



Press Release

Simplifying the Assembly of Biological Tools

Freiburg Team Receives Special Prize in European Finals of Competition for Synthetic Biology

Off to Boston: The team from the University of Freiburg has qualified for this year's finals of the "International Genetically Engineered Machine Competition" (iGEM), a science competition focusing on synthetic biology. At the European finals in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Freiburg's team also won a special prize for their research project.

Supervised by BIOS Centre for Biological Signalling Studies, the Cluster of Excellence of the University of Freiburg, the Freiburg group goes by the name "FreiGEM" and includes 18 students of biology, medicine, molecular medicine, pharmacy, and philosophy. Their project for the competition deals with TALEs, a newly discovered class of DNA binding proteins. TALEs can be assembled in such a way that they can anchor effectors – molecules that can cut DNA or turn genes on and off – at any point in the genetic information. Since TALEs enable scientists to introduce effectors into a genome with great precision, they have enormous potential for biological research as well as for gene therapy applications.

FreiGEM has developed a modular principle for assembling tailor-made TALEs that is considerably quicker, less expensive, and – most importantly – simpler than previous methods. The young Freiburg researchers hope that their innovation will make this technology available to even more scientists. The jurors in Amsterdam awarded FreiGEM a special prize for the most innovative BioBrick part in the European finals.

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The iGEM competition, hosted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston, USA, each year since 2003, is targeted at young researchers who have not yet earned a degree. The finals will include roughly 50 groups from around the world and will be held from 2 to 5 November 2012 at MIT. 18 European projects have qualified, including five teams from Germany.

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The University of Freiburg achieves top positions in all university rankings. Its research, teaching, and continuing education have received prestigious awards in nationwide competitions. Over 22,000 students from 100 nations are enrolled in 186 degree programs. Around 5,000 teachers and administrative employees put in their effort every day – and experience that family friendliness, equal opportunity, and environmental protection are more than just empty phrases here.