

This past July, I had an invaluable experience of participating in the two-week NIH summer course in Clinical and Translational Research. The course is designed specifically for those who are on the PhD track to gain insight and training on the role of PhD scientists in clinical and translational research. During the first week of the course, various principal investigators, statisticians, scientific directors, and many others guided the participants through the various aspects of clinical and translational research including the components of study design, data presentation, protocol development, ethical review of research, and medical product development. The presentations were filled with open dialogue between the participants and the lecturers, and interactive case study discussions were also included. One of the biggest highlights from the first week of the course for me was a mock IRB meeting of a real clinical trial that took place during the Ebola breakout. Participants were assigned to groups, and each group evaluated the study to determine if it would be approved as is, approved with modifications, or rejected. The mock session was a great way to apply our lecture discussions to a practical case study.

The second week of the course was filled with tours of the different centers and institutes on the NIH campus as well as real IRB meetings that course participants could attend as silent observers. Also, course participants were given the opportunity to meet with Principal Investigators doing research of interest. Since I am getting close to completion of my PhD training, I used this opportunity to determine the type of research that I would like to be involved in during post-doctoral training and find potential post-doc labs. Due to my interests in translational research, I contacted PIs at the National Cancer Institute who all have translational projects. The PIs that I met with were enthusiastic about convincing me that the NIH is the best place for post-doctoral training in their opinions. I was able to meet members of their labs, learn about the various projects, and what it is like to be a post-doc in their lab. A few of the investigators discussed their plans for taking new post-docs in the next 12- 18 months, so I was extremely excited and grateful for the opportunity to meet with them in person. Lastly, during the second week of the course, I met with a program director who spent time explaining various funding mechanisms that I could apply for as a post-doctoral researcher if I complete training outside of the NIH. Everyone that I encountered throughout the two-week course was extremely welcoming and helpful. The NIH is one of the premier places to do science and I am eager to return one day. I would highly recommend this course to those who are seriously considering a path in clinical and translational research.