

Alumni Profile – Joy Liu

Joy Liu



Joy Liu has been a UROP participant since 2010 and her links with the program continue. It is easy to see why. When asked about her UROP experience Joy responded immediately “It is good!”

On her continuing UROP-initiated journey, Joy is set to commence a 6-month appointment as a research assistant at the Burnet Institute that will take her to Beijing for 5 weeks to develop new skills in the area of infectious diseases. She will study the potential of various proteins to act as biomarkers of tuberculosis.

Joy gained her first taste of research as a vacation scholar at the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in 2010. Joy’s sister was doing her PhD at WEHI at the time and it was during chats with her sister’s fellow students that she received the clear message that she had to apply to UROP.

“I remember how enthusiastically they pointed out the attractive feature of the program for young people interested in science. Their enthusiasm was spontaneous. It couldn’t be faked,” Joy said when recalling the exchanges.

Joy has just completed her Bachelor of Biomedicine, having taken the unusual decision to study her final year subjects part time. That way, she reasoned, she had the time to extend her lab work at the Burnet Institute as a UROP participant while gaining an appreciation of where the science she was taught in course work could lead.

Since commencing her UROP placement at the Burnet, Joy has worked in the Diagnostics Development Laboratory, contributing to a number of projects in the broad area of international human health. Unexpectedly, the outcome of one such project culminated in her winning an award earlier this year.

With her supervisor Mary Garcia, Joy submitted an abstract to the International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Diseases Congress in Melbourne. Having initially been offered a poster presentation, she was given an oral timeslot in the program at the last minute. That talk earned her the IUSTI Bronze Medal* for best oral presentation at the conference.

Her entry into UROP was tentative. Joy had gone home to Brisbane for a mid-semester vacation without a placement in her area of interest, infectious diseases and immunology. She was delighted when the call came through offering her a placement at the Burnet Institute. It turned out to be a perfect match.

“I was so lucky that UROP was able to match my preference with a placement at the last minute”, she said. Indeed, Joy sees the careful matching of students and projects as a ‘big plus’ about the UROP.

In her brief life as a researcher, Joy has already worked on a rapid test for diagnosing the progress of HIV infection, found a way of assessing from dried blood spots whether Fijian prisoners have a sexually transmitted disease and begun to delve into improved methods for the diagnosis of TB in a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

And should other students apply for UROP? “Definitely go for it! I can’t speak too highly of the program. If you are interested in science, UROP opens your eyes to what goes on outside the textbook situation.”

Joy has yet to decide on her career path, but would be surprised if it did not include research.

Article by Alana Mitchell

*Award: International Union Sexually Transmitted Infections 2012 Conference Bronze Medal for oral presentation at 2012 conference.