Upcoming Events

- Pitt Football Game and Tailgate - Sept. 2
- BGSA 2017-2018 Elections - Sept. 12-19
- Row House Movie Night - Sept. 21
- BGSA Symposium - Oct. 11

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Dear fellow students and faculty members,

I can hardly believe that this will be my last update as BGSA President! The BGSA has been very active since our last newsletter in March. In April, students attended the March for Science in Washington DC and satellite locations. In June, we kicked off the summer with the second annual Spring Semi-formal, followed by two exciting career seminar series given by Pitt alumni, and held our annual summer orientation picnic in Schenley Park. You can read more about these events and others in this newsletter. Please visit www.bgsa.pitt.edu for updates on upcoming events, useful resources, and student accomplishments.

Here are some new highlights and opportunities from the BGSA:

- We will be holding elections September 12-19. Interested in running for a program representative or executive board position? Contact Paige Rudich at pad68@pitt.edu.
- We recently formed an Intramural Sports Committee to engage students in outdoor physical activity at the newly opened Pitt Sports Dome and public parks. If you are interested in playing sports this fall, contact Dan Zuppo at daz48@pitt.edu.
- We are also looking forward to volunteering at Saturday STEM academies this fall with Carnegie Science Museum and Carlow University. If you’re interested in community outreach, contact Mondraya Howard at moh16@pitt.edu.

It’s been a privilege to serve as the leader of the BGSA. Looking forward to the upcoming academic year! Abby Stahl BGSA President, 2016-2017

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**BGSA Representatives, 2016-2017**

**Executive Board**

- **President**: Abby Stahl
- **VP of Records**: Paige Rudich
- **VP of Finance**: Lisa Jean Clark
- **VP of Communications**: Anastasia Gorelova
- **VP of University Relations**: Eileen Wong
- **VP of Programming**: Jennifer Boatz

**Program Representatives**

- **IBGP First Year**: Christopher Chuckran and Nikki Naim
- **Cell Biology and Molecular Physiology**: Rachel Wills
- **Molecular Pharmacology**: Ryan Staudt and Eleanor Johnston
- **Cellular and Molecular Pathology**: Colin Beckwit, Morgan Preziosi, and Anthony Otero
- **Immunology**: Alyah Weinstein, Helen Rich and Hiroshi Yano
- **Molecular Genetics and Developmental Biology**: Fine Han and Daniel Zuppo
- **Molecular Virology and Microbiology**: Justin Wendzicki and Mondraya Howard
- **Integrated Systems Biology/PIMB**: Kate Shipman, Celestino Velasquez, and Ricardo DeMoya
- **Molecular Biophysics and Structural Biology**: Sara Whitlock and Stephen White
- **Biomedical Informatics**: Jose Posada, Michael Ding
- **Neuroscience**: Sarah Najjar and Matt Rich
- **Computational Biology**: Jocelyn Sunseri
- **Clinical and Translational Sciences**: Alyce Anderson
Spring Semi-formal at Wigle Whiskey

The BGSA hosted a Spring Semi-Formal Happy Hour at Wigle Whiskey Distillery in the Strip District on June 26th. Students enjoyed snacking on crock-pot meatballs, hummus, watermelon, Prantle's cupcakes and more paired with two free drinks from scotch, bourbon, and rye whiskeys neat, on the rocks, and as mixed spirits. Over the night, students learned how local grains such as corn, barley, and rye are converted into flavorful whiskeys through tours of the grain mill, fermentation and distillery vats, and aging barrels. Everybody had a great time and several people bough bottles and snifters to take home with them. Wigle is donating back 13% of their proceeds from the night of celebration back to the BGSA.

Careers in Government Agencies for Biomedical PhDs

In our first Career Seminar of the summer, Pitt alums, Kelly Poe and Paul Carlson, came back to talk about their current jobs at the NIH and FDA, respectively, and the paths that led them there. Dr. Poe is a Scientific Review Officer for the National Institute of Allergy and Infections Diseases (NIAID), while Dr. Carlson is a PI at the FDA. Both of them carefully chose post-docs that would help them attain their end goals. Dr. Poe chose to work for a PI who had started a non-profit which she then worked in after she finished her Ph.D. Dr. Carlson went to University of Michigan and did research in a leading anthrax lab. Both Dr. Poe and Dr. Carlson emphasized how important it was to choose post-docs based off where you want your career to go, and how vital it was to apply for grants early on. They also recommended to check usajobs.gov frequently if you want to work for the NIH, as job listings are often only on there for a short period of time (such as a week or two). It is challenging to get a job at the NIH, so one recommendation was to work as a contractor for the NIH by applying through Zintellect and then you have a connection with someone at NIH. It was great to hear from University of Pittsburgh alum and to get to pick their brains on how to succeed after graduate school.
Anti-gravity Pilates

