

The G.S.A. NEWSLETTER



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Choosing an advisor

by Lesley Brown

As part of an effort to become more informed about issues that affect graduate students, Dean Hildreth has set up monthly luncheons with departmental student representatives. These luncheons are a forum where students can voice concerns and present those concerns to the administration. In return, Dean Hildreth provides progress reports and insight about ongoing issues. A complete report of the issues discussed appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

We discussed many things, but one issue in particular served as the inspiration to write this article. Many students come to Dean Hildreth seeking advice about how to resolve conflicts with advisors. In his opinion, many of these conflicts would never have arisen had there been better and clearer communication. We discussed several ways in which both students and faculty could address this issue. On our behalf, Dean Hildreth has advocated that faculty meet and discuss among themselves general problems with and expectations of graduate students.

On our own behalf, we can provide new students with perspectives of what is important in choosing an advisor. All would agree that it is a significant decision, but its true impact unfolds by degrees. If it's an option, do yourself a big favor and do rotations so that you can immerse yourself in the lab culture. Even if you are certain that you want to do a certain type of research or join a particular lab, it never hurts to learn other techniques and experience different scientific viewpoints. Doing rotations is usually the easiest and most enjoyable step in choosing a lab. Informal surveys of post-doctoral fellows and research associates revealed some common themes concerning successful choice of an advisor.

Upon asking people to rank what

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GSA Sponsors First Annual Alicia Showalter Reynolds Memorial Lecture

by Ed Hsiao

On January 27th, the GSA presented the first memorial lecture in honor of Alicia Showalter Reynolds, a graduate student who was murdered last spring. The lecture was given by Dr. Shirley Tilghman, an HHMI investigator at Princeton University. Her talk on "The Mechanisms and Function of Genomic Imprinting in Mammals" was well attended with a standing-room-only crowd. Dr. Mette Strand, Alicia's PhD advisor at Hopkins, noted Alicia's enthusiasm particularly as an active supporter of women in science. "This is something I know Alicia would have loved, and I'm glad to see that the students have invited Dr. Tilghman to give the inaugural lecture." In addition, Mrs. Showalter gave a short presentation on Alicia's goals and dreams.

Before the lecture, Dr. Tilghman had lunch with 25 graduate students representing several graduate programs from the School of Medicine. Discussion centered mostly on the topics of tenure, job market, and industry. Dr. Tilghman noted, "I think tenure is probably going to become less common among academic institutions. For one, the concept of tenure is unfair to women, particularly since women scientists need to balance other factors such as family and children. What we need isn't necessarily an abolishment of tenure, but rather discussion and modification of the whole process." Dr. Tilghman also noted that several research institutes including Cold Spring Harbor have started to switch to a rolling 5 or 10 year appointment system. She has detailed many of her opinions in an Opinion article that appeared in the Jan. 23, 1996 issue of the New York Times. Besides the issue of tenure, the graduate students were also interested in Dr. Tilghman's opinions of the job market, and of science careers in industry. The discussion was

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Upcoming GSA Meetings

April 8

*Poster Session/ Happy Hour organization -HELP needed!

*Finalization of '97-'98 GSA budget guidelines

*Review of student group application (if applicable)

GSA Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 2pm in Hunterian Room G-5.

NOTES FROM THE GSA March Meeting

Poster Session

The **GSA Poster Session/ Spring Happy Hour** will be held **April 22, 4 PM** in the Greenhouse. About 30 students have indicated that they will show posters. Due date for abstracts is April 2. Posters will be judged (years 1-3 and years 4+ separately), and cash prizes awarded.

"Pioneers in Biology" Lecture Series

Dr. Philippa Marrick

Wed., **April 23 at 2 pm** in the WBSB East Lecture Hall

Community Service

Due to popular demand, a second **Habitat for Humanity** date was arranged for Sat, March 22nd. Upcoming community service opportunities include the **Serv-a-thon**, an annual one day event to be held at the Inner Harbor on **May 3**. Contact Tara Riemer or Ann Marie Egloff.

Career Development

Students are interested in seminars on how to write resumes and give presentations, develop teaching skills, etc. Suggestions have been made to collect a series of books regarding skills useful for getting jobs.

GSA Budget

The relative levels of funding for career development, scientific lectures, student travel, student groups, and social

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events was discussed.

