

THE VULCAN LETTER

Voice of the MSTP at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

October 2012

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The UAB MSTP has decided to increase the frequency of our newsletter releases. Instead of three times a year, we are moving to a monthly newsletter. By moving to a monthly newsletter, we hope to highlight and show off all that this program in particular, and Birmingham in general, has to offer. As an example, in this month's letter you will find the first in our new series entitled "The Magic City Spotlight." In these recurring articles we bring attention to an interesting MSTP student, faculty member, or notable citizen. While we certainly have plans for upcoming newsletters and recurring articles we think our readers will enjoy, we also welcome any feedback. We envision this newsletter to be an interactive and ever evolving body of work for UAB's MSTP students, and so we want to hear from you.

If you have an idea for an article or if there is something interesting happening around town you think everyone should know about, this is your chance. If there is something we can do better, we want to know that too. In the meantime, grab your beverage of choice, and take a look at what's been going on.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Brosius
Jarrod Meadows
Mikael Guzman Karlsson
Anna Joy Graves
William Webb



2012 MSTP RETREAT RECAP

The Annual MSTP Retreat is held each summer to provide students with the opportunity for fellowship and collegiality. As always, this year incorporated student poster presentations, discussion sessions, panel discussions, and a keynote address.



The theme for our panel discussion this year was "Transition from Residency to Faculty," and featured Brian A. Van Tine, MD, PhD from Washington University in St. Louis and UAB's own Talene Yacoubian, MD, PhD and Sonya Heath, MD.

Our keynote address was given Brian Vin Tine, a UAB MSTP alumnus. More detailed information about this year's retreat can be found on the UAB MSTP website under the academics tab.



2012 MSTP OLYMPICS

written by Jeff Singer

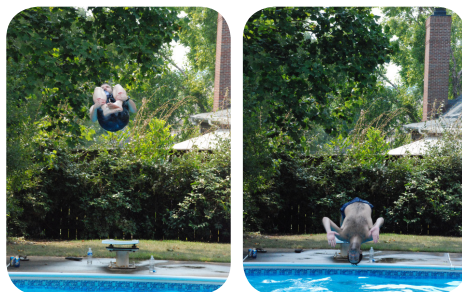
While many fixated this summer on the 30th Olympiad in London, the city of Birmingham played host to an arguably more important Olympic tradition: the 2nd annual MSTP Olympics. This historic event coincided with the program's yearly retreat, pitting class against class in fierce competition and intensely productive team-building excecise.



Events included tug of war, apple bobbing, corn-hole, water balloon toss, three-legged relay, swimming pool relay, and the crowd favorite: Science Relay Race. This year's Science Relay Race required competitors to restack a spilled box of p200 pipette tips, mouth pipette media with careful precision, reorganize a freezer box with liquid nitrogen safe gloves on, "gown up" and "gown off" all the required Personal Protective Equipment to give to another person who can finally sex and wean the baby mice.



The stakes were high as students vied for the coveted "Golden Nag" and "Golden Pipette" trophies. The Golden Nag symbolizes the embodiment of an MSTP Olympic winner and is engraved with the class that comes in first place overall. The trophy proclaims "fastest horse at the glue factory" to both congratulate and put into perspective the scope of the victory. The Golden Pipette on the other hand, is a special award given to the class that wins the science trophy.



Highlights of this past year included the Entering Class of 2010 continuing their dynasty and winning the Golden Nag for a second year in a row. Jon Lockhart (GS1) remained unbeaten in apple bobbing with 21 apples in 60 seconds besting his previous record of 18 from the year prior. When asked to make a statement he replied, "I hope Dr. Lorenz seriously considers including this in the application process. It's lonely up here at the top."

Jon's classmates Jeff Singer (GS1) and Daniel DiToro (GS1) also repeated as the MSTP's best water balloon tossers after a highly controversial disqualification and subsequent sudden death do-over round eliminated Ryne Ramaker (MS1) and partner Nick Eustace (MS1).



