NS&M Hosts 2nd Annual Scholarship and Awards Luncheon

The School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics hosted its 2nd Annual Scholarship and Awards Luncheon, January 25, 2005 at the Alys Stephens Center. Representatives from UAB, including UAB President Dr. Carol Z. Garrison, joined Dean Lowell Wenger, NS&M Department Chairs, faculty and staff to honor the school’s donors and friends along with student scholars and outstanding alumni.

Dr. Garrison welcomed the crowd of students, friends and alumni. Dr. Wenger presented tokens of appreciation to the scholarship and award donors present, which included a host of friends to the School. The list of donors included Mrs. Gladys Brockman, Dr. Jeanne Hutchison, Tim Ferguson from SOLEN, Inc., and Dr. and Mrs. Anthony Barnard. Dr. Wenger also recognized the student scholars from throughout the school.

Students receiving named scholarships for the 2004-2005 year were:

- Ziad Bou Akar - George F. Brockman, IV Endowed Scholarship
- Sara Ismael - God at the Speed of Light Endowed Scholarship
- Ruben Vuittonet, Dwayne Turner and Matthew Curry - Joseph M. Fontana Endowed Scholarship in Computer and Information Sciences
- Yu-sheng Huang - Daniel Jones Endowed Graduate Support Fund in Biology
- Matthew Morgan – Travis Wood Memorial Mathematics Scholarship

Students participating in school-sponsored scholarship programs, including the Math Fast Track Program and the Chemistry Scholars Program, were also recognized.

Stated Dean Wenger, “the Scholarship and Awards Luncheon gives us a wonderful opportunity to thank the generous contributors who make it possible for us to recruit and retain the best and brightest students through scholarships and awards. We are also proud to highlight our outstanding students and their academic achievements within the disciplines in the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.”
Letter From the Dean

It has been an exciting and busy time in the School of Natural Sciences & Mathematics during the past several months as we prepared for UAB’s re-accreditation by SACS, the accrediting body for universities in the Southeast. As part of this process, the university has had to submit a Quality Enhancement Plan for improving the learning of our undergraduates. After discussions with many different groups, the decision was made to focus on reconceptualizing the undergraduate core curriculum to ensure that a UAB Graduate is an individual who uses communication skills effectively, possesses breadth and depth of knowledge, is experienced at problem-solving, and is prepared for responsible citizenship. Clearly these are traits and characteristics we feel that our present and future NS&M alumni must possess if they are to be successful in reaching their career objectives. As this plan develops and is implemented, we will highlight many of the programmatic enhancements arising from the School in future newsletters.

As you read this issue of the newsletter, you will find that the School continues to excel in many venues and is extremely proud of the accomplishments and honors achieved by our alumni, students, and faculty. This past January, NS&M formally recognized for the first time several of our distinguished alumni as part of our Annual NS&M Scholarship and Awards Luncheon. In the future, we hope that more alumni will be able to attend this recognition luncheon and meet former classmates as well as current scholarship recipients.

Lastly, we again wish to thank you for your continued support of NS&M and our departments, whether providing financial assistance or informing others of the advantages of a UAB education. We hope you enjoy the newsletter and please let us know of other features you would enjoy reading about in this newsletter.

Lowell E. Wenger, Ph.D.
NS&M Honors Outstanding Alumni

At the 2005 Scholarship and Awards Luncheon the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics began the tradition of honoring three of our most outstanding graduates who have achieved tremendous success in their chosen fields and who continue to serve as ambassadors for the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and UAB. This year’s recipients of the Outstanding Alumni Award were David W. Brasfield, Dr. Frank E. Harrell, Jr. and Martin C. Nowak.

David Brasfield received his BS in Computer and Information Science in 1984. He is currently President and CEO of Brasfield Technology and Brasfield Data Services, which provides financial institutions throughout the southeast with integrated technology solutions. Brasfield Technology offers cost-effective means for community banks to benefit from advances in technology. Brasfield Data Services provides a world-class level of customer service to their member financial institutions.

David has more than 20 years of experience in the banking and software industries, including time with the Federal Reserve Bank, NCR Corporation and as President of SBS Corporation, a company that he founded in 1989 with the support of the Office of Advancement of Developing Industry (OADI). His company was the first of the OADI companies to move into the million-dollar revenue bracket. David completed the Harvard University Executive Education program and has been recognized as one of the Birmingham Business Journal’s Top 40 Business Executives. David is currently serving as a founding member of the UAB Department of Computer and Information Sciences Leadership Council.