Funds for '96-'97 year have supported the Career Symposium, The Alicia Showalter Memorial Lecture, the GSA Newsletter, the New Student Fall Picnic, subsidized new students' tickets to the Orioles, GSA happy hours, and the Dean's luncheons. Upcoming events include the Student Poster Session/ Spring Happy Hour, the "Pioneers in Biology" seminar series, and the MBGA sponsored seminar.

Travel Fund

Travel fund guidelines were discussed.

Funds were previously set aside to assist student travel only in cases when the students lab lacked sufficient funds to send students to meetings. The financial committee established guidelines of a \$200 maximum per application. Suggestions for changes were made, such as to determine the amount on case-by-case bases and raising the maximum to \$500.

February Meeting

MBGA Funding

MBGA funding of \$900 was approved by the GSA departmental representatives.

The Minority Biomedical Graduate Association is an organization of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions who belong to underrepresented minority groups. The purposes of the organization are: 1) provide a support base and network for minority students and post-doctoral fellows 2) aid the recruitment and retention of minority students and postdoctoral fellows 3) increase the awareness of the Johns Hopkins community of minority scientists around the country, and 4) provide a network for career advancement.

Another important goal of the organization is to give back to the community in ways that will allow disadvantaged students to continue their education and to embark on scientific and/or medical careers

NOTE: The MBGA sponsored seminar will feature **Robert Boswell**, from The University of Colorado and will be held Tuesday **May 6th** at 2 pm.

Dean's Luncheon Held on February 26th

With the aim of improving communication between students and the administration, the GSA is sponsoring a series of lunches with Dean Hildreth, the first of which was held in February. Topics, which ranged from the mundane to those fundamental to graduate education, are listed below:

- See Lesley Brown's article for a discussion of mentorship and student/advisor relations.
- Dean Hildreth raised the idea of a retreat for incoming first year students. As students from different programs spend little or no time together, brief weekend retreat would encourage interaction as a class, independent of program affiliations.
- Career Development: A recent seminar on "Becoming an Outstanding Science Teacher", which was hosted by the BME department, was a huge success, and there is interest in inviting the speaker (Bob Phair) back. Also discussed was a series of informal seminars/meetings with alumni who post-doc/work in industry, or professional career development seminars.
- Also discussed: Parking, the UHS billing system (or lack there of) and UHS confidentiality problems.

Contact the GSA (gsa-g@welchlink.welch.jhu.edu) if you're interested in attending.

Congratulations to the 1997 Young Investigator's Day Student Award Recipients!

Presentations by award winners will be at
4 pm on April 10 in the **Mountcastle
Auditorium.**

Everyone is welcome to attend.

MICHAEL A. SHANOFF AWARDS (two)

David M. Sabatini (MD PhD candidate)
Todd Waldman (MD PhD candidate)

ALICIA SHOWALTER REYNOLDS AWARD

Laura Rusche (PhD candidate)

DAVID I. MACHT AWARDS (two)

Stephen M. Soisson (PhD candidate)
Tae-Wook Chun (PhD candidate)

MARTIN AND CAROL MACHT AWARD

Douglas E. Bassett, Jr. (PhD candidate)

PAUL EHRLICH RESEARCH AWARDS (four)

Richard C. Anderson (MD candidate)
Alexandra C. McPherron (PhD candidate)
Emily Hsiao-Yu Cheng (PhD candidate)
Sean Taylor Prigge (PhD candidate)

CERTIFICATES OF MERIT

Loren Walensky (MD PhD candidate)
Paul Brakeman (MD PhD candidate)

Remember to use the 410 number when making phone calls in Maryland. Starting May 1, 1997, you must dial the area code plus the seven-digit phone number when making local calls. Look in your 1996-1997 telephone book for details about the new dialing instructions.

GSA Web Page

Check out the GSA Web Page for everything from what to do in Baltimore to back issues of the GSA Newsletter!

<http://www.med.jhu.edu/gsa/GSAmain.html>

Writers wanted: The pen is mightier than the pipet...

