

## A chance to grow through Globalink

September 2012

*Indian student Murtaza Saif made deep connections while honing his skills at UBC*

As a fourth-year undergraduate student at the Vellore Institute of Technology, Murtaza Saif thought he'd learned a lot already during his degree. So when he found himself examining protein mutations that cause cardiac arrhythmias in a laboratory at the University of British Columbia's Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, he knew he'd come a long way from where he once was.



Murtaza, a bioinformatics major, says that while he had related experience with database coding before, the hands-on experience he gained while working with Dr. Filip Van Petegem and his team let him build a valuable new skill-set that he didn't expect to gain. While building a database for members of the Cardiovascular Research Group, Murtaza was able to assist in analysis of proteins using x-ray crystallography and diffraction data.

The findings from this, and other studies, could help researchers determine what role these proteins play in the heart's ability to initiate its own rhythm independent of the nervous system, a condition called a cardiac arrhythmia. Though most arrhythmias are harmless, certain forms of the condition can cause stroke or heart failure in patients with the condition.

For Murtaza, the experience in the laboratory also helped him develop some meaningful connections with his lab partners. After studying together to complete their different projects, the group became good friends - even throwing Murtaza a "farewell" party when he left to go home to India at the end of his Globalink internship.

With his Globalink cohorts, Murtaza attended "The Data Effect" conference, connecting to the humorous, but educational speech that Christopher Johnson, Leader of Business Intelligence and Advanced Analytics for IBM, presented. They also attended workshops through Mitacs Step, including one on project management which he found particularly useful to his work in the lab.

However, it was his personal growth and the deep connections that he made through Globalink that made his experience truly memorable:

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“As an undergraduate student, Mitacs Globalink was a God-send. I never expected that I'd go to Canada for a 3-month project and meet such nice people and become so close to them, and I never expected that I would learn so much academically and personally in such little time. But now that I reflect on my summer in Canada through Mitacs Globalink, I have taken with me so many sweet memories that I will always cherish for life.”