

# Reflecting on the International-Domestic Student Summit

By Justin Foy (Photos by Morton Z. Hoffman)

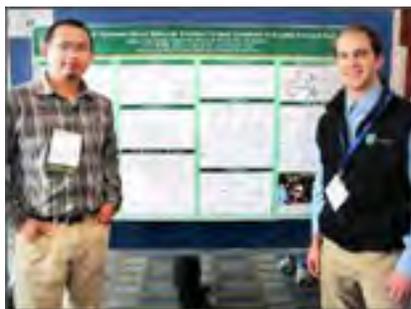
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*Xin Su (at left) with Morton Hoffman (Boston University) and Justin Foy*

The International-Domestic Student Summit (IDSS) was held in Raleigh, NC with nine teams of two students each (one international and one domestic) from universities in the following local sections: Ames, Central New Mexico, Coastal Georgia, Colorado, Dallas-Fort Worth, East Central Illinois, Kansas State University, New York and Northeastern. The purpose was for the ACS to get feedback from these students on how to promote international and domestic student collaboration, increase international skill flow, and utilize the unique resources that the international community provides. A study related to this overarching problem found that 38% of foreign students studying in the U.S. did not have a single close American friend.<sup>1</sup> As the largest scientific network, the ACS was determined to figure out what it was or wasn't doing well in serving of the international student.

I am the domestic student on this side of the equation. I was raised in Concord, NH and have never really moved far from home. The cross-cultural friendship statistic surprised me very much, as did the responses I received when I mentioned it. For example, one international student in my department simply said in an apathetic tone "it can happen." Sure I was aware that there were cultural barriers before, but to see such a staggering number and to hear such an attitude about the subject was very strange. I started realizing that this is a much larger problem than I had previously thought.

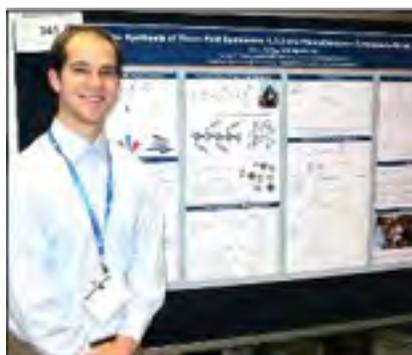


*Graduate students Xin Su (at left) and Justin Foy at their research poster, "Activation of Hydrazone-Based Molecular Switches Through Coordination Coupled Proton Transfer"*

My partner to the conference was my labmate and friend Xin Su who is from Qinhuangdao, China. Xin and I set out on a brisk November morning from the Lebanon, NH airport. We were lucky to have perfect weather that day as we flew out in a small Cessna plane to Boston and subsequently down south to Raleigh. We had our first meeting that night at dinner with all of the other teams. This was our first introduction to Steve Meyers from the ACS who had coordinated the event. It was exciting to meet everyone for the first time and to see that we had a very diverse group where a good dialogue on international collaboration could be formulated.

During the IDSS summit, the participants were split into three different groups to analyze the problem from the perspective of local institutions, the ACS, or the global scientific community. I was assigned to the global scientific community group and we tried to break down the global network into its respective institutions such as the funding agencies, special interest groups, universities, government, among many others. We began to see that many of these stakeholders in the global network that benefit from international researchers and collaborators are poorly coordinated with one another. One of the major suggestions was that the ACS could reach out to these groups and act as the “glue” with which to build a database of information to share between the stakeholders. We believe that increasing the networking ability between communities should also help get more opportunities for international students, whether it is in the form of discussion groups at a university or getting more out of the embassies.

There were many layers to the discussions that went on during the day. The most interesting part of the discussions for me was hearing the stories from the international students. Some told sad



*Justin Foy at his research poster, “The Synthesis of Three-Fold Symmetric 1,3,5-tris-Phenylbenzene Cyclopentadienyl Ligands”*

stories of not being able to get home for a death in the family because of visa difficulties, or some clearly were set behind in their careers because of the lack of opportunities in their home country. It certainly made me feel lucky to be born in a country with such a wealth of opportunity and, furthermore, that there are organizations in this country like the ACS that are trying to make a difference for everyone. At the end of the day, all of the groups were called together to summarize their suggestions.

A recurring theme from all of the groups was the aim to increase the networking and sharing of information through social media. One area where this could be useful would be a blog containing societal logistics for a city/state/university (e.g. licensing, banks, shopping etc.). Another useful idea was to utilize a network of expatriates from each region to help mentor incoming students and prepare them better for the culture here. It was clear that an increasing amount of attention should be given at universities to hold partnering/mentoring events between international and domestic students to make them feel more welcome in this country. An exhaustive report of what was discussed is not possible here, but will be forthcoming from the ACS.

Everyone at the summit realized that the common obstacles that divide us, such as fundamental language/cultural barriers and visa problems, would not be changed overnight. Nonetheless,



*Xin Su making his oral presentation, "When Aromaticity Met Resonance-Assisted Hydrogen Bonding (RAHB): Unusual para-Substituent Effects on the Intramolecular H-Bond in Hydra- zone-Based switches"*

we were still hopeful that progress towards our common goal could be made through practical suggestions, such as networking between the ACS and these stakeholders as well as making changes at the local level. All of these activities could sow the seeds for change in the right direction. I did leave the summit optimistic about some of these suggestions that we had made and also because of how our group came together. Even without the ACS-planned events during the trip, most of our group of international and domestic students would spend time with each other every night, going out to dinner and planning our own events. The last night was the best as we all went out to a couple of different night clubs in Raleigh. It might be the first and last time I will ever see more than ten dancing chemists in my life! We all made some great friends through this experience and knew that putting our best foot forward to discuss a complex problem was better than being apathetic toward the issue and the people around us.

We are especially grateful to the ACS and those most involved with us at the summit: Steve Meyers, Varsha Ramini, H. N. Cheng and Jodi Wesemann.

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<sup>i</sup> Gareis, E. Journal of International and Intercultural Communication 2012, 5, 309–312.