through which they could provide feedback to and assess reactions of those working with them to make their work system more effective and efficient.

Accord Consultants Pvt. Ltd., a Bangalore based Human Resource management concern conducted the above sessions.

Grants Writing Session

This half a day session took the participants through the essential points needed on an International grant application form. Suggestions were made on the dos and don'ts on various sections of a grant proposal: personal information, structure of the proposal, experimental designs, collaborative efforts and preliminary results. The CEO of the India Alliance, Professor Anuradha Lohia apprised the participants on the details in an International application which are subsequently evaluated by the Committee members, while the Programme Manager Dr Megha and Grants Adviser Dr Madhuri Dutta examined an application form of the India Alliance and information needed on each of its sections.

A 2500 word research proposal from each participant was sent to a peer group of scientists. Their critical reviews were given to the participants online. The scientists were Professor Subhash Lakhota, Professor Shankar Subramaniam, Professor Shobhona Sharma, Professor Anuradha Lohia, Professor Sandhya Viswesariah, Professor Satyajit Rath, Professor Jyotsna Dhawan, Professor D.N. Rao and Professor Sanjeev Galande.

Learning from Choices

This session was held at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Kolkata. Professor Helen Skaer from the University of Cambridge, U.K; Professor Noel Buckley from King's College London, U.K; Professor Douglas Young from National Institute for Medical Research, U.K; Professor Mike Turner from the University of Glasgow, U.K.; Professor Partha Majumder from National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, India; and Professor Anuradha Lohia, Professor of Biochemistry at Bose Institute and CEO of The India Alliance, engaged the audience by taking them through the personal and professional choices they had made in order to follow a path in science. This session was intended to be motivational and a learning experience for the participants.

Feedback from the participants

Feedback forms were distributed to the attendees of the workshop and were filled in anonymously. In summary, the participants felt that they had gained immensely with the workshop format especially from the modules held by Accord Consultants. However they wanted these sessions to be more contoured for a scientific audience. A few found the sessions lengthy and suggested to shorten the sessions with emphasis on the most relevant information. The participants found the grants writing session very informative and suggested that it could be followed up with an interactive evaluation session of their proposals.

Recommendations for the future

➤ Sessions held by the Accord Consultants

The Accord Consultants have a wealth of knowledge and experience in training participants in management skills. However the modules can be made to fit the scientific community by drawing attention to examples from routine activities that a scientist endures (with the help of the IA staff members).

The Dining etiquette session is an informative session but is lengthy and is cost constraining. A sample table arrangement for a five course meal can be demonstrated

with a smaller session on the type of conversation one should have during a Banquette dinner.

Since a scientist has to manage personnel from different departments, the personnel management session should be suited entirely to the scientific community and should provide responses that are feasible.

The length of the sessions can be shortened such that only the most essential portions are covered leaving out those which are unfamiliar to the scientific community.

The time management session was interactive and fun and should be retained as such.

➤ Grants writing Session

This session can be conducted in more detail via case studies, so as to help participants obtain more clarity on the entire process. In addition to the current module, an interactive session with personal feedback from mentors or committee members of the India Alliance on individual pre-submitted proposals can be incorporated. A group discussion session can be arranged where the participants can bring out the mistakes on their own proposals after the grants writing session.

➤ Learning from Choices

This session gives a unique opportunity to participants to interact with the India Alliance Committee members. It is mostly a Question and Answer session. Each of the Committee members relay their career trajectories and the choices they made both personally and professionally to establish a scientific career. Women scientists bring forth an important aspect of choices they make with young families to find time and drive for balancing a scientific career. This session should be retained as it is.

Annexure I

The Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance

Science and Communication Workshop

Kolkata, 23-25 April 2011

Workshop Agenda

23 April 2011 Saturday Swissôtel, Kolkata	Presentation Skills Accord Consultants 9.30 am - 7.00 pm Dining Etiquette Accord Consultants 7.30 pm - 9.30 pm
24 April 2011 Sunday Swissôtel Kolkata	Time Management Accord Consultants 10.00 am - 12.30 pm Personal Effectiveness Accord Consultants 1.30 am - 3.30 pm Grantsmanship Workshop India Alliance Team 3.30 pm - 6.00 pm
25 April 2011 Monday IISER Kolkata	Learning from choices India Alliance Committee Members 3.30 pm - 5.30 pm

Annexure II

Scientific mentors involved in the Learning from Choices session

Professor Helen Skaer

Department of Zoology

University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

Prof Skaer's research program focuses on understanding cellular activities underlying development of epithelial tissue in *Drosophila melanogaster*.

<http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/zoostaff/skaer/index.htm>

Professor Noel Buckley

King's College London, United Kingdom

Prof Buckley studies transcriptional programs that regulate neuronal gene expression.

<http://mng.iop.kcl.ac.uk/site/people>

Professor Douglas Young

MRC National Institute for Medical Research, United Kingdom

Prof Young's group is researching host responses to *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* infection.

<http://www.nimr.mrc.ac.uk/research/douglas-young/>

Professor Mike Turner

University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

Prof Turner's group is focused on elucidating parasite genetics and trypanosome pathogenesis. The group also studies genomics of malaria parasites and immune epidemiology of schistosome infections.

<http://www.gla.ac.uk:443//ibls/staff/staff.php?who=PPAndn>

Professor Partha Majumder

National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, India

Prof Majumder's research projects include preparing a global blueprint for Primary Congenital Glaucoma. He has recently concluded a project on immune response polymorphisms for Typhoid/Cholera vaccines.

<http://www.nibmg.ac.in/PPM.php>

Professor Anuradha Lohia

Department of Biochemistry at Bose Institute, India &

CEO of the India Alliance

Prof Lohia works on cell cycle progression in *Entamoeba histolytica*. Her research involves identification of cell cycle gene networks and transcriptional analysis on high throughput microarray chips. Her laboratory had developed a method of gene 'knock-down' by targeting dsRNA expression to study the function of specific genes.

<http://bic.boseinst.ernet.in/anuradha/>