Dr. Frank E. Harrell, Jr. received his BS in Mathematics in 1973. He then went on to receive his Ph.D. in Biostatistics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1979. Frank spent 17 years in the Biometry and Cardiology Divisions and the Clinical Research Institute of Duke University Medical Center. In 1996 he founded the Division of Biostatistics and Epidemiology in the Department of Health Evaluation Sciences at the University of Virginia. Overall, Frank has taught biostatistics and research methodology to

(Continued on page 4)
hundreds of physicians since the early 1980’s and has overseen research projects of dozens of medical fellows. In 2003 Dr. Harrell became the founding chair of the Department of Biostatistics at Vanderbilt University. His new area of emphasis is pharmaceutical safety, relating to developing better ways to present safety information to data monitoring companies and developing new methods for pharmaceutical researchers to explore clinical chemistry, hematology, adverse events, and ECG data in Phase II and III randomized clinical trials. Much of Frank’s work has been applied to health services and outcomes research, technology evaluation and clinical trials.

Martin C. Nowak is the chief planning and strategy officer, and executive director of strategic ventures, UAB Health System and has been employed in the healthcare field for more than 30 years. He earned a bachelor’s degree in biology in 1979 and master’s in healthcare administration in 1981 from UAB. Prior to his current position, Martin was the Executive Director/CEO of UABHospital from 1998 until 2002. He also was administrator of UAB’s Center for Psychiatric Medicine, vice president of Medical Center East Hospital and administrator of St. Clair Regional Hospital. Martin has received numerous awards during his career including the 2001 Distinguished Service Award from the Alabama Hospital Association. He is a fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives and a member of the Medical Group Management Association and the Healthcare Finance Management Association.

We honor David W. Brasfield, Dr. Frank E. Harrell and Martin C. Nowak for their contribution to the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and celebrate their achievement as valued alumni in their given areas of expertise.
Dr. Thane Wibbels is an Associate Professor in the Department of Biology whose research interest is in sea turtles, specifically comparative reproductive physiology of vertebrates with an emphasis on temperature-dependent sex determination (TSD) in reptiles. Many reptiles (including all sea turtles) possess TSD, in which sex is determined by the temperature at which the egg is incubated. For physiological studies, TSD provides several advantages not available in other vertebrate sex determination systems, including the ability to manipulate sex by both temperature and steroid hormones. This research could provide wonderful insight into how temperature can “turn genes on and off,” resulting in far-reaching applications throughout science and medicine.

In regards to sea turtle conservation, Dr. Wibbels is working to validate non-lethal sexing techniques for hatchlings sea turtles. These methods can be used to enhance the recovery of endangered sea turtles populations, including the Kemp’s ridley, the most endangered sea turtle in the world. The smallest species of sea turtle, the Kemp’s ridley is 23-29 inches long and weighs between 70 and 95 pounds. Kemp’s ridley turtle populations have historically declined due to overharvesting for turtle products and eggs. They are also in danger from oil spills, beach traffic, beach development, boat propellers and commercial fishing and shrimping. However, the population is now slowly recovering due to conservation efforts.

Dr. Wibbels is working on conservation projects and sea turtle programs around the world and collaborates with the National Park Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is currently working with the National Park Service and the Padre Island National Seashore in Padre Island, Texas on tracking one particular sea turtle whose migration pattern runs from Texas, across Alabama, and into Florida keys (smart turtle!).

The International Sea Turtle Society, for which Dr. Wibbels is the President for 2004-2005, recently hosted its 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. Around 1,000 people from over 70 countries attended the sessions.

Dr. Wibbels received his B.S. in Zoology from the University of Nebraska, M.S. in Biology from the University of Houston and his Ph.D. in Zoology from Texas A&M University. Prior to coming to UAB, Dr. Wibbels conducted a
NIH Research Fellowship at the University of Texas at Austin. He joined the UAB Department of Biology in 1993 and, since that time, has become an integral part of the department, NS&M and UAB through his teaching, research and conservation efforts.

He also adds quite a bit of excitement and energy to the department. Dr. Ken Marion, Chair of the Department of Biology, says about Dr. Wibbels, “Thane is the most energetic person I have ever met. I get nervous when I see him take a sip or two of coffee (which he rarely does). He definitely doesn’t need caffeine!!” Dr. Marion also adds that “he (Thane) drives all over the country as part of his sea turtle work—sometimes to Florida, sometimes to Mexico—and he is back in 3 or 4 days. We all think he will be re-incarnated as a truck driver in his next life.”

