

An unforgettable PhD conference:

VIBes2020.

VIBes in Biosciences is an international symposium which aims to bring together PhD students working in a broad variety of life sciences fields, such as immunology, cancer biology, neuroscience and microbiology. Not only the audience exclusively consisted of young researchers, but also the organizing committee members were mainly PhD students from the different centers and campuses of VIB.

This edition was sold-out and was supposed to take place from 11 to 13 March 2020 in Leuven, hosting a series of training workshops and presentations from speakers from all over the globe, such as Nobel Prize Laureate **Paul Nurse**, **György Buzsáki**, **Madeline Lancaster** and **Suzana Herculano-Houzel**. Unfortunately, the meeting was shortened to two days and the program was adapted due to the COVID-19 measures that the Belgian government adopted with the conference in progress. Nevertheless, we managed to both set up a teleconference for speakers willing to share their work with an eager audience, and provide a live stream for the registered participants who could not physically attend the meeting. This way, many participants were still able to join this special edition of VIBes.

Our conference reporters Tim Van Den Bossche (VIB - UGent Center for Medical Biotechnology), Giulia Doglio (VIB - UGent Center for Inflammation Research), Anna Chrzanowska (NERF, KU Leuven, imec) about VIBes2020:

We were aiming to organize a symposium that was well-suited for any PhD student in Life Sciences. This consists of attracting leaders in different fields, but also organizing workshops

to sharpen their soft skills. During VIBes, the six workshops addressed two very important issues for PhD students: how to present scientific data and what to do after obtaining the PhD. After the inspiring afternoon of workshops, Dr. **Karen Stroobants** spoke about how our research culture can address global challenges and what the role of science is in society.

On the next day, we had the first session “A healthier you”, that spanned from immunology to cell biology, providing the participants with valuable insights into molecular mechanisms involved in human health. We were honored to host Prof. Dr. **Antonio Lanzavecchia**, a world-renowned pioneer of immunology and infectious disease. He spoke about a new technique to study antibody variability which his group used to discover a copy-and-paste mechanism of antibody diversification that takes place in conditions of chromosomal instability, like in a sort of molecular bricolage.

In the afternoon, the “Inspired by nature” session turned out to be dominated by neuroscience and the invited experts tackled numerous fascinating questions about the brain. Nevertheless, Prof. Dr. **Tom Ellis** gave an exciting in-depth overview of synthetic biology. He showed how engineering principles can be used upon living systems to synthesize materials of our interest that have a widespread range of applications, from battery separators to fashionable clothes.

We concluded the conference by welcoming the award-winning science communicator Dr. **Kat Arney**, who explained the importance of good science communication by sharing her experience. For example, scientific facts alone are easily forgettable, while personalised stories and emotions linked to their discoveries make them understandable and more memorable. So, we learned that adding a story to our scientific message is an essential ingredient to successfully convey your message.

We thank Tim, Giulia and Anna for their insights in VIBes2020 conference and are looking forward to the next edition!

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