REPORT ON POGO-SCOR FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

Supervisor’s Report (Parent Institution)

Name of Trainee: Mario Vera       Supervisor (Parent Institution): Dr. Danilo Calliari


Subject of Training: Measurement of dissolved oxygen by an automated Winkler method and estimation of planktonic net Community Production and planktonic Respiration rates. Also, general oceanographic instrumentation for large-scale studies in Biological Oceanography.

1) Please provide an evaluation of the training received.
Pending a more in-depth conversation with Mario (after his return to Uruguay), my evaluation would stress two main aspects of the training received:

i.- The technical and methodological issues that comprised the formal subject of his training, considering both on-board methods and data analysis/processing at land-based labs, constitute “new tools” that from now on Mario will have available to broaden his capabilities to pose and pursue scientific questions in his future research career. The fact that he learnt such methods at a leading laboratory with highly qualified advising and using (I believe) state-of-the-art equipments will undoubtedly strengthen his confidence to employ such approaches in the future, and of course in obtaining relevant and high-quality results.

ii.- I consider that taking part in a large-scale oceanographic cruise like AMT has a very high formative value on its own. No classroom lecture can substitute the experience of being on board a research vessel and have first-hand view of the difficulties and excitement of collecting samples and running experiments at sea. Also, such experience can certainly teach a lot about the value of collaborative work among scientists working on related issues. Also, I think it is always interesting and a mind broadening experience for any scientist, but particularly valuable for a graduate student, to interact during routine work and during informal discussions with researchers working on different topics, with diverse backgrounds and nationalities. To take part in real oceanographic cruises and enjoying an international academic atmosphere is unfortunately an uncommon experience for our students, for which I believe Mario has been extremely lucky to be able to participate in this AMT training activity.

2) What applications of the training received do you envision at your institution?
Mario is currently an advanced Master student, and he will likely present his dissertation during 2009. I consider that the chances that he will be able to employ some of the new knowledge in Uruguay are rather high. I am currently starting a research project aimed at estimating several organic matter fluxes in the plankton of the Rio de la Plata, a large-scale estuary on the subtropical South Atlantic ocean. The methods Mario learnt during his training would yield complementary information that fits very nicely within the array of measurements that are planned in that project, and I would be very happy to have Mario collaborate within that activity. Also, I have just learnt that while I write this Mario is preparing a preliminary research proposal to be submitted to a local funding agency that could contribute with a start grant so Mario can pursue his own research interests on the general topic of production/respiration balance in the plankton.

3) Is this exchange likely to lead to future collaboration with the host institution?
Whether this exchange may lead to future collaborations is a little difficult to predict, but I am positive about that. The establishment of academic collaborations depends on several factors including identification of common research/academic interests, access to funds to develop ideas into real projects, and other circumstances that may facilitate the process (actual personal knowledge between intervening parts, right timing and possibility of coordination of proposed/desirable activities within the
general duties of parts involved); the visit of Mario to Plymouth could certainly be a first step in that direction. For reasons above described, I consider very important the establishment of academic collaboration with researchers from other institutions and countries, so I would be very keen on exploring such possibility, particularly if that may involve participation in research cruises in the South Atlantic ocean.

4) Please provide your comments on the Fellowship Programme.
For the reasons expressed under question #1, I consider this Fellowship Programme a very valuable instrument to advance the academic formation of graduate students in Oceanography or Marine Sciences in developing countries, so I hope it will continue in the years to come.

One further comment refers to the difficulties that Mario experienced to obtain his visa to enter the UK (only succeeded after the third try and having strong supporting advice from personnel at the host institution); maybe in the future accepted candidates could have some sort of formal advice on how to proceed with such matters (which application form is required, how to fill some items in such forms that are far from obvious, etc.).

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the POGO and AMT Fellowship Programme for providing a great opportunity to advance the formation of young scientists, in this case Mario Vera from Uruguay.

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OR send by e-mail to: pogoadmin@pml.ac.uk