

UREKA 2011 Students visit Novartis

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Twelve undergraduate students taking part in the Microbe-Host UREKA programme funded by Science Foundation Ireland in UCC recently visited Novartis in Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork. This industry site visit was one of a number of activities, seminars and workshops that students undertake as part of this programme which is organised and run by Dr Cormac Gahan, Dr Sally Cudmore and Andrea Doolan in the Alimentary Pharmabiotic Centre, a research partnership between UCC, Teagasc Moorepark Food Research Centre and Cork Institute of Technology. The 12 students, chosen from 130 initial applicants, are from universities in Canada, Romania and Malaysia as well as from Irish third level institutions including NUI Maynooth, CIT and UCC.

In addition to training seminars and workshops the students each undertake a challenging 12 week research project in infectious diseases and microbe-host interactions that introduces them to all aspects of laboratory-based research, from the inception of the project to the design and implementation of experiments

During the site visit Suzanne O'Leary QA specialist at Novartis briefed the group on the Novartis organisation and product portfolio and gave a background on the international manufacturing standards required for pharmaceutical operations. She placed a major emphasis on GMP, health & safety and product quality. Peter Coughlan and Michael Donnellan facilitated two tours of the production facilities. The site visit to a pharmaceutical facility plays an important role in the development of the students' careers and the success of the UREKA programme.

The UREKA (Undergraduate Research Experience and Knowledge Award) summer research programme is funded by Science Foundation Ireland. The scheme aims to increase undergraduate students' interest in biological science by providing them with excellent research experiences, broadening their scientific horizons and helping them make more informed career decisions. It also aims to encourage undergraduate students to consider following a course of PhD study, and to help Ireland's research community attract high calibre PhD students from abroad. This is the sixth year of the Microbe-Host Interactions programme at UCC and to date over 70% of past UREKA students have gone on to pursue studies for postgraduate degrees (PhD or MSc).

Picture: UREKA 2011 group visiting Novartis