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

RE: Undergraduate Program on Genomic Sciences

Dear Dr. Palacios:

It is my pleasure to write this letter in enthusiastic support of the Undergraduate Program on Genomic Sciences from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. I became acquainted with the Program and its students when I visited the Center for Genomic Sciences in October 2007 to give the Frontiers in Genomics Seminar.

I am most impressed by the quality of the Program, both in terms of its depth and breadth. The four-level curriculum guides the students from theoretical classroom instruction to "real world" application of their acquired skills. The first two years of training provide solid foundations in pillar disciplines from both the biological and mathematical sciences, while the third and fourth years engage students in cutting-edge research projects. The location of the Program within the Center for Genomic Sciences allows students to get a taste for research and benefit from a variety of activities such as seminars and lab rotations. This integration of education and research seems very effective. As a teacher myself, I was also very impressed by the instructional facilities that include classrooms with state-of-the-art audiovisual and computing equipment. This set-up allows the integration of computer demonstration with classroom instruction. I have found it very effective to use such an interactive approach to concurrently teach (theoretical) statistical methods and their (practical) software implementation.

In my view, however, the most important asset of the Program is the people, that is, the outstanding faculty and student body. I was blown away by the quality of the students and constantly had to remind myself that they were UNDERgraduate students – not yet graduate students. It was a pleasure to interact with the students during my lectures and numerous informal discussions around the Center. I found it refreshing to witness their enthusiasm, thirst for knowledge, competence, sense of initiative, and maturity.

The students were the driving force behind the one-week R and Bioconductor course developed and taught by my PhD student Jim Bullard (January 21–25, 2008; http://biostat-09.berkeley.edu/~bullard/courses/T-mexico-08). In the discussions following my October 15th lectures, the students expressed a strong interest in further developing their skills in statistical methods and software for genomic data analysis. In particular, they were especially keen on learning about R and Bioconductor software and came up with the idea of a short course on this topic. I have rarely seen a project be successfully implemented in such a short time frame and efficient manner; it took less than three months to bring the entire project to fruition.

Following my October visit, I must admit that I went back to Berkeley thinking that American students could take a lesson or two from your students. However, I also went back to work with re-invigorated belief in the value and pleasure of teaching.

In closing, I would like to express my admiration for your leading role in putting together such an outstanding, creative, and timely academic program and for fostering such a pleasant and effective learning environment. I look forward to more interaction with the Program.

Best regards,

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