

MolTag2 – The students-SAB-PIs retreat meeting 2017 in a „cheerful and lightened-up atmosphere“

The **Second Funding Period of our Doctoral Program “Molecular Drug Targets”** started in 2015. **This year, 2017, MolTag PIs, Scientific Advisory Board and Students gathered for their 3rd retreat, again in Hotel Strasserhof, Kamptal, Lower Austria.**

For our recent MolTag-Retreat we had the great pleasure to welcome **three international guests** from overseas:

For the **keynote speech**, we invited **Chris AHERN** from the University of Iowa. The Ahern laboratory is interested in the pharmacology and function of the voltage-gated ion channels that support electrical signaling in muscle and nerve cells.

Students as well as Faculty member enjoyed very much to have an inspiring and motivating key note lecturer exclusively available for them during the retreat.

“I had an exciting and informative visit to Vienna for the retreat.....the science was top notch, and you guys throw a great party. The internship portion of the program gives the students a **unique opportunity** (not present in many other similar PhD programs) that to build **essential steps towards the next phase of their careers**. In this regard, I would be game to host any MolTag students in my own lab where we offer a variety of synthetic chemistry, pharmacology and electrophysiology projects.” *(Chris Ahern)*

Chris will chair the 2018 Ion Channel Gordon Research Conference on “**Excitable Membranes in the Era of Precision Biology**”, where some of the top ion channel investigators will present and discuss frontier research to an international forum. We are confident, that some MolTag groups will join this event to share their science.

We also were lucky enough to welcome our US based **Scientific Advisory Board Member Maria GARCIA** and **Gregory KACZOROWSKI**, who both consults on ion channels and transporters and provide recommendations to clients in Pharma, Biotech, and Academia on different aspects of drug discovery and development.

Both were invited first for the retreat in 2015 where they evaluated and discussed the planned projects of our students. Now, two years later, they were curious and very pleased with the quality of the meanwhile achieved results.

From the appreciated MolTag SAB team we also had the pleasure to welcome again **Hugo KUBINYI, Peter NUSSBAUMER, Chris OOSTENBRINK and Thierry LANGER** who all followed the call to come to the MolTag retreat and made their invaluable experience available for our students.

The students presented their ongoing PhD projects first in a **data blitz session** (3 minutes each), followed by a **poster presentation** in the evening.

To let the students speak:

“The shorter presentations gave **more time for actually discussing issues and further development of the projects**, which is usually not possible after a 15 min presentation. During the poster session I could ask questions and comment personally to everybody who stopped by, and this often triggered very interesting discussions. This kind of discussion are never taking place after longer presentations, where the student is supposed to answer rather than to ask.”

“The format of data blitz and poster session **I found very good and effective for getting good feedback on your work.**”

“The flashtalk-poster concept was **very enjoyable.**”

“I really enjoyed the flash presentation to **introduce the SAB and the PIs to each one’s topic, and the discussion face to face about the project in front of the poster.**”

In the afternoon, after a stunning falconry show at Rosenberg castle, the MolTag community got introduced to a new program feature: **The Round Table Discussions!**



During the round table discussions, PhDs students came together with PIs and SAB, to exchange experience and knowledge. Each table in this session combined a representative variety of SAB and PIs who comprise the knowledge available in “MolTag” – including our guest Chris Ahern. The remaining seats were reserved for students.

The students came prepared with questions, which they discussed with faculty members and SAB. Chosen topics concerned project specific questions, research specific questions and, possibly the most popular issue: **specific recommendations for career development and/or individual situation** (like what to expect as a young postdoc or work-life-balance as a researcher).

Every 20 minutes, the students changed the table to another group of “seniors”.

Student comments:

“The round table discussion offered **an excellent opportunity to talk to the SAB and faculty members in an easy going and less formal environment**. This resulted in a very diverse and fruitful discussions where all students felt comfortable participating in.”

„I also enjoyed the round table sessions a lot and **I personally received a lot of feedback, regarding my project and regarding what can I expect** after I graduate from the PhD, which I personally am grateful for.“

„I found this discussions **really productive!**“

On **Day 2**, PIs and SAB gathered for a meeting to evaluate the students performance and discuss strategies for the next funding period.