The GSA Newsletter is looking for writers to cover current events! This is your chance to get published! Send your submissions (articles, creative writing, drawings, whatever) to the address below, or contact Ed Hsiao (ehsiao@welchlink) for more information! Deadline for the next issue is **May 6, 1997.**

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Seeking Volunteers for Baltimore Community Service: Serv-A-Thon 97

by Tara Riemer

I am working with Hands On Baltimore, a volunteer organization, to plan Serv-A-Thon 97. This is an annual event which raises money for Hands On Baltimore for its year-long programs and provides thousands of hours of service to Baltimore City schools. Volunteers will provide a day of marathon community service at 50+ sites throughout Baltimore City. In honor of Baltimore's Bicentennial celebration, this year's event has been expanded to cover 200+ projects. Serv-A-Thon '97 will focus on neighborhoods within the Empowerment Zones. This year, Hands On Baltimore has formed partnerships with the Police Athletic League (PAL) and the Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA). Over 5000 volunteers are needed for this day long event!

Serv-A-Thon volunteers will paint classrooms, work on neighborhood beautification projects, refurbish recreation centers and low-income housing developments, and clean up neighborhood playgrounds. It will give people the opportunity to make a tremendous difference in our communities.

Sound exciting? I think so. The date is **Saturday, May 3**, and it will be an all-day event, starting with a kick-off at the Inner Harbor and ending with a post-work party. Both Dunbar High School and Lombard Middle School, very close to JHMI, will be sites for the Serv-A-Thon 97.

How can you help?

1. Be a volunteer on a JHMI team. I am going to try to organize teams of students, staff, or whoever is interested! If you would like to help ****organize**** a team of students, let me know.
2. Be a site captain or project leader. These leadership positions require a bit more dedication. Site captains will be in charge of the projects at a site, and will need to visit the site a few times in advance of May 3. The project leaders are basically assistants to the site captain, and will need to attend a short training session and converse with their site captain before the event. (If you know someone else who would be good at one of these tasks, please pass along the info to them.) No major skills required, except dedication, the ability to direct volunteers, and willingness to get dirty.
3. Let me know if a group you are a part of (alumnae group, church, school, etc.) would be interested in forming a volunteer team for the day.

Please contact me if you are interested in more information on this event. I can send you a detailed list of the volunteer opportunities and how to get involved. I can be reached by Email triemer@jhu.edu or by phone: 410-955-9603 daytime, 410-764-6120 evenings.

HONEY, THEY CLONED A SHEEP!

by Jutta Beneken

It looked pretty harmless, sandwiched somewhere between "Lower Palaeolithic hunting spears from Germany" and "Evidence against a dedicated system for word learning in children" in a magazine that most of us didn't actually hold in our hands until the hype had already diffused. This three page story about the Finn Dorset lamb 6LL3 (hmm let's see - why don't we call her Dolly instead!?) born of a Scottish Blackface ewe has sparked opinions, fears, ethical and theological outbursts, not to mention thousands of newspaper articles and editorials (no doubt TIME magazine will vote 6LL3 - that's Dolly to us - Sheep of the Year.) I would venture to say that Dolly has been the subject of significantly more spontaneous hallway and dinner table discussions around the world than any other animal since Laika, the Soviet space-travelling dog. Suddenly everyone was talking about sheep, and I was afraid to use the word "cloning" in public, although in my case it merely refers to the simple cut and paste technique. It wasn't, "so, do you think it'll rain tomorrow?" anymore, but more along the lines of "so, what do you think about that sheep thing?"

Now that I'm past the first paragraph of what I thought would be my journalistic contribution to the sheep story, I've come to realize that this subject has already been beaten to death by other journalists. You think that this will be yet another essay on the ethics and potentials of cloning sheep. Don't worry, it's not about cloning per se, but rather about how it is presented to the public. After skimming through the cover stories of TIME and Newsweek, I was left with just one thought about this whole thing. Rather than projecting from current experimental breakthroughs into a future of cloned presidents or athletes, let's maybe just concentrate on duplicating present results as happens to be SOP in science? No need to get the lay public all worked up about it.

Charles Krauthammer wrote in his introduction to TIME Magazine's 'Special Report on Cloning' that Dr. Wilmut's discovery is "not so much a technical trick as a new law of nature" [TIME, March 10, 1997]. I happen to disagree; at this stage it is nothing more than a technical trick, and a fortuitous one at that. Laws of nature are not made by man. If nuclear transfer were a law of nature, I have a feeling that our method of reproduction would be very different from what it is. Any mention of Dr. Wilmut in the same sentence as the fictional Dr. Frankenstein, however well-meant and benign it may be, is very much out of line. That type of portrayal of science to the general public does more harm than good. The gap between "us" and "them" is rapidly widened by hyped media reports such as this one.

