

The G.S.A. NEWSLETTER

a publication of the Graduate Student Association Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 2 APRIL 2003

The function of the GSA Kara Cerveny

Most of us spend the majority of our time experimenting or thinking about how to elucidate the function of a particular biological process or entity. This column is dedicated to thinking about how the major functions of the GSA benefit the graduate student community of JHMI.

While contemplating what the functions of the GSA are, I considered what the abbreviation GSA might stand for. GSA could stand for Give Students Access since the GSA works as a lobbying organization for you. Just as some national non-profit groups work to gain certain rights or benefits for their members by lobbying congress, the GSA lobbies the JHMI administration on behalf of graduate students for access to benefits such as adequate healthcare, dental care, stipends, and work-out privileges at the Homewood gym.

GSA could also stand for Great Social Activities. The GSA provides happy hours throughout the year where we can all get together, catch up on the gossip, talk shop, and throw back a few cold ones (brewskis or cokes, as well as munchies, are available and free to all graduate students). For the past several years, the GSA has also helped to coordinate graduate student appreciation week during May. This year, grad student appreciation week promises lots of fun with activities ranging from the popular on-campus events such as wine tasting and afternoon coffee hour to the

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The Impact of September 11th on International Students and Exchange Visitors

The events of 9/11 changed the world's perception of security and affected the way nations think about their place in the world community. A year and a half later, the laws enacted by the U.S. Congress in response to 9/11 and in response to continued concerns of additional attacks are being enforced. International students, researchers, professors, and staff from select countries must now register in person with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS—recently renamed BCIS: The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services). In addition, increased security checks for visa stamps performed at U.S. consulates and embassies-while necessary and importantmay take months. The events of September 11th changed the lives of international students and scholars, the minds of U.S. lawmakers, and the way the international offices of The Johns Hopkins University and the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions (JHMI) advise international visitors. This article highlights some of the recent legal changes in immigration law and provides additional information on the new data tracking system the U.S. government implemented in early 2003.

Of immediate importance to JHMI's international student and exchange visitor population (a.k.a. nonimmigrants present in the U.S. in F and J visa status) is the launch of the new electronic Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). For institutions of higher education, the launch of SEVIS on January 30, 2003 changed the way in which we do "business" with INS and the U.S. Department of State (DOS). For nonimmigrants present in the U.S. in F and J visa status, SEVIS has changed the way in which their information is collected, maintained and shared with INS and DOS. SEVIS is not a system designed to frighten or dissuade international visitors from coming to the U.S. Rather, it is a system designed to immediately identify those internationals who fail to comply with INS/BCIS regulations. The

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Upcoming GSA Meeting April 15

1830 Bldg, 2-108

Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 3PM

Upcoming Events

GSA Wine Tasting April 4th, 5PM Mountcastle Auditorium

Coffee Hour with Ed Miller April 8th Greenhouse

Open Mic Night April 10, 6PM Levering Hall, E-level

Developmental Biology Journal Club by Melissa Vinning April 16, 12PM

GSA Poster Session

April 30th, 2PM SPH Lobby

Seminar by Teacher of the Year

Jeremy Nathans

May 6th, 3PM West Lecture Hall *****

The Cons of Human Cloning

Philip O'herron

The issue of cloning human beings to harvest embryonic stem cells for research purposes is certainly one of the most difficult topics scientific ethics has ever had to address. As science continues to advance, increasingly difficult and important ethical issues arise, of which the current debate on human cloning is clearly the most prominent. Let me state first off that I will not be ambiguous about my terms. Whenever I refer to cloning, I will be specifically referring to the generation of an embryonic human, whether through the method of fertilizing an egg cell with a sperm cell, or transferring the nucleus of any 46-chromosome cell into an egg cell that has had its nucleus removed (called somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT)). In attempts to make the procedure less objectionable to the public, people have tried to introduce new phrases such as a distinction between "therapeutic cloning" and "human cloning". But these are just word tricks. The difference between the two lies not in the nature of the procedure nor in what the end result of the procedure is, but only in what is then done with the entity created. Since "therapeutic cloning" involves the creation of a living embryo of the species Homo sapiens, I will not distinguish between the two at the procedural level and will use the phrases "cloning" and "human cloning" interchangeably.

It is clear that there is something not quite right about cloning human embryos for research. No one cares if adult stem cells are used for research. And almost every argument you'll hear in favor of the procedure talks about the potential benefits and how these "outweigh the harm done" or "outweigh any problem someone might have." So what exactly is this "harm" or "problem" or element of distastefulness about the procedure that has to be "outweighed"? Of course it is nothing other than the nature of the entity created by the procedure. There is some sense that it may be wrong to create and destroy this "thing", but that the therapeutic benefits that could come from it outweigh this sense.

