

Syracuse University Department of Biology

The Robert and Susan Hallenbeck Graduate Student Travel Award

INSTRUCTIONS

Description:

Thanks to the generosity of Robert and Susan Hallenbeck, the Department of Biology has funds available to Biology Graduate Students for partial support to cover travel expenses directly related to presenting your work as a first author at a professional meeting or conference.

A maximum of ONE award, usually up to \$500*, may be made per student per fiscal year (i.e., July 1st through June 30th). Out-of-pocket conference expenses will be reimbursed after attendance at the conference. Original receipts must be submitted for reimbursement.

*Each Biology Department PhD student who has passed their qualifying exam can apply for a one-time-only grant of up to \$1,500 to fund presentation of their research at a conference. To apply for this grant, the student should submit an application and budget to the GEC. Biology MS students undertaking a thesis-based MS, are also eligible to apply for this grant on a case-by-case basis. [Approved in faculty meeting March 2022].

Eligibility Requirements:

1. To qualify, Biology graduate students must be:
 - a full-time matriculated graduate student in the Department of Biology Graduate Program
 - the first author or primary presenter for a presentation at a professional conference;
 - in good academic standing.
2. Because funding is limited, the Travel Award Request Form must be submitted BEFORE traveling. Qualified requests will be awarded as long as funds are available.
3. Qualifying expenses include transportation, lodging, meals, and registration. Reimbursement will be no greater than the actual out-of-pocket expenses and will be disbursed AFTER travel has occurred. Receipts for reimbursement must be provided within 60 days of the conference.
4. Students are encouraged to seek additional support to help subsidize travel expenses. Potential sources include: your advisor's research funds, the professional meeting you are attending, and the SU Graduate Student Organization (GSO). To apply for a GSO travel grant, visit the GSO website at <http://gradorg.syr.edu/travel-grant> and download their application forms and instructions.
5. Recipients may not receive more than one Biology Travel Award per fiscal year (i.e., July 1st through June 30th).

Travel Award Request Submission:

The following must be submitted to the Graduate Academic Support Coordinator (biograd@syr.edu):

- completed Travel Award Request Form: Part I (Student section) and Part II (Advisor section);
- proof of registration;
- documentation from meeting organizers that your presentation has been accepted—if this is not available at the time you submit your Travel Award Request Form, you must submit documentation before funds are disbursed.

Post-Travel Donor Acknowledgement Letter Requirement:

All graduate student travel award recipients are required to submit a personal thank-you letter to the donors—Robert and Susan Hallenbeck—within 4 weeks after their return date from the conference. (For your convenience, 3 sample thank-you letters are included below.)

If your Travel Award Request is approved, you will be notified via e-mail with instructions for submitting your receipts for reimbursement.

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER #1

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hallenbeck,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you both for the funding that helped offset my travel expenses to a conference in Montreal, Quebec. The conference I attended was the 8th meeting of the International Research Society of Spinal Deformities. I was able to give a presentation on my research and meet many important people in the area of spinal deformity research.

My research used zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) to study the roles of *chromodomain helicase DNA binding protein 7* (*chd7*) in the onset of spinal deformity and a human developmental disease named CHARGE Syndrome, in which more than 60% of those afflicted develop later onset scoliosis. We found *chd7* may play a role in the earliest part of spinal development, somitogenesis, as well as in vertebral mineralization. In collaboration with a lab from the University of Montreal (a connection I made at the conference), we also showed that upon loss of proper Chd7 function, zebrafish exhibited many developmental anomalies similar to those recognized as symptoms of human CHARGE Syndrome.

Most recently, we performed a transcriptome-wise analysis to determine global functions of Chd7 in zebrafish. First we knocked down proper Chd7 expression, and then we studied genes with changes in expression upon Chd7 loss. We found several differentially expressed genes with potential implications in spinal deformity and CHARGE Syndrome, as well as many genes with novel or uncharacterized functions.

In March of this year, I successfully defended my dissertation, and I am planning to graduate with my Ph.D. in Biology this May. I am currently employed as a tenure track Science Instructor at a local community college, and I honestly feel that I use my research experience every day in the classroom.

I very much appreciate your generosity in helping me to attend my first and only research conference. It was a fun and educational opportunity for me that helped shape the course of my dissertation work. The knowledge and the connections that I made at that conference are invaluable, and it was an experience that I will never forget. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

[full name]
5th-year Biology Ph.D. student

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER #2

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hallenbeck,

I am a 4th-year Ph.D. student in the Biology Department at Syracuse University. I am writing to thank you for your gift to the department that allowed me the opportunity to travel to, and present my work at, the first annual *Student Conference on Conservation Science-New York (SCCS-NY)* in November.

My research aims to understand how impacts of grazing on plant species composition differ between livestock-dominated and wildlife-dominated systems, and how these differences are related to management. I use a combination of social and ecological methods, and this conference gave me an opportunity to explore and discuss these methods, as well as to learn about other methods, with a variety of students and professionals in the fields of ecology, sociology, geography, plant biology, and conservation. I met students working on related questions, and I also enjoyed the opportunity to receive feedback, suggestions, and advice from both these students and the professional mentors who attended the conference and took time to evaluate the presentations. It also provided a great forum through which I was able to gain experience presenting my work.

I would have been pleased to have the opportunity to thank you in person during your visit to our department, but unfortunately, I am currently in the field in Serengeti, Tanzania, collecting data for a remote-sensing aspect to my project, as well as finishing up data collection for my grazing experiment. I hope that you enjoy your visit.

Thank you very much again for your generous contribution in support of the graduate students in the Biology Department at Syracuse University.

Sincerely,

[full name]
4th year Biology Ph.D. student

SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER #3

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Hallenbeck,

I am writing to thank you for the very generous travel awards received in both my 4th and 5th years in the S.U. Biology Ph.D. program. Without your assistance, I would not have been able to attend the yearly international conference of the *Society for the Study of Reproduction (SSR)*, which is a very prestigious conference in my field.

I am currently in my last year of my Ph.D. program at Syracuse. I have enjoyed my time here working closely with my advisor, Dr. Melissa Pepling, on mouse ovarian development. Through my research, I have made significant findings in my field, and each year, I was invited to present my research at the *SSR* conference. In my 4th year, I traveled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to present a poster highlighting my work on the role of Bcl2 in ovarian follicle formation. Through this, I gained experience with both poster presentations and with talking to other scientists in my field. What I gained most, though, was valuable advice and feedback on the direction(s) in which I should take my project.

In my 5th year, I was invited to give a platform presentation during one of the mini-symposia at the *SSR* conference in Portland, Oregon. This is a huge honor for a graduate student! I was able to give a talk on my work on the kit signaling pathway in early ovarian development in front of top scientists in my field. This was both a nerve-wracking and amazing experience. After doing that, I feel I can talk anywhere! In addition, I was able to network with people who may be able to take me on as a post-doc in the near future.

Without your generosity, I would not have been able to attend these important career-building conferences. It was both an honor and a thrill to be able to see what exciting research is going on in reproductive biology on an international level.

Thank you so very much for helping me to achieve my goals!

Sincerely,

[full name]
6th year Biology Ph.D. student