

Dr. Rafael Palacios
Coordinator.
Undergraduate Program on Genomic Sciences.
National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Dear Dr. Palacios:

I am happy to comment on the National University of Mexico's Undergraduate Program in Genomic Sciences at Cuernavaca. When I visited the new Center for Genomic Sciences in 2005 and gave an invited lecture as part of the "Frontiers of Genomics" course for the undergraduates, I was very impressed by the institute, the faculty, and the undergraduate program. All of these were outstanding, but the students, in my mind, were the best; they were superb and extraordinary in comparison to any other institution I have visited. They really made the place come alive with their passion for science and their strong desire to understand new ideas and take knowledge from the program. As in all student populations, some students are more advanced than others, and that was true here as well, but the overall level of achievement was very high and that a greater percentage of the students were really trying to get the most out of the program, whether it was from their courses, their interaction with faculty, and even their interaction with visiting scientists like myself. I gave the same type of lecture to these undergraduates that I give at international meetings and universities around the world. They responded with keen and sustained interest and asked many excellent questions; the same probing types of questions asked by good scientists everywhere. I am not familiar with how the students are chosen to be a part of this program, but the method is working very well. I expect that many of these students will become top graduate students and productive scientists.

I mentioned above that the program was outstanding in all aspects including the faculty and design of the curriculum. I very much liked the way the special course on "Frontiers of Genomics" was set up to provide the students with lectures from scientists doing all types of important research at the cutting edge of the field of genomics. Individual students were assigned as hosts for the invited lecturers and a strong effort was made to have the lecturer available to meet with the students informally in discussions on campus and at dinners. I have seen the general undergraduate curriculum; it provides the necessary introductory courses in mathematics and biology for the entering student, and then starts a strong program emphasizing genomics, bioinformatics and systems biology courses and projects. There is not much emphasis on biological interdisciplinary programs that include studies of chemistry and physics. All in all, however, it is a very good curriculum, which encourages individual study and research. In meeting with the students, I found that several in their third year had already gone to an international meeting and/or had taken courses outside of the institute, including rigorous summer research courses at The Cold Spring Harbor Labs. Importantly, the program does not overly emphasize human genomics and instead builds a strong base in genetics and molecular biology studies of model systems including bacteria. The faculty is strong and is well grounded in their own experimental studies, which provide an excellent base for individual student research projects in their last years in the program. Overall the Center is a vibrant spot for intellectual discussion and research at all levels. It is a great training ground for the students.

Sincerely,

Donald L. Court, Principal Investigator
Chief, Molecular Control and Genetics Section
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