However, this is a bad approach to take when deciding an ethical question. The first question that must always be addressed is "what are we dealing with and what are we doing to it?" Nazi experiments on Jews could have provided valuable knowledge about human psychology and other things, but we would not condone them. And this is because certain things may not be done to other human beings regardless of the benefit. Try to answer the hypothetical ethical question of whether it would be allowable for us to kidnap just one person, and do every kind of experiment no matter how painful, and eventually even kill this person if doing so would definitively result in a cure for every known disease. Even if we knew beforehand that it would just take sacrificing one person to cure every disease that everyone has, would we be justified in forcibly taking someone for this purpose? I hope that all will agree that this is never allowable. Again, this is because there are absolutes when dealing with human beings and certain things are not subject to a relative scale of general benefit.

So the critical question becomes, what are we dealing with when we clone a human embryo? The scientific evidence indicates that it is a living distinct human organism. It has its own genetic makeup, it is growing, the cells are dividing along a guided course that, given the proper time and external environment, will lead to a mature adult organism. This is very different from any somatic cell of an adult organism, even an egg cell. These cells are part of a living organism and share the genetic makeup of the organism from which they come, and they "grow" as functional parts of the adult organism and not as separate entities. But once the egg is given a complete set of 46 chromosomes, it is now a separate entity. Regardless of its stage of development, regardless of the environment in which it lives, it cannot be denied that this is a distinct living member of the species Homo sapiens. Certainly we can see that the level of development cannot determine what a thing is. Is a newborn less human than a walking, talking two-year old, which is less human than a fully developed, reasoning adult? Of course not. But, the argument might be raised that the difference between a newborn and these other stages is much less than the difference between a blastocyst and a newborn. Again I would say that the level of development cannot determine what a thing is.

Perhaps you think that although it is a living human organism, it is not really as valuable as an adult human being who is suffering from a terribly debilitating and painful disease. In fact, it has no sensation. One cannot even distinguish between which cells will make up the adult organism and which will become placenta or something else, it can be frozen for some time and then revived and will continue to grow, it will never get beyond a very primitive level without being implanted into a womb, and many other things which are very unlike the adult organism. First of all, if you are going to start giving different value levels to different human beings, you are running a great risk. I think that anyone can see that this is on the road to a very slippery slope, science gone amuck, "Brave New World" horror myth that anyone can come up with. Once blastocyst embryos can be harvested for stem cells, why not let them develop a little further to develop tissue lines that would be even more effective in treating disease? And then why not let them develop to where whole organs can be harvested?

If you really hope to have any logical basis for rejecting such propositions and not just rely on a consensus of public and scientific disgust, then you have to draw the line determining which human beings are dispensable and which are not. (Surely 100 years ago the idea of legalized abortion would have seemed disgusting to nearly everyone and even 30 years ago people would have scoffed if abortion protesters had claimed that legalizing abortion would eventually lead to scientific research that would destroy embryos.) The only way to logically defend your position in this matter is to say that no human beings are dispensable. Otherwise, what criteria can

ATTENTION SOM GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Have you recently found yourself thinking these very statements?

"There is so much pressure to succeed and so much competition."

"Will I ever graduate?"

"I feel like all I ever do is study or work in the lab. When I'm not, I feel guilty about it." "I need to publish and get perfect grades otherwise I won't get a decent postdoc or job." "I don't have any time to do the things I used to do with my friends and family."

"I have no money, in fact, I have a lot of debt."

"I have to pull another all-nighter because I have to pass this exam."

"I am having trouble finding the time and motivation to work on my thesis"

"There is too much to study, I am never going to pass my comprehensive exams." "My advisor just doesn't understand."

If you find yourself having experienced any of these thoughts, welcome to graduate education....you are not alone!

THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CAN HELP

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. My name is Deborah Hillard and I have been hired by the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program to develop and implement services for School of Medicine Students. The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a comprehensive program aimed to help students deal with the various, and sometimes competing, demands placed on you by school, family, and friends. Although challenging and exciting, it is not uncommon for graduate students to experience stress, tension, and adjustment difficulties. For example, the demands of being a SOM student (you know...classes, labs, writing papers, studying for exams, working on a thesis,

comprehensive examinations, attending conferences for your professional development, etc., etc., etc.,) limit your spare time. Therefore, you may not be able to do what was once considered important, like sleeping, exercising, and socializing. One of the primary goals of the SAP is to help you find an appropriate balance.