For more information on Dr. Wibbels’ research, the International Sea Turtle Society or sea turtle conservation please e-mail twibbels@uab.edu.

Program Spotlight: The Chemistry Scholars Program

The Department of Chemistry offers a unique program to provide students with hands-on experience in the classroom and in the laboratory and integrates them into the Department from their first day.

Students participating in the Chemistry Scholars program follow a rigorous academic curriculum while also part-icipating in additional activities inside the classroom and the lab. As freshmen, students are getting hands on teaching experience as apprentice-type teaching assistants and with peer-to-peer teaching in laboratory classes. As sophomores and juniors, students are allowed to become laboratory assistants for faculty in the Department and are actively involved in the teaching of the labs. During their senior year, students become less active in laboratory teaching and more active in research. Senior students select a faculty advisor and conduct research projects.

The Chemistry Scholars Program doesn’t just teach chemistry. Students in the program are taught leadership and confidence building-skills through these experiential learning opportunities. Students also attend weekly meetings and form strong connections with the faculty and other students in the department.

As participants in the Chemistry Scholars Program, students receive scholarship funds annually which are currently provided through the Department of Chemistry and the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics Dean’s Office. Currently there are around 40 students participating annually, a number that could certainly grow with additional funding.

Students in the Chemistry Scholars Program also participate in the Department of Chemistry Honors Program, which requires students to do one year of research. Chemistry Scholars are recognized each year at an annual awards ceremony. The majority of students in the Chemistry Scholars program are highly-recruited and go on to graduate schools. About one-half of the students that have gone through the program have gone on to Medical School, many of which at such prestigious institutions as Johns Hopkins University, the University of Illinois and the UAB School of Medicine.

If you would like more information on the Chemistry Scholars Program, you can reach the UAB Department of Chemistry by calling (205) 934-4747.
Biology

- Dr. Steve Watts, Professor spent most of the fall and winter in Port Aransas, Texas, performing experiments on sea urchins. Four graduate students and Research Associate Professor Mickie Powell accompanied Dr. Watts to Texas where they utilized the Texas A&M University Shrimp Mariculture Research Facility for a project, funded by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, seeking to find ways to grow a better sea urchin for the growing seafood market.

- Graduate student Patrick Erwin received a grant-in-aid of research from the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology to work on the symbiotic relationships between bacteria and sponges. He will spend this summer working on this project by diving in the crystal, clear marine waters at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute’s Bocas Research Station at Bocas del Toro, Panama.

- Dr. Jim McClintock, Endowed Professor in Polar and Marine Biology, and Dr. Chuck Amsler, Professor, and their laboratory were the main contributors to the UAB Antarctica web site that recently won a regional CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) award submitted by and awarded to the UAB Web Communications and UAB Media offices. The UAB Antarctica web site had over 24,000 “hits” from individuals across the world, including Australia, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.

- “Epigenetic Protocols,” published by Humana Press and edited by Associate Professor Trygve Tollefsbol, has recently become the second best-selling book in the area of molecular biology. The book deals with new methods and technologies that are currently being employed to help unravel the mysteries of the cell and abnormal cell divisions, such as what happens with cancer.

Department of Computer and Information Sciences Forms Leadership Council

The UAB Department of Computer and Information Sciences has formed a Leadership Council that will assist the department in a number of areas, including providing an independent, unbiased sounding board for both evaluating the performance of the department as well as identifying ways to make it more effective. The Leadership Council will also provide technical expertise and serve as advocates for the department. This is particularly important as the department is seeking accreditation. The members provide feedback from the professional community that will enable the Department of Computer and Information Sciences to continue to grow and expand in the most effective way.

Founding members of the CIS Leadership Council are: Mr. Jimmie J. Barnes, Entrepreneur; Mr. David Brasfield, President and CEO of Brasfield Technology; Dr Stephen Brossette, President and CTO of MedMined, Inc.; Mr. Ray Haberle, Software Project Manager at IBM; Mr. J. Christopher Murphy, Special Agent in Charge, United States Secret Service; and Mr. Glenn Phillips, President of Forté, Inc. Dr. Tony Skjellum, Chair of the Department of Computer and Information Sciences, coordinates the CIS Leadership Council, in conjunction with other CIS faculty and the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics Development Office.