The Entering Class of 2009 handely captured the Golden Pipette this year in an impressive display. When asked if he thought the Golden Pipette was adequate consolation after not winning the Golden Nag this year, Carson Moseley (GS2) commented, "[...] there were other events? There's no consolation when you win gold, baby!"



All and all, the event was deemed successful by 64% of survey respondents. The Events Committee is hard at work to ensure that this coming year's MSTP Olympics is even better. We welcome the participation of any interested party and will be soliciting your help as the retreat comes closer to fruition.

MAGIC CITY SPOTLIGHT

written by Jarrod Meadows

This month, we shine the Magic City Spotlight on Vishnu Cuddapah. Vishnu entered the UAB MSTP in 2006, and in 2008 he began his graduate training under the mentorship of Harald Sontheimer, PhD in the Department of Neurobiology. On October 2nd of this year, Vishnu defended his graduate thesis entitled “Regulation of ClC-3 in Human Malignant Glioma.” For younger MSTP students searching for a role model, Vishnu is an excellent choice. Not only has he been successful in the laboratory, with a grand total of seven publications, an NIH F31 grant, and numerous oral and poster presentation awards, but he has also found prosperity in his personal life with his marriage to Sanmati Rao Cuddapah in the summer of 2010.

Recently, I sat down with Vishnu to discuss his philosophy regarding graduate school.

When it comes to choosing a PhD laboratory, Vishnu argues that the nature of the thesis project is secondary to the qualities of the mentor. While there obviously needs to be interest in the scientific nature of a project, what really matters is finding a mentor that is engaging and supportive. To become a proficient scientist, one needs to be able to ask difficult questions, and as graduate students, we are only beginning to learn how to ask those questions. Therefore, it is imperative that one finds a mentor that is at the very least receptive to questions, and better yet, one that actively encourages them.



When it came to choosing a project, Vishnu first explored the prototypical high-risk, high-reward route. In fact, he said he spent his first year in Dr. Sontheimer’s lab chasing down a question he was ultimately unable to answer. However (and here is the important point), he chose not to get discouraged. As frustrating as it was to get negative data, he continued to come in to the lab early every morning and worked with just as much vigor as he did in the beginning. It was this combination of unwavering dedication and the guidance and encouragement provided by Dr. Sontheimer that he was finally able to find a story worth pursuing.

In regards to his future aspirations, Vishnu plans on spending a year as a post-doctoral fellow prior to completing his medical clerkships. He will take this opportunity to work in Michelle Olsen’s laboratory, studying glia in the context of human epilepsy. For residency training he is considering neurosurgery, and although he acknowledges the inherent difficulties involved, he plans on maintaining an active research career. If there is anyone who can find success combining the demanding roles of surgeon and scientist, it’s Vishnu.



2012 UAB HOMECOMING



UPCOMING EVENTS IN BIRMINGHAM

Oct. 6-26 REMEMBRANCE: A Group Exhibition Celebrating Alabama's 10th Day of the Dead Festival - Art Folk Gallery

Oct. 13 Fiesta 2012 - A Hispanic Culture Festival - Linn Park, Birmingham

Oct. 14 Break 'n Bread - Railroad Park

Oct. 15-21 Side Man - UA Tuscaloosa Theatre

Oct. 19 Emmylou Harris and her Red Dirt Boys - Alys Stephen Center

Oct. 20 MUTEMATH/ CIVIL TWILIGHT - Workplay Soundstage

Oct. 20 Gov't Mule - Alabama Theatre

Oct. 21 Vulcan AfterTunes - Vulcan Park & Museum

Oct. 25 Neil Young & Crazy Horse/ Alabama Shakes - Tuscaloosa Amphitheatre

Oct. 26 Horror in the Gardens- Aldridge Botanical Gardens

Oct. 28 Barking at the Moon - Fultondale Bark Park

Oct. 29 Brendan Benson - Workplay

Oct. 31 Man or Astro-man - Bottletree