So, now that you know about some of our goals, you might be asking yourself, what can the SAP offer me? The SAP provides a variety of services including preventative and educational sessions, discussion groups, brief counseling, consultation, and referral to appropriate services and resou-

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be used? Surely location, level of dependence on other organisms, and source of nutrition are arbitrary. All of these can change over the life of a human and yet no change in them would allow us to declare someone valueless and subject to lethal scientific experimentation. Similarly, just because it doesn't look like a human being has no bearing on what the thing is. We also do not use functionality as a criterion for designating humanity. A paralyzed person, or a person born with no sensation is not therefore matter to be destroyed in scientific experimentation. Similarly, one does not have to manifest the special cognitive abilities that humans alone have to escape destruction at the hands of researchers. A severely mentally handicapped person, or even a person in a coma, does not, by virtue of this, lose their rights to avoid experimental destruction.

I cannot conceive how one can logically defend the destruction of a distinct human being at any stage of its life (which has been shown to begin with fertilization) for any reason at all. I know it is extremely difficult to view the blob of cells you have created in a dish as too special to help the large numbers of people suffering from debilitating and painful diseases. It is extremely difficult for me as well. But

as awful as suffering is, we cannot kill one human to cure another, and so to be consistent we must reject this procedure. In fact, there are even people with such diseases who do not wish science to take this route, simply because they see firstly that it involves creating and destroying a human being, and secondly they see what the logical consequences of taking the first step down this path will be.

I challenge you to take some time, sit down, and being perfectly honest with yourself, try to answer why human beings cannot be experimented on like other animals. I think that for every answer you come up with, you will, in an analogous manner, be able to find a special case where that reason would not hold for certain human beings. I think the answer is simply that there is something special about human beings as a species, such that even if some members do not have all the manifestations of it, they are still protected by it.

The editors would like to call for submissions by those with a differing view point on human cloning for publication in the next issue of the newsletter. Submission information can be found on the last page of this issue. -SHL

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off-campus pub-crawl. In addition, the GSA works to bring social and intellectual pursuits together by providing activities like the annual GSA poster contest where good eats and good science come together, along with some much sought after accolades in the form of prize money.

The abbreviation GSA could mean Group Subsidizing & Accounting because the GSA provides funding for many of the diverse educational and cultural activities provided by a wide variety of student groups. For example, the Art as Applied to Medicine Art Show & Happy Hour, cultural programming by groups including (but not limited to) the Chinese student association and Jewish student association, the Pioneers in Science lectureships, and this newsletter were all funded, at least in part, by the GSA. Additionally, the GSA also distributes money to individual students who are unable to obtain enough funds for travel to a scientific meeting.

When all is said and done, GSA is defined as an organization made up of and for the benefit of graduate students – the Graduate Student Association. The over-arching function of the GSA is to listen to the students and act on their behalf by lobbying the administration, providing social outlets, or funding a particular event or speaker. The GSA council needs your help to recruit speakers, provide quality and fun social events, and make sure the appropriate events, groups, and people receive funding. So check out the GSA website, come to a GSA meeting (free pizza and soda ©), or talk to your council representative about what you think the GSA should be doing. After all, the GSA is your association.

www.hopkinsmedicine.org/gsa

Kara Cerveny, a fifth year graduate student, is the BCMB representative for the GSA council.

The Journey of a Science Writer: A Profile on Joanna Downer by Raj Mukhopadhyay

What can you do with a PhD, besides research? Like countless of other graduate students, Joanna Downer posed this question to herself two and half years into graduate school. The answer for Joanna was to become a science writer. Joanna currently holds the position of assistant director of science communication in the Office of Communications and Public Affairs at the medical campus. Among other things, she writes news releases on the groundbreaking work done at Hopkins, helps journalists get in touch with various Hopkins experts, and acts as a liaison between Hopkins' researchers and communicators. Joanna's career path illustrates the steps a person can take when interested in pursuing a life in science writing.