For more information about the Computer and Information Sciences Leadership Council, please contact the Development Office at (205) 934-5148.
Chemistry

► To accommodate an increasing number of students, a major project to completely renovate the 3rd floor undergraduate laboratory facility was initiated in June 2004 with an anticipated completion date of November 2005. This space will include state-of-the-art laboratory facilities for general and upper-level chemistry courses. The renovation will also include the first floor lecture hall in the Chemistry Building, which will receive new carpet, seating and audio-visual upgrades.

► **Dr. Sergey Vyazovkin** received a $10,000 grant from the Boehringer-Ingelheim Cares Foundation. This grant was given to support Dr. Vyazovkin’s innovative research in the area of physical stability of solid amorphous drugs, which are currently of great interest to the pharmaceutical community. The grant from the Boehringer-Ingelheim Cares Foundation will allow the department to initiate studies and develop a novel methodology for evaluating the life span and the stability of amorphous drugs.

► **Dr. Sadanandan Velu** (medicinal chemistry) joined the Department of Chemistry in August of 2004. In August of 2005 a new faculty member, **Dr. Pengfei Wang** (organic chemistry), will also join the department as tenure-track faculty.

► Research is underway involving the collaborative efforts of **Dr. Don Muccio** and **Dr. Wayne Brouillette** from the Department of Chemistry and the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center to prepare a new drug, 9cUAB30, to clinical trials as early as 2006. This chemically modified version of retinoic acid (vitamin A) has the potential to protect against breast cancer.

Physics

► **Dr. Qui Liang** was awarded his Ph.D. in Physics in December 2004 (mentor – Dr. Yogesh Vohra). Dr. Liang is currently employed as a Project Scientist at Vista Engineering in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. Liang is in charge of processing nano-diamond films for cutting tools, biomedical implants and diamond based sensors. Dr. Liang is also credited with commissioning the 30 kW microwave plasma chemical vapor deposition reactor at Vista Engineering. This is one of the only two 30 kW microwave plasma reactors currently operational in the United States.

► **Andrew Gallian** received a prestigious Commission of the European Communities grant for travel to the Advanced Solid State Photonics Conference in Vienna, Austria in February 2005. Andrew presented two out of three accepted talks at the conference. Co-authors Vladimir Federov, Igor Moskalev, John Kernall and REU student Justin Allman provided valuable input.

► The Department of Physics is holding its 2005 Summer Physics Workshop for High School Students from May 31 to June 10, 2005 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. This two-week workshop is designed for students 16 years and older. Visionland will sponsor a Roller Coaster Physics event at Visionland for student participants. Please visit www.phy.uab.edu for more information and application forms.

► The Institute of Electrical Engineers (IEE) in the United Kingdom has named **Professor Sergey Mirov, Ph.D., research associate Vladimir Federoy, Ph.D.,** and graduate fellows **Igor Moskaley** and **Keith Graham**, recipients of the Snell Premium award for their paper on microchip lasers titled “Diode and fiber pumped Cr2+:ZnS mid-IR external cavity and microchip lasers,” which was recently published in the IEE Optoelectronics Journal.
Computer and Information Sciences

- **Associate Professor Dr. Alan P. Sprague** and **Assistant Professor Dr. Chengcui Zhang** established the Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery Research Lab (DMKD) in fall of 2004. The lab will support research of new algorithms, systems and applications for large-scale data mining and visualization. This newly established DMKD lab houses high-performance computers and a data storage-centric computer cluster for use by data mining graduate students.

- Four UAB students, **Enis Afgan, Xin Chen, Matthew Curry** and **Victoria Davis**, presented their research at the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Mid-southeast conference held on November 12, 2004 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Twenty-six students from universities in seven different states competed in the student research competition at the conference. Of the twelve awards presented across various categories, UAB students were awarded three honors: Xin Chen (1st place, Doctoral Division), Enis Afgan (2nd place, Doctoral Division), and Victoria Davis (2nd place, Undergraduate Division).

- **UAB CIS Assistant Professor Jeff Gray** has been awarded an Eclipse Innovation Grant (EIG) from IBM for his proposal entitled “Grammar-Driven Domain-Specific Language Tools.” This research will investigate the generation of language tools (e.g., debuggers and test engines) from grammar specifications. More information about this project is available at http://www.cis.uab.edu/wuh/DDF/.

