

## UC Berkeley Chemical Biology Career Day

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When a job search is conducted, the title “chemical biologist” is unlikely to pull up many hits. Because of this, some may conclude that graduate work at the interface of chemistry and biology could limit one’s future choices. The Chemical Biology Graduate Program at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB), has started a new tradition to debunk this perception. On May 5, 2007, they held their first annual Career Day to help aspiring chemical biologists learn about the diverse job opportunities for chemical biologists and how to land their dream position.

The Saturday event brought chemical biology graduate students and postdoctorate students from UCB, UC San Francisco (UCSF), and UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) together with top chemical biologists in diverse fields. The day’s speakers spanned academia, government, industry, and law. Unlike the typical conference, the Career Day focused on how each person became successful in his or her chosen field. Also unlike the typical conference, the format was short on talks and big on interactive questions and answers. The result was a fun day filled with straight talk about the highs and lows of a chemical biologist at work.

The day’s tone was set with Barry Selik (venture partner, Sofinnova Ventures; CEO, Threshold Pharmaceuticals, outside director for Bionaut Pharmaceuticals, DiObex, Inc.; chairman of the board of Catalyst Biosciences) really letting down his hair in a talk about the many ups and downs he experienced over the years. He included the “failures” along the way, complete with graphs detailing his happiness levels throughout his careers. He was followed by

equally candid stories from colleagues Andrea Cochran (senior scientist in protein engineering, Genentech), Ron Zuckermann (lead scientist of the Biological Nanostructures Facility, Molecular Foundry, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL)), Parisa Jorjani (patent lawyer, Morrison and Forster), Carolyn Bertozzi (T. Z. and Irmgard Chu Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and professor of molecular and cell biology, UCB; Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator; director of the Molecular Foundry, LBNL), Cliff Berkman (professor and chairman for the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, San Francisco State University), and Greg Went (CEO of Neuro-Molecular Pharmaceuticals; member of the board of directors for ParAllele BioScience and Tethys Bioscience). After 15-min talks about their career paths, they shared their expertise about finding the perfect job through extensive student-led questions and answers.

The results were terrific. According to UCB student Aaron Esser-Kahn, “I found the speakers’ personal experiences to provide a lot of perspective on where I am now and where I want to head next. I was actually surprised at how much more useful I found it than I initially thought I would. It was well worth spending a Saturday on it.” Many students were surprised at the glimpse into the diverse industrial world, which is not often considered by students in the midst of academia. As UCSF student Kristin Krukenberg states, “I learned that some industry positions are more academic, allowing freedom in what one works on and opportunities to publish and participate in conferences.” In fact, several students are

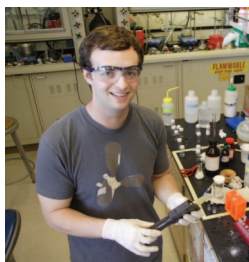


Image courtesy of Michael Barnes, UC Berkeley

**Aaron Esser-Kahn, CBGP graduate student and Career Day participant.**

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considering a change in their career plans. UCB student Stavroula Hatzios says she was inspired to consider “[taking] risks in your career, whether it means doing a postdoc in a less established lab whose research interests you or joining a start-up.”

The day covered more than just a variety of career opportunities and what they are like day to day. A large part of the day was spent discussing how to get the job you want. “I thought it was really great to learn what people look for when hiring,” says Karen Dehnert of UCB. The students in attendance were able to get started right away on the networking tips.

The biggest take-home message of the day is best summarized by UCSC’s Genevieve M. Halpenny, “Don’t over-plan. Stay flexible so you can love what you do!”

The event took place in UCB’s newest building, Stanley Hall, a hub for interdisciplinary research and teaching at the intersection of the biological sciences, physical sciences, and engineering. To learn more about UCB’s Chemical Biology Graduate Program, please visit <http://cbgp.cchem.berkeley.edu>.