The students meanwhile had a workshop with a professional trainer regarding **“Interpersonal Communications Skills and Conflict Management”**.

„I found it great to talk with my colleagues, discuss problems that might arise and try to find solutions together. **This particular interaction between all the students during the workshop was really valuable.**“

„I also think that the workshop was unexpectedly an **opportunity to open up about other topics to our colleagues and that made us somehow bond with each other**. It was very nice, especially for me, that I am relatively new on Moltag.“

„The workshop was really useful, since it gave the student the possibility **to discuss sensible topics in a constructive way with real suggestions on how to deal with it. I found it really productive.**

Furthermore usually we focus "just" on science, forgetting that **we base every scientific result on the interaction with colleagues and of course supervisors**, so having some training also in interpersonal communication skills might be very useful.“

All in all: „**There was a very cheerful and lightened-up atmosphere, probably due to the fact that students, SAB and supervisors finally have grown accustomed to each other during the period.**“

See the **detailed program** below and the **photo section** in the “Gallery”.



MolTag is looking forward to it's further activities in our final year of this period, 2018!

The MolTag Retreat 2017's planning team consisted of: MolTag PI Anna Weininger, current student representatives: Stefanie Kickingner and Alex Morley & MolTag Program Management and organization: Susanne Menschik.

WHERE: [EISENBOCKs STRASSERHOF, Straß im Straßertal](#)

<http://www.strasserhof.at/>; Marktplatz 30, 3491 Straß im Straßertal, +43(0)2735/2427

PROGRAM*): DAY 1 - Thursday, 28.09.2017

- 08:00** Meeting point, Schwedenplatz
08:20 Departure
09:20 Arrival at the Hotel, **Students:** mount your poster in the Seminar room
- 09:55 Begin, Opening Address by Speaker Steffen HERING
- 10:00 **Data Blitz Session** with students (3 minutes each)
See **Appendix 1**
- 11:30 Bus Drive to [Schloss Rosenberg](#)
- 12:00 Arrival at the Castle, Lunch at Schlossgasthof Rosenberg
- 13:30 Birds of Prey Demonstration ([Falconry](#)) 40 Minutes,
Walk in the castle garden
(**Faculty stays for Meeting** in Schlossgasthof)
- 14:45 Return to Hotel Eisenbock
- 15:30 **Felix MAYER**, MolTag Associate student at Medical University of Vienna,
Short presentation of the results of his PhD Thesis: **“Unraveling the mechanism of action of new psychoactive substances and their phase 1 metabolites“**
- 15:50 **Scientific Talk** by [Chris AHERN](#), Molecular Physiology and Biophysics,
Univ. of Iowa:
Taking a chemical biology approach to voltage-dependent ion channel gating and Pharmacology, followed by Q&A, see also **Appendix 2**
- 16:45 Coffeebreak
- 17:00 **“Meet the Faculty“** - Parallel **Round Table Discussions** with PIs, SAB and Students
to ca. See **Appendix 3**
18:40
- 19:15 **“Heurigen“** DINNER with a selection of regional wines and specialities
ZIRBENSTUBE, Hotel Strasserhof
- 20:15 **Poster Session**, see **Appendix 1**
End ca 22:30

PROGRAM*): DAY 2 – Friday, 29.09.2017

- From
07:30 BREAKFAST
→ **Check-out;**
→ **Students: Remove your poster from the seminar room!**
- 09:00 SAB, Chris Ahern and Faculty:** Meeting for a FEEDBACK ROUND and strategic discussions
- 10:15 **Bus for MolTag Faculty & Guests back to Vienna**
- 10:00 STUDENTS: WORKSHOP,** Training in Interpersonal Communication Skills
Trainer: Elisabeth Sperk MSc
See Appendix 4
- 11:50 Coffee Break (Students and Trainer), 20 minutes**
- 14:30 LUNCH AT THE HOTEL**
- 15:30 Bus to Vienna
16:40 Arrival in Vienna, Schwedenplatz



Rosenburg, Kamptal, Austria