

*Fall 2010*[www.vet.upenn.edu/research/programs/vmstp](http://www.vet.upenn.edu/research/programs/vmstp)*In This Issue*

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*Hill Student Inspiration Award Presentations*

Dear VMD-PhD Alumni,

Greetings from the University of Pennsylvania! Much has happened since last Spring and I am pleased to update you on new activities and events at Penn. We take this opportunity to highlight our new class of incoming VMD-PhD students, and to feature this year's Hill Student Inspiration Awards. VMD-PhD student Nikkita Patel was one of two winners this year. Fifty percent of all winners have been VMD-PhD students, indicating the innovation and drive of our students. We also take this opportunity to list some honors of our alumni, and we ask that you continue to keep us informed about your activities and awards. We have some upcoming events including a first ever review of the VMD-PhD program by an independent body, and our annual Christmas dinner party at my home, open to all current students and alumni. We also include the recent publications from our current students. Finally, we are extremely grateful for the generous support of our alumni who generously gave to the VMD-PhD Program this past year enabling us to continue to expand our Program. Student admissions for the coming year are now beginning and we continue to be in need.

We hope the end of 2010 is a period of joy for you and we look forward to 2011 with great anticipation. I wish you all the best in the coming season.

Sincerely,  
Michael Atchison, Ph.D.  
Director, VMD-PhD Program



Alumni are Online! Check out:

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## Incoming VMD-PhD Students



*In Fall 2010 we welcomed three new students to the VMD/PhD Program, bringing our total number of students to 28. Pictured here is the incoming class. Left to right, Abigail Shearin, Jeffrey Carey, and Viviana Vallin.*

### **Jeffrey Carey**

#### **Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics**

Jeffrey graduated from the University of Michigan in 2007. He gained extensive research experience in the laboratories of Jeremy Semaru, Bruce Logan, and Masahito Taya. Most recently he worked at Douglas Bishop's lab at the University of Chicago where he designed and performed experiments elucidating the function of homologous recombination proteins. Jeffrey's research background ranges from microbial fuel cells, tissue engineering, methanotropic bacteria, and mechanisms of homologous recombination. He looks forward to a career in academia where he can perform biomedical research and still maintain a limited presence in the clinic.

### **Abigail Shearin**

#### **Cell and Molecular Biology – Genetics and Gene Regulation**

Abigail graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland in 2005. She attended the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine for two years before being admitted into the VMD-PhD Program. Prior to applying, she was awarded a prestigious Howard Hughes Medical Institute Fellowship to take two years off from her Vet studies to gain extensive research experience in the laboratory of Dr. Elaine Ostrander at NHGR/NIH, working on a research project in the Comparative Genetics Section, Cancer Genetics Branch. Her project involved mapping the genes that confer a strong genetic risk for malignant histiocytosis, or disseminated histiocytic sarcoma, in Bernese Mountain dogs as well as in Flat-coated retrievers. Abigail plans for a career in academia that combines performing research, teaching students and seeing patients.

### **Viviana Vallin**

#### **Neuroscience**

Viviana graduated from Loyola Marymount University in 2009. Viviana has worked in the laboratories of Martin Ramirez and John Wolfe. In Martin Ramirez's lab, she studied spider genetics using lynx spiders. In John Wolfe's lab, her project was to develop a reliable and effective method for detecting the therapeutic enzyme  $\beta$ -glucuronidase after gene therapy injections. Viviana also did her senior thesis research on the biomagnification of wetland contaminants in garden spiders (*Argiope trifasciata*). Viviana plans on becoming a veterinary scientist committed to public service by helping develop policies and supporting innovative research.

## 2010 Student Inspiration Award



**CONGRATULATIONS** to Nikkita Patel for winning the 2010 Hill Student Inspiration Award! Established through a generous gift from the Hill Family Foundation, the award provides \$100,000 in unrestricted funds to students who demonstrate the potential to advance the frontiers of veterinary medicine and expand the profession's impact on the wellbeing of animals and society. These are the largest prizes in veterinary medicine. Fifty percent of all winners have been VMD-PhD students. The Hill Inspiration Award presentations were on Tuesday, September 28, 2010 at the School of Veterinary Medicine. The other student award recipient was Brittany Gross.

Nikki is a fourth-year VMD-PhD student and her award-winning proposal, entitled "Veterinary Public Health Outreach 2.0," involves using the Internet to "educate, engage and empower the individual and provide a powerful resource for policy makers". Nikki is a native of Knoxville, Tennessee and earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Tennessee and an MPH degree from Yale University.



