

# UAB DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY NEWSLETTER



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!



If you have suggestions for a story or would like someone in particular to be featured in a future issue, please contact us at [biology@uab.edu](mailto:biology@uab.edu).

## FACULTY FOCUS: FAREWELL DR. ANNE CUSIC

After 29 years in the Department of Biology, Dr. Anne Cusic has announced her retirement from UAB. As the instructor for our freshmen introductory biology courses, she has impacted the lives of thousands of students and helped guide them through their first year of college. "I have been at UAB almost all of my life. Having been born at University Hospital, I feel that I have never left," says Dr. Cusic who went on to receive her Bachelor of Science and Ph.D. from UAB. Throughout her years at UAB, Dr. Cusic has routinely been honored with academic distinctions and awards, including the Who's Who Among America's Teachers (6 times!), the UAB President's Award for Excellence in Teaching (twice), and the prestigious Ingalls/Alumni Society Excellence in Classroom Teaching Award. In 2012, a group of former students created the Endowment of the Anne M. Cusic Endowed Scholarship Fund to thank her for her dedication to teaching. In 2017, she was recognized with two major awards for lifetime work: the University Honors Program Service Award and the Early Medical School Acceptance Program (EMSAP) Lifetime Teaching Award. Dr. Cusic left an indelible mark on our faculty, staff, and students, and we will be forever grateful for her years of service and dedication to the department. If you would like to send Dr. Cusic a note of appreciation and well wishes, reach out to us at [biology@uab.edu](mailto:biology@uab.edu).



## **BIOLOGY SPRING 2017 AWARDS CEREMONY**

The Department of Biology's Spring 2017 Awards Ceremony was held on April 24, 2017 at the UAB Alumni House. Faculty, staff, and students gathered to honor the incredible accomplishments of our department's students during the 2016-2017 school year.

### **LOCAL AWARD WINNERS**

The Anne M. Cusic Scholarship in Biology  
*Regina Sherman*

The Ken R. Marion Biology Career Award  
*Rachel Rock*

The Ken R. Marion Ecology /  
Environmental  
Science Career Award  
*Matthew Kuhl*

The Daniel Jones Excellence in Graduate  
Studies Award  
*Xiaoyu Liu*

The Harold Martin Outstanding Student  
Development Award  
*T.C. Howton*

Department of Biology Outstanding  
Student Award  
*Mina Momeni* - Undergraduate  
*Karen Jensen* - Master's  
*Xiaoyu Liu* - Doctoral

College of Arts & Sciences Dean's Award  
*Xiaoyu Liu* - Doctoral

### **NATIONAL AWARD WINNERS**

Fulbright U.S. Student  
Program Scholarship  
*Brenna Nye*

NSF Graduate Research  
Fellowship Program  
*Sarah Adkins*

NSF East Asia and Pacific Summer  
Institute (EAPSI) Award  
*Elizabeth Bevan*

NSF EPSCoR Graduate Research  
Scholar Program (GRSP) Award  
*T.C. Howton*

American Institute for Cancer  
Research Travel Scholarship  
*Samantha Martin*

NIH Fellowship in Comprehensive  
Minority Faculty and Student  
Development Program (CMFSDP)  
*Samantha Martin*

Glenn Medical Foundation and  
American Federation for Aging  
Research Postdoctoral Fellowship  
*Jessica Hoffman*

## **STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: SARAH ADKINS**



Sarah Adkins, a doctoral student in Dr. Jeff Morris' lab, has been selected for the 2017 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program. This highly-competitive fellowship is given to outstanding STEM graduate students. Adkins is an interesting mixture of scientist and artist, holding Bachelors' degrees both in biology and in studio art from UAB. Her doctoral dissertation continues her work as a master's student, which explored the benefit art can have for science education. Petri dish art has been remarkably effective as a teaching tool in our microbiology lab curriculum. Students begin by designing their own mandalas, which are circular and symbolic symmetrical artworks. Then, they use different colored bacteria isolated from the soil to paint their mandala design on a Petri dish. Adkins says this interdisciplinary approach to learning provides a visual and exploratory guide for students to better understand microbial ecology and molecular evolution.

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## **STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: BRENNA NYE**

Brenna Nye, a senior majoring in biology, has been awarded a Fulbright Study/Research grant to continue her education in Estonia. While abroad, she will conduct genetics research at the University of Tartu. The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government. It is designed to build relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries so we can all work together to solve global challenges. Recipients of Fulbright awards are selected on the basis of academic and professional achievement as well as a record of service and demonstrated leadership in their respective fields.



## ILLUMINATING ALUMNI: BRIAN SIMS, M.D.



Dr. Brian Sims' life is the quintessential "local boy makes good" story. Recipient of this year's Outstanding Alumni Award, Brian was born in Birmingham, where he attended Ramsay High School just up the hill from UAB. Working toward a biology degree (Class of '91) as a gateway to medical school just seemed like an obvious life path to him. But with interests in both research and clinical practice, he enrolled in UAB's especially taxing MD, PhD program, with a research focus on neurobiology and cell biology. His PhD research in Dr. Anne Thiebert's laboratory tracked specific chemical changes in the brains of Alzheimer's disease patients. He received his PhD in

1999 and his MD one year later. A one year Clinic Research Fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis took Dr. Sims away from Birmingham briefly, but at the same time awakened his continuing interest in brain functioning at the other end of life, in extremely prematurely-born babies. Birmingham called though. At the end of his fellowship, he returned to UAB joining the faculty in the Department of Pediatrics, where he has remained ever since. His memories of the Biology Department include the classes he took from Dr. Watts, the very special personal interest Dr. McClintock took in his success, and most memorable of all, he met his future wife, Dr. Janene Sims, now UAB Professor of Optometry, when they were both UAB biology undergraduates. Even as a very busy physician, Brian has continued to help out the Biology Department by serving on several search committees for new faculty. We are grateful for his help and proud to have helped launch his outstanding career.

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## **STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MORGAN BURKE**

Morgan Burke joined the Biology Department in 2015 as our Program Coordinator. She handles outreach for the department, including overseeing social media feeds, updating the website, producing the newsletters, and fostering relationships with alumni. She also organizes our seminar series and other fun events like the Biology Fall Picnic and Darwin Day. As is appropriate for someone who organizes fun, Morgan is a lot of fun to be around as everyone who passes through the Biology Office will attest.



Morgan graduated from Nashville's Belmont University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. After college, she moved back home to Birmingham and spent 7 years working in UAB's Department of Pathology before transferring to the Biology Department. She loves working in academia, being creative, and looks forward to what her future in our department holds.



*Morgan Burke*

Editor & Contributor  
Program Coordinator II



*Dr. Steven Austad*

Editor-in-Chief  
Distinguished Professor &  
Department Chair