

## **The Cocktail with the experts**

A great opportunity for students and companies in optics to get acquainted

by David Hélie, Université Laval's OSA student chapter president

The cocktail with the experts is Université Laval OSA student chapter's original activity permitting grad and undergrad students in optics to meet with company representatives in the same field. The second edition of this activity was held on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2011 as part of the closing event to the annual meeting of the Center for Optics, Photonics and Lasers. 40 students showed up to meet representatives from 8 companies from Quebec City, Montreal and Toronto. The first edition of the Cocktail with the experts was held in March 2009 as part of the Photonics Toolkit conference organized by our student chapter. Following the great response and comments from participants in 2009, we decided to hold a second edition and possibly others in the next years.

What makes this activity quite novel to the scientific career domain is that the speed dating concept is used for everybody to get acquainted. Students are separated into small groups who will individually meet with representatives from a company waiting for them at a table. After approximately 8 minutes, a bell rings and the groups of students move on to next table for another 8 minute session with a different company. This goes on until everybody has broken the ice! Afterwards, all participants are invited to continue networking while enjoying drinks and a light meal. Everybody involved had a really great time and interesting career opportunities arose for some of our colleagues.

You may imagine the great opportunity for students to personally meet company representatives and give out first impressions with handshakes. Companies also took advantage of this event to talk about the students' expertise and interests in addition to presenting the companies' philosophy, specialization and products. They thoroughly promoted their interest in collaborating with graduate students during their studies. This open networking has numerous benefits for both students and companies. Some of the most promising career and study opportunities for students are not freely advertised, they may appear during a conversation with a representative while enjoying a glass of wine. It is a quite interesting way to make contacts with the industry. As for companies, collaborations with graduate students benefits to industry R & D programs. They can keep up to date with current technology trends and work with the Universities as they are being developed.

Another key to the success of such an event is to keep it simple for all participants. Have very efficient logistics so people know where to go and make it free of charge for all participants. Therefore, we would like to thank particularly the Optical Society of America and the Center for Optics, Photonics and Lasers for funding of this event.



The Cocktail with the experts



A company representative showing the functionalities of one of their products to a group of students



Company representatives and Grad students chatting.