On July 29th, BGSA members got a great workout at the AntiGravity Pilates class at Sthiel Pilates! AntiGravity Pilates utilizes Harrison AntiGravity Hammocks created by Christopher Harrison, which allow participants to be suspended as they perform strength and flexibility exercises. Although most of us were new to AntiGravity, our wonderful instructor Steph was very impressed with our abilities.

We even went upside down in our hammocks for multiple exercises! The class also included decompression of the spine and joints as well as a time of relaxation at the end. Everyone had a blast at the class, and everyone is encouraged to check out Sthiel Pilates! A variety of classes are offered each week, and each class costs only $12 for students! Please check out the studio’s website for more information: http://www.sthielpilates.com.

Mars Elementary School Science Fair

The annual Mars Area Elementary School Science Fair was held on April 11th. Students in grades 4-6 worked in small groups and had the opportunity to test their hypotheses in a tried and true fashion befitting a scientist. The eager young researchers were more than willing to delve into their projects such as “Which metal makes the best magnet”, “How to dry nail polish quickly”, “Which popcorn pops the best”, and “Which water tastes the best” (spoiler, it’s not Pittsburgh city water). Their audience? University of Pittsburgh graduate students and parents. While we attentively listened to the young scientist’s rationales and methods, the school so kindly provided us with some much need sustenance (pizza, cookies, and water). As the evening drew to an end, the participants were given awards to acknowledge their scientific breakthroughs.
Early in the morning of April 22, before the sun had even begun to rise, dozens of BGSA students filed onto chartered buses along with students from Pitt Chemistry, Duquesne Chemistry, and staff and faculty from Pitt to support scientific research funding at the nationwide March for Science in Washington, D.C. To prepare for the big day, BGSA sponsored an event at the Pittsburgh Center for Creativity the evening of April 20 to write postcards to government representatives and make posters for the march. After a long bus ride, BGSA students joined 40,000 other citizens around the Washington Monument for a rainy morning of notable science speakers, including Bill Nye, and musical performances.

At 2 o’clock in the afternoon, the march from the Washington Monument to Capitol Hill began, with umbrellas, science signs, and chants filling the streets. “Despite the rain and the cold, it was inspiring to be part of a movement in which so many people across the country from so many disciplines in the scientific community came together to make their voices heard and united. This is what democracy looks like,” described Justin Wendzicki.

Exhausted after a long day, BGSA students left the march to head back to Pittsburgh, and enjoyed sandwiches and snacks provided by BGSA on the bus ride, as they recovered and warmed up from a cold and rainy day marching to support evidence-based policies and government funding for research. “It was lovely to see so many people come together, all ages, for the importance of science. Plus I got buttons,” excitedly exclaimed Mondraya Howard.

BGSA students also joined the local March for Science in Pittsburgh that occurred simultaneously on April 22, starting their march from the Cathedral of Learning, and marching around Oakland to engage the Pittsburgh community and showcase the scientific research of Pittsburgh.
Student Spotlight

Ali has a strong passion for her translational research in breast cancer. She collaborated with Cemal Erdem (graduate student in Computational Biology) which was recently published in Mol Cell Proteomics, and recently received a fundable score on a NRSA F31 Fellowship on this work. Ali gave an oral presentation at the 2017 Gordon Research Conference on IGFs in Physiology & Disease for which she received a travel award, and a poster the UPCI Annual retreat where she won 1st place prize in pre-clinical research. Last year she mentored a high school student in the UPCI Summer Academy program, and she offer support to all of her lab and graduate school colleagues. Ali is a member of the leadership team of Women in Bio, serving as the Vice Chair and Secretary, and working hard to promote young female interest in the STEM fields. Outside of her busy work schedule, Ali finds time to run marathons and recently completed the Hell Hath no Hurry 50k race to become an ultra-marathoner! Go Ali!

