Notes from the Chair

During the 2009 summer, the Associate Dean of the School of Sciences led the science department chairs (Biology, Chemistry/Physics, Mathematics/Computer Science, and Psychology) to consider how we might promote “characteristics of a rigorous, purposeful science education at Belmont.” We focused on four areas: promoting external links via more internships and science speakers, developing additional service learning and community service opportunities in the sciences, encouraging character development of students, and providing more career preparation for science students. Two immediate outcomes of our conversations led to a Student Code of Conduct that all science faculty were encouraged to adopt for their courses and the creation of a School of Sciences Seminar Series. Each department will host one school-wide seminar as well as two departmental seminars in 2009-10. In the fall, we enjoyed presentations on dark energy, physical knot theory, and “broken brains.” Recent alumni Becky Repasky Adams spoke about her transition to graduate school (Vanderbilt University) while Christina Inman shared her experiences as a first year medical student at Wake Forest. Lined up for spring is our own Dr. Jennifer Thomas to talk about H1N1. Enjoy reading our fall newsletter and learning about all the many ways that we promote a “rigorous, purposeful science education” in the Department of Biology.

Dr. Darlene Panvini
Chair, Biology Department

Annual Meeting of Academy of Science Fall 2009

The Annual Meeting of the Tennessee Academy of Science was held at UT, Knoxville on October 30, 2009. The Department of Biology was represented by Ryan Alexander, Beth Schriner, Anwesa Chakrabarti, Ola Osinusi and Amanda Castro. Dr. Jennifer Thomas, Dr. John Niedzwiecki and Dr. Steve Murphree were also in attendance. All five students presented posters at the meeting. Several students won awards for their posters: Anwesa Chakrabarti (first place, cell and molecular biology), Amanda Castro (second place, microbiology), Elizabeth Schriner (third place, zoology). Their abstracts were published in the March 2010 Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science.
15th Annual Tennessee Herpetological Society Meeting 2009
September 24-26 at University of Tennessee, Martin

Student Beth Schriner and Assistant Professor John Niedzwiecki gave oral presentations of their recent research at the Annual Herpetological Society Meeting at UT, Martin. Dr. Niedzwiecki presented his work using molecular phylogeography to compare common distribution patterns in eastern ambystomatid salamander species. Beth presented her senior honors research on the effect of predatory sunfish on asymmetric intraspecific competition in the streamside salamander, Ambystoma barbouri.

In addition to delivering her well-received talk, Beth had the opportunity to meet other researchers and state wildlife officials who work with reptiles and amphibians. Beth also learned from the keynote speaker, Dr. Stan Trauth (University of Arkansas), how a career in herpetology can lead to brushes with fame ranging from David Attenborough, to the TV show Dirty jobs, to Disney/Pixar studios.

Southeast Population Ecology and Evolutionary Genetics Meeting (SEPEEG) 2009
October 16-18, Camp Washega, Dahlonega, GA

In a Poster Session at the 2009 Southeast Population Ecology and Evolutionary Genetics Annual Meeting, students Sara Bentley, Kendra Cowan, Christopher Pilny and Elizabeth Schriner presented their Summer Research Projects to researchers from more than a dozen research-oriented universities from across the South. Students also attended talks given by professors and graduate students on the cutting edge of evolutionary biology and genetics. There was a large emphasis on the evolution of disease this year, with keynote speaker Les Real (Emory University) describing his work with the CDC on infectious diseases such as Ebola and rabies. Despite cold temperatures and primitive conditions at camp Washega, the science was state of the art.

Nissan Wetlands Project

Dr. Steve Murphree, Dr. Darlene Panvini and Dr. John Niedzwiecki have the opportunity to study a wetlands area on the Nissan North America campus in Franklin. The three biologists visited the wetland in July 2009 and submitted a grant proposal to Nissan. Equipment from the grant will be used by the faculty to work with Belmont biology students to study and monitor the wetland for the next few years. The wetlands will also provide the chance to use the area as a valuable research area for undergraduate research projects.

Dr. Steve Murphree, Nicholas Kirk and Mark McFarland visit the wetlands.
The Beaman Lobby was filled with students who came to attend and present at the Fall 2009 SURS, held on Dec. 3, 2009. A wide diversity of work was presented and discussed by Biology seniors who completed their research in BIO 4700. An additional 16 posters were presented by a total of 27 students from other departments in the School of Sciences. Following the poster session, oral presentations were made by 15 students. The keynote address was delivered by Dr. John Wikswo (right), who discussed his work at Vanderbilt University in “The Challenges of Controlling Living Cells.”

SURS (Science Undergraduate Symposium) Fall 2009

Dr. Jennifer Thomas listens to Alyson Singh’s research findings of treatment on zebrafish.

Kendra Cowan explains how zebrafish are an excellent model for her research project.

ENV Studies major Lindsay Walker talks about her research on composting.

Amanda Castro talks to students about her research on Staphylococcus aureus.

Anwesa Chakrabarti answers a student’s questions about C. elegans research.

Ola Osinusi explains ethanol and working memory on Danio rerio.

Bao Nguyen explains yeast as a model organism in his research project.
Biology Department

Dr. Robert T. Grammer, Professor
Dr. C. Steven Murphree, Professor
Dr. Lori L. McGrew, Associate Professor, ICORD Fellow and Neuroscience Coordinator
Dr. John Niedzwiecki, Assistant Professor and Gulf Coast Research Lab Coordinator
Dr. Darlene Panvini, Associate Professor, Environmental Science Coordinator and Chair
Dr. D. Nicholas Ragsdale, Associate Professor and Pre-Health Advisor
Dr. Jennifer T. Thomas, Associate Professor and BMB Coordinator
Ms. Terri Templeman, Administrative Assistant
Mr. Ray Seely, Laboratory Manager and Chemical Hygiene Officer

Contact Us!

- Have any comments about the newsletter or the Department?
- An alum with an update on activities?
- Like further information about the Department, its offerings or activities?

Please contact us by one of the following e-mail addresses or by postal service.

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Biology Alumni Update

We want to hear from you! Please take a moment to fill out the information below and send to us.

Name________________________________________________Graduation Year__________________
Address____________________________________________________________________________
City_____________________________State_____________Zip Code________Phone_______________
Email address________________________________________________________________________
Employment__________________________________Title_____________________________________
Recent promotion, honor, award, family activity?___________________________________________