

SCOR mentorship implemented at the SOLAS Open Science Conference, Barcelona, 6-9 Nov 2009

SOLAS received from SCOR a grant of 5kUSD to sponsor attendance of developing countries scientists to the OSC.

In addition to the SCOR instructions for travel grants to follow, the SCOR Committee on Capacity Building added one requirement. Organizers of meeting that receives travel support should assign a mentor to each participant supported. This mentor should contact the participant before the meeting, meet with them during the meeting and help them network, and follow up after the meeting to prepare a report of how the participant will make use of the information and information gained.

A call for application was open some months before the conference.

The selection process took place and the following 5 scientists were selected and therefore partly sponsored.

- Carl Palmer from South Africa
- Roman Bortkovski from Russia
- Damodararao Valavala from India
- Jinhui Wang from China
- Noureddine Yassaa from Nigeria

The 5 names were submitted to SCOR for approval.

In the email which informed them about the attributed grant, the awardees were informed about the mentoring system to be put into place.

"Info: You will be assigned a mentor. This mentor will contact you before the meeting. We will let you know more about this closer to the date, sometimes in Sept/Oct." Email extract

In order to identified mentors, an email was sent to all the SOLAS SSC members attending the OSC explaining the mentoring system and asking them to volunteer.

"Would you volunteer to become mentor for few days???"

5 scientists from developing countries partially sponsored by SCOR to attend the OSC09 need each a mentor for the OSC09.

*In addition of the usual NSF and SCOR instructions on travel grant, the SCOR Committee on Capacity Building added one new requirement described below.
SOLAS is the first project to experiment this requirement.*

The conf organisers should assign a mentor to each participant supported.

This mentor should:

- *contact the participant before the meeting (email to introduce him/herself),*
- *meet with the participant during the meeting several times (for example: the mentor should come to the poster session and give the participant feedbacks on his/her poster presentations)*
- *help the participant to network (for example: meet sometime during the icebreaker so the mentor can introduce the participant to others scientists)*
- *follow up after the meeting to prepare a report of how the participant will make use of the information and information gained, what they thought about the meeting, etc...*

The 5 sponsored participants are:

- 1- Carl Palmer from South Africa, Postdoc, Poster title: Relationships of surface bromofrom concentrations with mixed layer depth and salinity in the tropical oceans*
- 2- Roman Bortkovski, Russia, Voeikov Main Geophysical Observatory, Prof, Poster title: Influence of water temperature on the wind waves spectral density*
- 3- Damodararao Valavala, India, NIO, PhD (yr 3), Poster title: Intra seasonal and Inter annual Variability of the Ocean Atmosphere Feedback in Bay of Bengal Using Remote Sensing Data*
- 4- Jinhui Wang, China, Jiao Tong UNI, Phd (Yr 2), Poster title: Distribution of CO2 in surface seawater / atmosphere and its Flux in East China sea*

5- Nouredine Yassaa, Algeria, U.S.T.H.B, PhD+6, Poster title: First evidence for marine production of monoterpenes

Please let me know by next Tuesday (13th Oct) if you volunteer (feel free to volunteer colleagues too ;-)"

2 SSC members volunteered.

To find the other 3, we took the conference list of participants and picked 3 scientists we knew could be good mentors. We approach these 3 scientists with a similar email than the one above and asked them to mentor one specific awardee.

All accepted and the pairs awardee-mentor were as follow:

- Carl Palmer, Roland von Glasow (SSC members)
- Roman Bortkovski- Brian Ward
- Damodararao Valavala, Hermann Bange
- Jinhui Wang, David Ho
- Nouredine Yassaa, Eric Saltzman (SSC members)

Once this was identified we sent an email to the pairs to e-introduce them.

"Dear Jinhui,

I am pleased to introduce David Ho to you, David volunteered to be your mentor for the SOLAS Open Science Conference 09.

David will get in touch with you soon (before the conference) via email.

You will have the pleasure to meet David at the conference and to discuss with him, David will also kindly introduce you to other scientists attending the conference, helping you to network and exchange ideas with your pairs and as a consequence to benefit as much as possible of your presence at the OSC.

Dear David,

*I am pleased to introduce Jinhui Wang to you.
Many thanks again David for kindly accepting this role.*

I leave it to you 2 now ;-)"

At the OSC, we made sure that the pairs found each other from the very first days and we let them interact.

After the OSC, the following request was sent to the awardees

" I am looking forward to hearing more about your experience of 'mentoring':*

Pairing every SCOR sponsored participant with another scientist for the time of the OSC09 was demanded by SCOR. However it was the first time that SCOR asked conference organisers to implement their idea. We had no experience in doing such thing and we tried our best. Therefore I am looking forward to hear your comments on this.

Please feel free to tell me what was good, what was bad, what works, what did not. Tell me your suggestions.

It can only be improved with your feedbacks as YOU've been experiencing it!!!"

The outcome of this request was poor, we only got this reply:

"Regarding the 'mentoring', it did not work with me. May be because the mentor found out that I know most of scientists. I think the mentoring is more useful to students."

We received however testimonials from all awardees about the OSC but there are no mention of the mentorship.

From this experience and from an organizer's point of view, we draw the following recommendations.

Rule for good mentoring:

- try to match males with males and females with females, to avoid cultural taboos (suggested by Ed Urban)
 - Approach scientists to mentor who have a certain interest and ability to 'teach' or knowledge transfer.
 - Assess prior to the meeting the level of already existing network of the awardees, maybe via a clear questions or list of publications...
 - Organise specific times and dates during the meeting when the pair should meet, and communicate it to the pairs prior to the meeting
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The 'after meeting follow-up' is a more tricky aspect for which I have no clear suggestions unfortunately.

To conclude, we believe that the mentorship is a positive effort which might be valuable in particular for students or young scientists who are attending the meeting on their own, PhD students level. In the case of SOLAS OSC, it did not work very well, partially because the awardees were from very different levels in their careers, only 2 were PhD students and I believe these 2 benefited from the mentorship.