I have encountered many non-scientists, including those of my immediate family, who have a genuine desire to understand basic principles such as the genetic code, the immune system, and yes, even cloning. Everyone is extremely grateful when I take a few minutes to explain to them, with the help of simple analogies, how a nucleotide sequence becomes a protein sequence. I have also met people who consider science to be "the work of the devil," because all they hear about are experiments on mice, rats, monkeys, sheep, and possibly even humans. In their eyes, we literally are all Frankensteins. I believe that we need more of the type of journalism that will give the general public a truthful, and more importantly, a realistic picture of what goes on behind laboratory doors. The simple reason being that they are more likely to pick up Time, Newsweek or their daily newspaper than a Scientific American or Nature.

Yes, I do realize that there are people who actually read papers like the National Enquirer, but anyone who believes that Hitler is alive in Wyoming probably won't be fazed to hear that Bill Clinton's clone is running the country while the real Bill is out golfing. I am worried, however, that the rhetorics of "Will there ever be another you?" or "Can souls be xeroxed?" [TIME, March 10, 1997] and the depictions of identical men coming off an assembly line are getting the wrong message across to people who will take it seriously. I hope that back in Scotland Dolly is being adequately monitored for any abnormalities (increased susceptibility to disease and shortened lifespan come to mind) that are beyond her genetic identity with her mammary gland cell donor. Meanwhile, I suggest you check out those hunting spears from Germany - fascinating stuff.

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very open and Dr. Tilghman was very honest and frank with her opinions about graduate training and careers. The GSA apologizes for limiting the number of students, but felt that it was necessary in order to encourage open discussion.

Nancy Jensen Biery, a 4th year Human Genetics Student, was instrumental in organizing the event. She comments, "I am very excited about how the lecture turned out and the prospect of having an annual lecture that will continue to highlight exceptional role models in science, especially women. Hopefully we can continue with the student lunch which was a great opportunity for students to talk frankly with such a well-known scientist. Dr. Tilghman was an excellent choice as the first lecturer. This was also a great opportunity for me and I hope that the student body will continue this lecture with Alicia's ideas in mind."



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they felt was most important, the following items were consistently high on the list. First and foremost, choose research that is interesting, exciting, and intellectually challenging as you will be doing it for quite some time. Second, determine what type of lab environment works best for you. Some individuals thrive on competition while others prefer a more cooperative environment. Pay attention to whether or not the members of the lab are actively engaged with one another and with the principle investigator. No one works in a vacuum and constant communication is crucial. How available is the principle investigator, and when s/he is available, how easy is it to get access? Consider the educational environment of the lab. If the lab members are capable, patient teachers, you should be able to learn the reasoning and lab skills you need. It is also important that the lab have some way of keeping abreast of the literature and the latest developments in the field.

The third key aspect to consider is your interaction with your advisor. Don Brunson, a post-doc in Molecular and Clinical Pharmacology, provides a unique perspective concerning the relationship between student and advisor. If this "short-term marriage" is to be successful, he recommends that you look for compatibility on several different levels. There should be "philosophical compatibility." You and your advisor should have similar views on how research should be done. Look for "managerial compatibility." Goal-oriented individuals may not mix well with task-oriented individuals. Those who need motivation and guidance might do well under an advisor who believes in micro- management. Make sure that mechanisms exist that allow you and your advisor to evaluate progress. Lastly there must be "personal compatibility." A significant amount of your time in graduate school will be spent dealing with your advisor. An already long day can seem even longer (to the both of you) if you don't get along. And imagine what effect a strained relationship will have on a recommendation.

Several other items are worth mentioning. There was no general consensus on whether to work with an assistant professor or a full professor. Weigh the pros and cons. Full professors may be more established, and they may also have more experience training graduate students. On the other hand, their additional responsibilities may make it more difficult to keep up with what is going on in the lab. Assistant professors may be under more stress, but they often are more available and have more of an impetus to publish in a timely manner. They are also not so far removed from what it is like to be a graduate student. Another key thing to remember is that graduate students and professors are on different time scales. Somehow you have to balance the long term goals of the professor with the short term goals of the student. Be flexible and be willing to compromise and look for the same qualities in your advisor.

This is hardly a definitive study on how to choose an advisor, but I hope that these guidelines will provide food for thought as you adapt them to meet individual needs. And thanks to all of the post-docs and research associates who were so generous with their insight and time.