JSMC Newsletter
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# Member Stories

## JSMC Career Orientation Grant:
## Raquel's Journey after the JSMC

Text and Photos by Dr. Raquel Alonso-Roman

Hi everyone!

If you read the April Newsletter, you might have come across the JSMC Career Orientation Grant. Well, don't sleep on it, because it's a great opportunity if you're trying to find a new path after your PhD. I applied and received this grant in the summer of 2025 and in this newsletter, I'm going to share how I applied, how I used it, and what did I do afterwards.

When I finished my PhD at the Hans Knöll Institute, I first stayed as a postdoc for a few months. After a few months, though, I wanted a change of scenario in my academic career, with new topics, new labs, and new people. However, I didn't like the idea of applying to a postdoc position to carry out an existing project: I wanted to create my own project, but I wasn't sure exactly where or in which topic. The Career Orientation Grant fitted perfectly here, since the funding is tied to the person and not to a project, and is flexible in terms of timing and goals.

Knowing the requirements for applying, I contacted several research groups with a short email. Briefly, I introduced myself, told them I would like to apply for a grant that would offer me support for 6 months, and explained why their lab interested me as well as the things I can do. I did not focus only on academia and also reached out to a few PIs in industry. Finally, I had 3 interviews where I could explain more about the grant and discuss how could I fit in their labs. In my case, the 3 PIs were open to hosting me for 6 months, so I picked one based on the opportunities they offered to stay after my grant. While two PIs were quite vague and said "we can see what to do once you're here/once the grant is over", another one immediately suggested further postdoc grants to which we could apply together and was proactive in helping me get more funding. If you want to stay more than 6 months in the same lab, I really recommend you to have an in-depth talk with the potential supervisors to discuss this. However, my experience also showed me that, if you are more relaxed about the future, most doors will be open for you with this grant, since the PIs don't need to put money on the table nor write anything.

The Organ-on-Chip-System Raquel is working on

Once I had picked my future PI, we briefly designed a project (but keep in mind this is for 6 months). The JSMC is very flexible with funding, but they are more likely to fund projects that fit your profile and that are clearly strengthening your career. Therefore, in my application I focused on why this lab and project were suitable for me and in the opportunities for staying longer that the PI was offering.

The grant got finally granted and very soon I started working as a postdoc in the Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, applying lung-on-chip models to the study of pneumonia. In the time before starting and during the first month of JSMC grant, I also wrote and submitted a Walter Benjamin DFG stipend with the help of my PI. This grant is aimed at early career postdocs to develop their own research project for two years. The JSMC Career Orientation grant helped me cover the time between the submission and the approval of this grant, and gave me the opportunity to prove myself to my new PI, who agreed to support me economically after my grant was over and before the DFG stipend began.

In my experience, I can only encourage JSMC PhDs to apply for this grant. It gives you the opportunity to try new paths, establish new connections, and it provides a valuable buffer in these stressful and difficult stages of transitioning from one stage to the next in the academic career. My recommendation: think of what you really want and then use this grant to follow your dreams! If you want to apply and are a bit unsure, feel free to contact me through the newsletter team and of course, speak to the JSMC team, who were incredibly helpful to me the entire time. Good luck!

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## JSMC Graduates - A PhD Journey

# Friedrich J. Ehinger

### Non-canonical diversification strategies of nonribosomal peptides in bacteria

**Could you please tell us the topic of your PhD and in which group you did your PhD in?**

I conducted my PhD in the group of Prof. Dr. Christian Hertweck at the Leibniz-HKI Jena with a strong focus on the elucidation and engineering of natural product biosynthesis pathways. Specifically, I studied how bacteria generate a non-proteinogenic, chemically reactive amino acid (3-furylalanine) and incorporate it into diverse bioactive peptides. Besides basic research on the biosynthesis and the discovery of novel natural products, I also applied the chemoselective reactivity of this fascinating amino acid to generate bioconjugates – currently one of the most dynamic fields in the pharmaceutical industry

**Do you already know what you want to do next?**

Take time to reflect both on your research projects and your personal development goals every now and then to not get lost in daily routines and challenges, but to ensure long-term growth. My next steps are in Drug Discovery in the pharmaceutical industry at Boehringer Ingelheim.

**How did the JSMC help you during your PhD? What are your thoughts about recent developments and improvements within the JSMC?**

I very much enjoyed being part of the JSMC during the last years. It helped me to maintain a broad understanding and perspective on the field of microbiology and to exchange ideas and solutions between different disciplines. For the future, I hope that the JSMC maintains its dynamic spirit of community activities and scientific discussions which gained momentum again during the last years after the Covid time.

## Link to the JSMC Cloud Folder

It contains recent news, information on grants, mental health services, PhD training, postdoc career program, etc.

**Regular updates to come!**

Do you also have **meme-worthy content** to share?
Send it to us here!

## Meme of the Month

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## Travel Grant Awardees - JSMC meets the World:

# Axel, Candela, and Karen at the FEBS La Colle-sur-Loup

Text and Photos by Axel Dietschmann, Candela Fernandez, and Karen Cheng

It was a great honour to receive travel support from the JSMC, so that we could attend the 11th edition of the FEBS Advanced Lecture Course on "Molecular mechanisms of host-pathogen interactions and virulence in human fungal pathogens" in La Colle-sur-Loup near Nice as a team representing our group Adaptive Pathogenicity Strategies.The three of us were delighted to have the opportunity to attend this international conference that allowed us to present our work and interact with many experts in the field.

The experience was extremely valuable, since we received insightful comments, constructive feedback, and helpful advice that will benefit our future research. Further, the extensive lunch breaks and poster sessions fostered interaction with researches from different institutions and countries all over the world. Beyond the scientific program, the conference provided a wonderful opportunity for us to engage with different cultures and explore the local region.

In one free afternoon, together with other participants, we visited Monaco to take in its beautiful scenery and gain a glimpse of its unique atmosphere, while allowing for informal interactions among attending scientists.

Overall, being part of this prestigious conference was an enriching experience, both scientifically and personally. All three of us are sincerely grateful to the JSMC for their generous support, which made this opportunity a reality.

## Upcoming Events

June 19, 1 pm, Erbertstrasse 1
**ECRE Seminar**

July 1, 3-5 pm, JSMC Lecture Hall (Neugasse 23)
**Career Mentoring Nexus**
3rd Round

July 16, 9 am - 5 pm, Rosensäle, Fürstengraben 27
**JSMC Retreat**

July 16, 7 pm, Botanical Gardens
**Retreat Dinner**

July 17, 9 am - 5 pm, Rosensäle, Fürstengraben 27
**JSMC Retreat**

July 18, 1 pm, Saale
**Retreat Paddling Tour**

**No ECRE Seminars in July and August!**

September 18, 1 pm, Erbertstrasse 1
**ECRE Seminar**

More information on all events in the JSMC Event Calendar

The JSMC Retreat 2026

Registrate Here!

## Be Part of the Newsletter!

We want to know about

- Your publications
- Awards and prizes
- Your graduations
- Your research stays abroad
- Anything fun happening in our JSMC labs

E-mail us here!

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Jena School for Microbial Communication