Joanna started off in science at Carnegie Mellon University where she did her bachelor's degree in chemistry. Her next move was to Washington University to pursue a PhD in nuclear chemistry, working on radiopharmaceutical development. Early in her graduate career, Joanna realized the long haul of grunt work at the bench (a hallmark of graduate school we all know too well) was not quite her style. But what was she going to do? Noting her dissatisfaction, her thesis advisor stepped in and thanks to his generous support, Joanna got the chance to determine that science writing would be a fitting alternative to bench research. Writing a few stories for a public relations magazine at Washington University convinced Joanna to apply for an AAAS science writing fellowship. The 1997 fellowship landed her at the Washington, DC, office of Time magazine for ten weeks (you can find Joanna's name in Time and Time International!). Exhilarated by her experience at Time magazine, Joanna went back to finish her PhD with the knowledge she had found her career path in science writing. Even as she tied up loose ends of her thesis work, Joanna continued to write by taking up various freelance jobs. After she graduated, she took up a job at the Duke Medical Center where she worked in the News Office as a media relations person. She came to Hopkins in 2001 where she now works with researchers in the Institute for Basic Biomedical Sciences, the McKusick-Nathans Institute of Genetic Medicine, and the Institute for Cell Engineering.

Since she spends a great deal of her time talking to researchers in the major institutes on campus, Joanna has her finger on the Hopkins pulse. With her unique bird's eye view, Joanna often finds herself in the thrilling position of being able to facilitate collaborations. It's happened on more than one occasion that Joanna will be in the middle of discussing a project with a researcher when she remembers there is someone else on campus working on a similar problem or with the expertise to help the project under discussion. The best thing about her job? According to Joanna it's "receiving an education every day and getting paid for it instead paying for it"!

If you are interested in science writing, check out the following websites:

National Association of Science Writers www.nasw.org American Medical Writers Association www.amwa.org American Association for the Advancement of Science www.aaas.org

Directory of science writing courses and programs http://murrow.journalism.wisc.edu/dsc

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message is clear: We all—regardless of nationality—bear the burden of homeland security.

The information the JHMI Office of International Services (OIS) collects and transmits to INS and DOS via SEVIS is not new. Federal law has always required that institutions of higher education maintain specific data on nonimmigrants present in the U.S. in F and J visa status. Traditionally, institutions maintained data in paper files, files that could be inspected legally at any time by specific government officials for specific reasons—but paper files nonetheless. International office administrators previously had the legal authority to correct typographical errors—and other minor issues—to assure the legal status of their international visitors. SEVIS no longer affords this luxury.

Whereas the JHMI OIS has always collected address information on international students and exchange visitors, we are now required to report all address changes via SEVIS within ten (10) days. This time frame means that F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors must report address changes to OIS within five (5) days. Changes in degree levels, field of study, area of research, and funding must also be reported in similar time-frames. No international student or exchange visitor in F-1 or J-1 status pursuing a course of study may drop below full time enrollment without prior written permission from OIS staff. Consequently, OIS must immediately update SEVIS with such changes to assure the university's compliance with new federal reporting requirements. Failure to report changes in address, failure to obtain advance permission to drop below full time, and failure to report other seemingly minor changes will result in F-1 students or J-1 exchange visitors falling out of status, and in some cases becoming non-reinstateable and deportable.

Of new and crucial interest in SEVIS is the tracking of *dependent* visa classifications—those international visitors present in the U.S. in F-2 or J-2 status. These individuals are now tracked as carefully and as completely as their primary counterparts. Furthermore, F-2 and J-2 dependents may no longer enroll full time in degree seeking programs in higher education. Rather, they must apply to change their legal status to a primary status of F-1 or J-1. In addition, they must await the approval of that change before they can fully pursue their programs.

Of final significance in the new SEVIS system is form transition. By August 2003, all current Form I-20s issued to F-1 students and Form DS-2019s (formerly called Form IAP-66s) issued to J-1 exchange visitors will be replaced by electronic SEVIS-generated versions of the same forms. Institutions across the country (including JHMI and JHU) are grappling with how to generate and distribute these new forms effectively and efficiently. Keep your eyes and ears open for more information as August approaches.

The list of changes in immigration law is long. JHMI's OIS has a multifold mission to protect JHMI and to protect JHMI's international population. We do this by working to assure that all parties remain as informed as possible about the changes that have occurred (and that will continue to occur). It is critical that all international visitors remain up to date to protect themselves and their families. If you are not yet a member of the OIS listserve become one by visiting http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/intlsvcs and signing up. If you have not recently updated your information with OIS, do so by downloading the SEVIS update form available at on our website above and faxing it to OIS at 410-955-0871. Keep your eyes and ears open over the summer months when OIS announces the beginning of SEVIS I-20 and SEVIS DS-2019 form distribution. OIS cannot maintain your legal status for you but we can help you remain as informed as possible in the coming months.