- For 7 weeks during Summer 2004, two high school students (Matthew Ferguson and Erik Scott) were invited to participate as interns at a newly created robotics summer camp. The students were taught the Java programming language, which they used to develop several robotics applications using Lego Mindstorms. The internship was supported through collaboration between the CIS Department (led by Assistant Professor Jeff Gray) and the Heritage Center, which is a community center that matches high school students with UAB mentors. Additional information (including videos and pictures) is available at http://www.cis.uab.edu/heritage/

- On May 7th, the CIS department will initiate the first Alabama High School Programming Contest (HSPC). This will be held at Campbell Hall and provide students from across the state with an opportunity to compete by writing computer programs to solve several problems. The event is sponsored by Microsoft and CTS and is coordinated by CIS professors Jeff Gray and Barrett Bryant. More information about the programming contest can be found at www.cis.uab.edu/programs/hspc/.
Mathematics

On February 19, 2005 the third on-site math contest called UAB Math Talent Search Day was held. This program is sponsored and implemented by the UAB Department of Mathematics and coordinated by Professor Dr. Alexander Blokh and Instructor Ms. Carolyn Wailes. School winners were from Vestavia High School, Grissom High School, Hoover High School and Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School. Individual winners included: Johny Hu and Jennifer Berry from Grissom High School; Scott Adkinson from Hoover High School; and Evan Zhao, Andrew Chou, Chris Thomas, Zhenya Kaliberova, Ryan Muller, Seva Tchernov, Sara Katherine Clay, Jeanette Dooley, and Abhay Kulkarni of Vestavia High School.

The Department of Mathematics recently selected its Outstanding Students for 2004-2005. Students selected for this year are: Sara Ismael (B.S.), Mandar Kulkarni (M.S.) and Hongkun Zhang (Ph.D.)

Arts and Sciences Kicks-off New Alumni Chapter

The Arts and Sciences Chapter of the UAB National Alumni Society is growing quickly with a great deal of interest from alumni of the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, along with alumni from the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

The Arts and Sciences Chapter hosted its first membership event on March 11, 2005. Alumni from all three schools enjoyed an Opening Night Party for the Theatre UAB’s performance of The It Girl, directed by Naomi Baker. The pre-party was held in the UAB Visual Arts Gallery with the performance following in the Alys Stephens Center Odess Theatre.

The Arts and Sciences Chapter is planning many more activities and events for chapter members. Members also receive invitations to other events in the three schools, as well as benefits such as a free alumni visitor parking pass and discounts on tickets for athletic events.

Joining the Arts and Sciences Alumni Chapter means that $15 of your $50 individual membership dues goes to benefit the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Join today and become a part of an organization that is committed to maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between UAB and its alumni.

You can join the UAB Arts and Sciences Alumni Chapter online at www.alumni.uab.edu or call Mary Balfour Van Zandt at (205) 975-9644 for more information.
Contributions

The faculty, staff and students of the UAB School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for their gracious financial support. Contributions listed below were received during the period of October 1, 2004 to February 15, 2005. For information on how to contribute please contact the Development Director for the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at (205) 934-5148.

School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics Unrestricted Gifts

Ms. Amanda L. Adkison  Dr. Joan Roberts Friedlander  Ms. Heather Kendrick  Dr. Clinton T. Rozycki
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Travis B. Wood Memorial Mathematics Scholarship

Mrs. Helen S. Taylor  Anthony Barnard  Endowed Award Fund

Mr. David L. Hansen  Anthony Barnard  Anthony Barnard

The donations listed were received during the period of October 1, 2003 to August 1, 2004. Please forgive any errors or omissions. For corrections, please contact the Dean’s Office at (205) 934-5102. For information on how to support the School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics please contact the Development Director at (205) 934-5148.
Alumni Notes

DR. STEVEN A. BARKER (BS 1971, MS 1973, PhD 1978 - Chemistry) is a Professor in the School of Veterinary Medicine at Louisiana State University.

MR. NORMAN BOLUS (BS 1988 – Biology) is an Assistant Professor for the UAB Nuclear Medicine Tech Program.

MR. BRETT N. GOSSAGE (BS 1982, MS 1986 – Biology) is the Chief Technology officer for Invariant Corporation in Huntsville, Alabama.

MS. ANN W. GRIFFIN (BS 1995 – Computer and Information Sciences) is the MIS Director for Doster Construction Company in Birmingham, Alabama.

MS. LAKETTA MONTAGUE (BS 2000 – Chemistry) lives in Huntsville, Alabama where she is the Quality Control Supervisor for Nektar Therapeutics.

MR. MICHAEL E. ROWE (BS 1986 – Computer and Information Sciences) is the Technology Manager for Computer Sciences Corporation in Birmingham, Alabama.

Tell us what’s going on with you. Visit the UAB Online Alumni Community at www.uab.edu