

# Biological Sciences e-Notes

For the week of March 6, 2014

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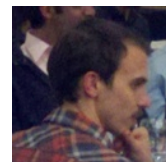
## News:

Three department faculty are being recognized with prestigious university-level awards this year! We heard earlier this week that **Dana Hawley** has been selected to receive one of two [2014 Alumni Teaching Awards](#) and **Lori Blanc** is one of two new [Diggs Teaching Scholars](#) for 2014. We have now also learned that **Mike Rosenzweig** will receive this year's [Alumni Award for Outreach Excellence](#). Please join me in congratulating these three very special members of our department!



On February 21, the interdepartmental Molecular Plant Sciences Program at Virginia Tech held its annual Mini-Symposium, with support from the Translational Plant Sciences IGEP program and the Fralin Life Sciences Institute. The event featured keynote talks by renowned plant scientists Joe Chappell (University of Kentucky), Carole Cramer (Arkansas State University), and Carole Auer (University of Connecticut). Presentations by MPS – Biological Sciences graduate students included an oral presentation by **Hardik Zatakia** (Scharf lab), and poster presentations by **Jason Lancaster** (Tholl lab), **Ben Webb**

(Scharf lab), **Alison Kernell Burke**, and **Revathy Ramachandran** (Stevens lab). **Zack Nimchuk** and **Jim Tokuhisa** among other MPS faculty were in charge of poster judging. The prize for best MPS poster presentation went to Ben Webb; the following day Ben won the first-place EEB poster award at Research Day. That was some poster; congratulations, Ben!



**Jason Lancaster**, a Ph.D. student in the Tholl lab, recently was awarded a grant from the Molecular Plant Sciences Program for his attendance and research presentation at the Gordon Research Conference on Plant Volatiles. Congratulations, Jason!

**Hang Zhang**, a third year graduate student in the Xing lab, received the second place poster competition scholarship award at the Fourth Interdisciplinary Research Symposium of the Iota Delta Rho Interdisciplinary Research Honor Society. The symposium was held on February 27<sup>th</sup> at The Inn at Virginia Tech. Hang's poster was entitled "A novel post-transcriptional motif regulates definitive endoderm differentiation of human embryonic stem cells." Congratulations, Hang!

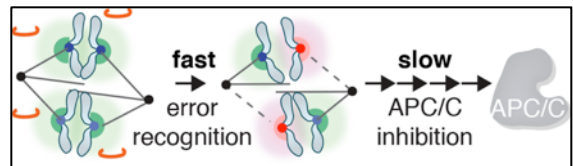


The Biological Sciences Alumni Advisory Board met at the Institute for Advanced Study during the lunch break on Research Day. Board members, **Edward Goyette** (incoming chair), **Jean Garrett**, **Betsy Hagan**, **Adrienne Hoffman** (outgoing chair), **Shawn Semones**, and **Jennifer Sheets** were joined by **Brenda Winkel** and members of the college development office, **Jenny Orzolek** and **Tim Howland**.

The agenda included a lively ongoing discussion of how to enhance connections with our 9000+ alumni, getting a head start on sponsorships for next year's Research Day, and a bit of brainstorming on the upcoming FIRESIDE CHAT. We are very fortunate to have such a highly-engaged and insightful board! They provide a unique perspective on many of the department's missions, from enhancing the undergraduate experience to identifying emerging research opportunities, helping shape the department's long-term strategic plan in the process.

## Hot off the Press:

Ph.D. Student, **Julia Kamenz**, and Assistant Professor, **Silke Hauf**, have published a new paper entitled, "[Slow checkpoint activation kinetics as a safety device in anaphase](#)," in *Current Biology*. According to Dr. Hauf, "We found that a crucial signaling pathway that protects chromosome segregation is fast in recognizing errors in chromosome attachment but surprisingly slow in creating a cellular response. This is irritating, because it jeopardizes faithful chromosome segregation. Our new work suggests that this slowness may become beneficial in anaphase when chromosomes split. In this situation, a too quick response could completely block the completion of cell division. The slowness of the response, in contrast, ensures that cells finish dividing once they have started to separate the chromosomes. Hence, being slow can also have its advantages...!"



## Announcements:



The Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute will once again serve as the Southwest Virginia partner for **Brain Awareness Week**, an annual international campaign that unites the efforts of universities, hospitals, government agencies, schools, and associations to increase public awareness about the progress and benefits of brain research. One highlight of the local weeklong commemoration will be [Brain School 2014](#), a public seminar series in which leading experts, including our own **Michael Fox** and **Michael Friedlander**, will offer an owner's manual on the brain. The full schedule is available [here](#). The Dana Foundation, a private philanthropic organization that supports brain research through grants, publications, and educational programs, is currently featuring [an interview](#) with Mike Friedlander about Brain Week.

