THE FIRST ANNUAL SOUTHEASTERN MEDICAL SCIENTIST SYMPOSIUM

Vishnu Cudapah

On October 9, 2010, the inaugural Southeastern Medical Scientist Symposium was held at the Children's Harbor building at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Hosted by MSTP students from UAB, Emory, and Vanderbilt, this was the first meeting of MD/PhD programs in the Southeastern US. About 140 MSTP students and undergraduates attended the symposium, composed of talks, small-group discussions, poster presentations, and schmoozing. More than a year ago, Dr. Robin Lorenz, Director of the UAB MSTP, wanted to provide her MD/PhD students an opportunity to meet and network with other MD/PhD students from around the country. Given that networking and research presentation are very important aspects of any MD/PhD student’s training, she decided to advocate for a regional MD/PhD meeting completely run by students. The MSTPs at Emory University and Vanderbilt University and the American Physician Scientist Association (APSA) enthusiastically agreed to co-sponsor the event, and an inaugural meeting was born.

Goals for the meeting included: (1) dialogue and networking among MD/PhD trainees; (2) opportunities to present research beyond a school-wide setting; and (3) providing information for undergraduate students interested in learning about MSTPs. Undergraduate students had the opportunity to meet students and directors from the UAB, Emory, and Vanderbilt MSTPs to gain first-hand insight into the application process.

Keynote lectures were presented by leaders in translational research. Speakers included Dr. David Standaert, Interim Chairman of Neurology and Professor of Neurology at UAB, who discussed his path to a successful career as an MD/PhD; Dr. Roger Cone, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics at Vanderbilt and member of the National Academy of Sciences, who discussed his research regarding obesity; and Dr. Richard Whitley, Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics, Vice Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics and Division Director of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at UAB, who discussed his research regarding herpes viruses.

The symposium also included small group discussions regarding a variety of themes relevant to the training of physician-scientists. Thematic discussions included (1) Being a Female Physician-Scientist, (2) Successful Grant Writing, and (3) MD/PhD...
A PhD or MD/PhD student, you have chosen to make research a part of your future. You have applied to graduate school in order to continue your education and eventually obtain your PhD degree. You have worked hard to get here. You are not one yet. Work for someone eager to train you. Graduate school is an apprenticeship. Luke Most importantly, remember, you can’t be successful if your PI isn’t. What defines success as a graduate student? Feeling good about yourself? No. Publications and grants in a timely fashion define success. What do you need to secure grant funding on a regular basis, how do you expect to? Believe it or not, I’m going to answer your question here. If it takes you more than a year to publish your “serious” research, you risk career lobotomy. Match the names of previous graduate students to publications. The majority of successful PhD alumni have published at least one paper per year in their graduate lab. If a potential PI has one publication per year, it’s a red flag.

The most important part of choosing a lab is choosing a PI with whom you can be successful. Management styles and competency differ vastly among researchers. Your PI can only make you successful if you can work with them. Not many people can do this. Most people work better with someone they can work with. This is a daunting task. It is one of the most important decisions you will make in your post-graduate career. This article will delve into this topic. Aggressive, forward-thinking action will help you make the best decision. The article will provide some general guidelines for choosing a lab. In addition, the UAB MSTP is over 15 years old and has no place here. Choose a set of objective criteria your dissertation lab must have. Ask potential mentors for their publications. Match the names of your previous graduate students with their publications. You need to have a good publication record to get into a graduate lab. Most new PhD’s work in the lab of a 6th year graduate student. If your lab has not achieved this, you probably won’t either. You’re not special. No matter how well your personalities match and how awesome the project sounds, don’t lose sight of the end goal. If potential lab has two 6th year graduate students and hasn’t published in the last three years, it’s a red flag. Don’t sacrifice having a good PI and a good lab environment because you want to work on a particular project. You aren’t choosing your research career yet. That said, there are a few things to consider when choosing a dissertation lab. Don’t start with data that are already present. You need a solid foundation when you enter your dissertation lab. The best projects are the type with which you can hit the ground running. That’s not to say you’ll be a research ninja out of the gate. You’ll need to learn anything, but being able to start generating data regularly and early is crucial. Aim for a project that already has some pilot data. As with all of the above, discuss potential PI’s management style with current and past members of the lab. Ask other members of the department when potential PI isn’t around members of that lab. Perhaps most importantly, ask individuals within the UAB MSTP. Chances are very likely that students, current or past, and program administrators have dealt with that lab and can speak honestly to the environment.

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FOCUS ON THE SWEATT LAB

David Sweatt currently serves as Professor and Chairman of the Departments of Neurobiology and Director of the Neuroscience Institute at UAB. He also serves as Professor of Psychology, Anatomy, Physiology, and Pediatrics. His lab focuses on understanding the molecular mechanisms underlying memory and learning, as well as the role of the brain in regulating behavior and emotion.

The lab uses a combination of cellular, molecular, and behavioral approaches to investigate the molecular mechanisms underlying memory and learning. The lab is actively involved in the training of graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and undergraduates in a variety of fields, including neuroscience, physiology, and psychology.

The lab has a strong record of successful training. Many of the lab's students have gone on to successful careers as researchers and educators. The lab's teamwork and collaboration, along with its commitment to training, make it a great place for students to pursue their scientific interests and develop their careers.

Dr. Sweatt's lab is located in the UAB SOM building, and they have access to all of the facilities and resources available to UAB scientists. The lab is well-equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and has a experienced and dedicated staff.

FOCUS ON THE GROSS LAB

Jeff Gross is a professor of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His lab focuses on understanding the molecular mechanisms underlying vision and light sensitivity in the retina.

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The UAB Volunteer Clinic

Juan Ceballos

2005 group of UAB medical students proposed the creation of a student-managed organization that would function as a way to fulfill their clinical rotations and basic science coursework. The idea was to have an early chance to interact and learn with peers from across campus.

J.C. Ceballos, a first-year student, worked closely with Asher Albertson, a third-year student, to form the UAB Volunteer Clinic (EAB). EAB was established as a student-run non-profit organization in the fall of 2006, with the goal of providing medical care to the underserved population in the Birmingham area.

With the support of Professor Barnett and Dr. Craig Horsley, this organization has provided clinical care to over 1,500 patients in its first year of operation. Students have been trained to perform basic medical procedures such as taking vital signs, drawing blood, and administering medications. EAB has partnered with various local non-profit organizations, such as the Charities of the Catholic Daughters of America, to provide free medical care to those in need.

The clinic operates on a weekly basis and is staffed by student volunteers who have completed their required clinical rotations. EAB has also received support from the School of Medicine and is currently a member of the UAB Student Council.

EAB is an integral part of every medical student's experience at UAB. As a result, the early clinical experience and participation in community service programs as part of the MSTP curriculum are encouraged. EAB provides an excellent opportunity for students to maintain clinical skills while still being able to contribute to the community.

Community Impact

EAB has brought medical care to the underserved population in Birmingham. The clinic operates on a weekly basis and is staffed by student volunteers who have completed their required clinical rotations. EAB has also received support from the School of Medicine and is currently a member of the UAB Student Council. EAB provides an excellent opportunity for students to maintain clinical skills while still being able to contribute to the community.

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