Thank you, Murray G. Welsh Director From the GSA President
Dan Cohen

By the time you are reading this newsletter, the GSA's first Graduate Student Social will have taken place on March 27th. This spectacular event offered SOM students an opportunity to schmooze with their peers at Public Health and Homewood, and find that special someone in a round of speed dating or human bingo. A number of students made significant contributions to planning this event, and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Mary Berk, Chris Altermatt, Ivan Litvinov, Ed Brignole, and Chris Von Seggern for making this event possible. And a special thanks to DJ Penguin (Amar Sahay) for helping folks get their groove on.

If you missed out on the Grad Student Social, or are looking for the next big thing on the social scene, fear not-more exciting events are just around the corner. Following on the enormously successful events of April 2002, the GSA is proud to again be sponsoring Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week, from April 7th-11th. For those of you eager to get the celebrations started early, we welcome you to join us at a Wine Tasting, featuring the ever-popular "Tish," on April 4th in Mountcastle Auditorium. Our first official GPSA Week event, however, will be a Coffee Hour, on April 8th, with Deans Ed Miller and Peter Maloney in the Greenhouse. An informal event designed to foster communication between students and administration, here's the perfect chance to sell the Dean and program directors on your ideas on how to improve graduate education at Hopkins. And even if you don't have much to say on that topic, come for some refreshing coffee or tea, and plenty of tasty pastries, courtesy of Alumni Affairs (our co-sponsor). This event is very low-key, but should serve to remind people that there is a community at Hopkins that really cares how you are faring.

On Thursday, April 10th, we invite students to join in another inter-campus event, Open Mic Night. Cosponsored by the GRO at Homewood, this event will start at 6pm at E-level in Levering Hall. Open Mic Night includes all forms of outrageous graduate student skits, from karaoke to stand-up comedy, to whatever else you can think of. Come show off how you just might be the next American Idol (we know how those special talents never get full credit in the lab). Admission is free to all students with a valid Hopkins ID.

Planning is still in the works for an appropriate concluding event to GPSA Week. So stay tuned to the ALLGRAD list as well as GSA flyers around campus for final details. If you have ideas for events you would like to see take place during GPSA Week or would like to get involved in the GSA, please contact gsa-g@jhmi.edu. As always, we look to the general student body to make our events a success, so please mark down April 4th, 8th, and 10th on your calendars, and make the most of what GPSA Week has to offer.

Student Assistance Program continued from page 3

rces. Let me also highlight just a few of the issues that we can help you with:

- Stress and anxiety
- Life/professional transitions
- Academic performance/productivity
- ❖ Faculty-student conflicts
- Family/couples relationships
- Depression
- Drugs and alcohol
- Adapting to a new environment
- Eating disorders
- ❖ Assault/rape
- Sexual harassment
- Sexuality issues

Second, you might be wondering about how to access services. This is simple! The SAP is run in conjunction with the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program. You can schedule an appointment to meet with a clinician by calling (410) 955-1220 or (443) 997-3800. You can also call me directly at (410) 502-2745 or you can e-mail me at dhillard@jhu.edu. SAP services are primarily offered between 8:30 and 5:00 but we do have some evening hours available. We are conveniently located at 550 N. Broadway, Suite 507 or at Eastern High School and our services are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL! Additional information about SAP services can be found at www.jhu.edu/sap.

In sum, I am very excited to begin this venture with you. As a recent graduate from a doctoral program in clinical psychology, I too have experienced a variety of the stressors that you might encounter on a daily basis and I can surely empathize with how busy you are. My ultimate goal is to bridge both my professional training and my personal experiences to help make your training experience as smooth as possible. I hope that you will come to know me as a familiar face, someone that you can feel comfortable talking to. I look forward to working with you in the future and please feel free to contact me with questions, concerns, and ideas about how to enhance SAP services. In many ways, it is your voice that will shape the future of this program.

* * *

.. For those who have to say "goodbye" ... by Van-Khue Ton

Close your eyes
Shed the autumn tears
Golden skies
Ocean blue seeps through reds
And goodbyes
From within the Hearts
Moonless nights
I nto which days Fall.

Close your eyes
Shed the winter tears
Sparkling bright
A thousand lights diffract
Artic ice
From the core of Earth
Frozen fire
Shattered in clear air.

Close your eyes
Shed the springtime tears
Larks soar high
Chiming Bells ring first notes
Sky spreads wide
Moon pulls curtains of dusk
Blue lupines
Budding hope forth Springs.

From your eyes
Wipe the summer tears
Lush sunshine
Drenched in blue-white crush
Old goodbyes
Ride the winds east west
In your eyes
A nosegay blooms . . .

The pen is mightier than the pipet!

Please send us any poems, short stories, creative writing, photos, or black and white art.

The next deadline for newsletter submissions will be May 2nd. Contact a GSAN editor:

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