**Erik Nilsen** has arranged for a visit from an experienced program officer at the NSF. **Irwin Forseth** will visit the campus on **Thursday, March 20<sup>th</sup>**, just after spring break. Dr. Forseth served several terms as a rotating program officer for the BIO directorate in the IOS division, followed by numerous short-term assignments, while on the faculty at the University of Maryland. He has now been appointed as a permanent program director at NSF. His extensive experience with the NSF and other federal funding agencies makes him a great resource. He will be meeting with graduate students from **9:30 - 10:45 in LS1 room 101**. Dr. Forseth has also agreed to make a presentation to the general VT community (faculty would be most interested) on programs and current issues at the NSF. This presentation will be in the **Fralin Auditorium from 1:30 - 2:30 on Thursday March 20**.

Carla Finkelstein has organized the first “**Cancer Funding Workshop**” at Virginia Tech, with support from the Fralin Life Science Institute. The event is being held today and tomorrow, March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, and provides an opportunity for researchers at Virginia Tech to hear presentations on current funding priorities by grant directors and scientific reviewers from a variety of organizations involved in cancer research. There are also opportunities to meet one-on-one with organization representatives. Among organizations participating in the workshop are *the American Association for Cancer Research, the American Cancer Society, the Avon Foundation, the Medical Foundation, the Susan G. Komen Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health (NCI)*. In addition, a representative from the *Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine* will discuss opportunities for collaboration between our institutions.

## **Events:**

**Thursday, March 6, 2014:** EEB Seminar by **Seth Wenger** of the University of Georgia, entitled, “New approaches for broad-scale population viability estimation,” 3:30 p.m., Fralin Auditorium

**Thursday, March 6, 2014:** VTCRI Distinguished Scholar Seminar (and part of Brain School 2014) by Helen Mayberg of Emory University, entitled, “Mapping depression circuits: Foundation for new treatment strategies using deep brain stimulation,” 5:30 p.m., [Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute](#)

**Friday, March 7, 2014:** VTLSS Seminar by Andrew Murkin of the University of Buffalo, entitled, “From Mechanism to Drug Design: New methods and applications of isotope effects in enzymology,” 12:20 p.m., VBI Conference Center

**Tuesday, March 11, 2014:** [Brain Awareness Week Seminar](#) by Anne Harvey of VTCRI, entitled, “Your Brain on Art,” 5:30 p.m., [Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine](#) M203

**Wednesday, March 12, 2014:** [Brain Awareness Week Seminar](#) by Anne Harvey of VTCRI, entitled, “Your Brain on Advertising,” 4:00 p.m., [Science Museum of Western Virginia](#)

## **Upcoming SEEDS/Blacksburg Nature Center Events:** *(Also, check out the Center's [Facebook Page!](#))*

**After School Thursdays: 2pm – 5pm.** We have great in-door fun on inclement days and have some great places to romp outside when it’s nice. Do you know an 8th grader who needs service activities? After School Thursdays might be a good time to come over and volunteer.

**Play Date Fridays: 9am-1pm. Fri. 7th.** Dorothy and Tamara always have a fun program and craft for the kids. This week’s theme is “What am I?” A guessing game about native animals.

**For all Ages Saturdays: 9am-1pm. Sat. 8th.** “I Love Herps” with our herpetologist intern expert Meredith; plus the “What am I” native animal guessing game. Fun and educational activities for all ages. Come on over for a visit and have fun with all of our living critters and kid-friendly exhibits! Admission is free and you can come at any point during the open hours to enjoy the activities.

## Photos:



On Friday, Feb 28, **Lori Blanc**, Director of the Da Vinci Living Learning Community (formerly the Biological and Life Sciences Community) took freshman and sophomore life science students on a field trip to the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute in Roanoke. The students were given a personal tour by VTCRI Director, **Mike Friedlander**, during which they learned about the wide range of cutting-edge medical research being conducted at VTCRI, as well as opportunities for involvement in undergraduate research.

*If you have newsworthy items that you'd like to share (including photos), please send them to Valerie at [vsutherl@vt.edu](mailto:vsutherl@vt.edu)! (e-Notes is distributed every Thursday to the BIOLOGY\_ALL listserv, which includes Biological Sciences faculty, adjuncts and affiliates, postdocs, staff, graduate students, emeriti, and select members of the College of Science.)*