S* Alliance Global Bioinformatics Online Distance Education

Mr Justin Choo
Teaching Assistant
Department of Biochemistry
National University of Singapore

Co-authors:
Associate Professor Shoba Ranganathan
Department of Biochemistry
National University of Singapore

Associate Professor Tan Tin Wee
Bioinformatics Centre
National University of Singapore

S* Alliance (pronounced as "S Star") is a collaboration among Stanford University, Karolinska Institutet, Uppsala University, National University of Singapore (NUS), University of Sydney, SANBI of the University of Western Cape and University of California, San Diego. Founded in year 2000, the Alliance aims to provide a GLObal Bioinformatics Unified Learning Environment (GLOBULE) made up of modular courses in the disciplines of bioinformatics, medical informatics and genomics. The collection of lectures from top researchers in the bioinformatics field is made available online at the S* official and mirror sites. It is openly accessible to everyone, anywhere in the world through the Internet.

With over 200 participants at any one time, we realize that bandwidth is a problem for many, hence a dozen mirror sites located worldwide have been set up to facilitate fast download of the entire lecture package for online video streaming and/or offline viewing and revision.

Using the Integrated Virtual Learning Environment (IVLE) system from NUS, various activities including discussion forum and assessment are carried out to enhance the learning experience. Additionally, IVLE provides vital course statistics for assessments, feedback from participations and many more.

More recently, we are introduced tutorial and practical sessions to further enrich the course. At the same time, we are formulating Problem-based Learning (PBL) sessions with our teaching assistants to introduce PBL into our next course.