*Clockwise from top-left: Nikkita with Mr. Vernon Hill, her parents, her husband, and presenting during the awards. Below is the Marookian Auditorium during the award presentations.*



## Alumni Awards, Accomplishments, and Honors

### **Sarah Ralson VMD/PhD (1982) Associate Professor, Rutgers University**

We congratulate Sarah Ralston for winning the 2010 SEBS Academic Professional Excellence Award under the category of Academic Innovation. The following is an excerpt from her nomination letter:

Over the past 20 years, Dr. Sarah L. Ralston has developed and implemented several creative academic innovations that have raised the level of excellence in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. She has taken advantage of the power of the Internet to enrich her Horse Management and Equine Nutrition courses for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education students and offered these courses online to students throughout the United States. In doing so, Dr. Ralston has expanded the scope and impact of her teaching to reach a larger number and variety of students well beyond what could be accommodated within Rutgers University classroom walls. These innovations alone would be sufficient to make Sarah a front-runner for the Academic Innovation Award! And yet, her creation of the highly innovative, sustainable, and forward-thinking Young Horse Teaching and Research Program, which has nurtured hundreds of Cook/SEBS student leaders and engaged the community in many ways, qualifies her as a most outstanding nominee.



### **Kim Blackwell VMD/PhD (1988) Professor, George Mason University**



Congratulations to Kim Blackwell for her article in Nature Reviews Neuroscience: Kotaleski, J.H. and Blackwell, K.T. Modeling the molecular mechanisms of synaptic plasticity using system biology approaches. Nature Reviews Neuroscience 11:239-251 (2010).

### **Katherine Masek Hammerman VMD/PhD 2006, Pfizer**

Congratulations to Kate Masek Hammerman who completed her postdoctoral studies at Harvard and has taken a new position at Pfizer as a Pathologist and Principal Scientist in Investigative Pathology.



**Please send up updates of your accomplishments, promotions, new positions, etc.**

#### **We want to know....**

New position, promotion, patent, publication, etc.?  
Please share your news! [atchison@vet.upenn.edu](mailto:atchison@vet.upenn.edu)

## Alumni Donors

Last year we appealed to our alumni for support to assist our VMD-PhD admissions season. Through your generous support by both cash and estate planning, we were able to recruit three outstanding new VMD-PhD students (highlighted on page 2). Heartfelt thanks to the following alumni for their generous support:

**Richard Miselis, VMD/PhD 1973**

**Patricia McManus, VMD/PhD 1983**

**James MacLeod, VMD/PhD 1990**

**Mark Pykett, VMD/PhD 1994**

**Katherine Masek Hammerman, VMD/PhD 2006**



Dr. Richard Miselis

Dr. Pat McManus

Dr. Mark Pykett

Dr. James MacLeod

Dr. Kate Masek Hammerman

Our 2011 admission season begins in several weeks and we are still in significant need of new funds. If you are interested in contributing to the VMD-PhD Program, please contact:

Melissa von Stade

Assistant Dean of Advancement and Alumni Relations

(215) 898-1482 or [vmstade@vet.upenn.edu](mailto:vmstade@vet.upenn.edu)

## Upcoming Events

### VMD-PhD Program Review

For the first time ever, the VMD-PhD Program will be reviewed by an external/internal body of reviewers on October 28-29, 2010. The Review Committee is made up of members from the School of Veterinary Medicine, School of Medicine, and VMD-PhD Alumni Dr. Jenni Punt, Dr. Jaime Modiano, and Dr. Ken Mohn. The committee will evaluate documents provided by the Program and will interview faculty and students. Subsequently, the committee will provide an evaluation of the Program and make recommendations for the future. We look forward to this review as we enter the fifth decade of the Program's existence.

### VMD-PhD Christmas Dinner Party



### VMD-PhD Christmas Party

Make sure to save the date for the annual VMD-PhD Christmas party to be held at Dr. Atchison's home on Friday, December 10th at 6pm. Please RSVP by emailing: [atchison@vet.upenn.edu](mailto:atchison@vet.upenn.edu)

All current students and alumni are invited.

## Conferences

### National Merit-NIH Veterinary Scholars Symposium

Between August 5-8, 2010, students in the VMD-PhD Program and the NIH/Merial Summer Research Program attended the annual Merit-NIH Veterinary Scholars Symposium at the University of Georgia. Students were accompanied by Drs. Michael Atchison and Kurt Hankenson. The conference focused on translational research and brought together veterinary students performing biomedical research from across North America and Europe. Third year VMD-PhD student Samra Zelman (shown at the right) was recipient of a poster award at the conference.



## Student Publications

### 2009

**Cook Sangar, M.L.**, Anandatheerthavarada, H.K., Tang, W., Prabu, S.K., Martin, M.V., Dostalek, M., Guengerich, F.P., and Avadhani, N.G. Human liver mitochondrial cytochrome P450 2D6 – individual variations and implications in drug metabolism. *FEBS J.* 276: 3440-3453 (2009).

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