Adrian V. Lee, PhD

Miranda Culley, CMP

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Miranda Culley for the BGSA Student Spotlight. Miranda is a gifted MSTP (MD/PhD) student who has been working in my lab for the past year. She has made tremendous progress in deciphering the molecular mechanism of how deficiency of the iron-sulfur biogenesis protein frataxin can promote pulmonary vascular metabolic dysfunction and pulmonary hypertension. In just her first year, Miranda has accumulated multiple awards for her work including a competitive award on the Angiopathy Training Grant (sponsored by Cell and Molecular Pathology 2016-2017) and 2nd place at the AHA Fellows Research Day (January 2017). Most impressively, Miranda was awarded a NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein F30 graduate student award (PI Culley) only after one year in graduate school. With this trajectory, I expect that Miranda will be in a unique position in the future to translate her laboratory discoveries to direct clinical application in pulmonary hypertension and beyond.

Stephen Chan, MD, PhD
Born in Damascus, Syria, Huda Akil came to the U.S. in the 1960s to get her Ph.D. at UCLA. After completing a post-doc at Stanford University, Dr. Akil began work as a professor at the University of Michigan in 1978 and has been there ever since. She is now a Professor of Psychiatry and co-director of the Molecular & Behavioral Neuroscience Institute at Michigan. She has made seminal contributions to our understanding of the neurobiology of emotions and affect, including pain, stress, depression, and addictive behavior. She began her research work at the time of the discovery of endorphins and participated in the development of that field through a combination of behavioral, anatomical, molecular, and translational studies. Throughout her career, she has developed new technologies for studying the function and regulation of neural circuits, as well as new paradigms and animal models of affective behavior. This includes the study of the neurobiology of temperament and its relevance to differences in mood and addictive disorders. She is currently engaged in large-scale studies to discover new genes and proteins that cause vulnerability to major depression and bipolar illness. The hallmark of her work is its multidimensional, collaborative, and integrative nature. Dr. Akil has received many awards and honors and has been recognized as one of the most cited researchers in neuroscience. She is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and served as President of the Society for Neuroscience in 2002.

Abstracts should be submitted to:
https://goo.gl/forms/hl1rAKVBNv9WzXc82
Award nominations should be submitted to:
bgsa.symposium.2017@gmail.com

Deadlines:
• Oral Presentations – Abstract Deadline August 25
• Poster Presentations – Abstract Deadline September 8
• Stephen L. Phillips Award – Deadline September 13
• Distinguished Mentor Award – Deadline August 31
• Most Well Rounded Student Award – Deadline September 8

We are seeking faculty and post-docs to serve as poster judges. Sign up here: https://goo.gl/forms/QnQpo8pQLY8NGDb33

Questions? Contact Sarah Najjar at bgsa.symposium.2017@gmail.com

BGSA Symposium 2017

Save the date!

October 11 at the University Club
from 7:45 am – 4:30pm
Travel Grants

Congratulations to BGSA Travel Grant awardees!

Congratulations to Cemal Erdem winner of the BGSA Travel Award for August! Cemal utilizes experimental and computational modelling techniques to study insulin and insulin-like growth factor I (IGF1) in breast cancer cells. Cemal gave oral and poster presentations on this research at the International Conference on Systems Biology 2017!

**July:** Chelsea Merkel studies the adherent junction, an important junctional complex connecting cardiomyocytes. She presented her work at the American Heart Association Basic Cardiovascular Science 2017 in Portland, OR!

**June:** Stephanie Ander studies how the placenta works as a barrier to T. gondii vertical transmission. She presented her work at the 14th International Congress on Toxoplasmosis and Toxoplasma gondii Research in Tomar, Portugal!

**May:** Michael Chiang and Vera Procaccia are the winners of May BGSA Travel Awards. Michael presented his work at the 36th Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Pain Society. Vera presented her research at Atherosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology - Peripheral Vascular Disease 2017 (ATVB-PVD).

The BGSA will award TWO travel grants of $250 per month to two eligible students within School of Medicine’s graduate programs. BGSA Travel Grants can be used to reimburse travel and lodging costs, and event-specific fees. To learn more and to submit an application, please go to [http://www.bgsa.pitt.edu/travel-grants.html](http://www.bgsa.pitt.edu/travel-grants.html) or email BGSATravelGrants@gmail.com.

Recent Student Publications

MBSB


Immunology


MGDB


CNUP


ISB


MMG


Mol Pharm