A Newsletter for the Department of Allied Health Sciences

Faculty Spotlight: Judy Brown

The recent discovery of reprogramming human somatic cells into induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS), offers an innovative approach to the study of human genetic disorders. The UConn Health Center and Storrs campuses recently approved and funded the cross-campus Induced Pluripotent Stem Cell and Chromosome Core (iPSCC). The Co-Directors of the Core are Dr. Judy Brown (Allied Health Sciences) and Dr. Rachel O’Neill (MCB) on the Storrs Campus and Dr. Ren-He Xu on the Farmington campus.

The iPSCC provides critical levels of support to UConn investigators and to the expanding community of iPS cell technology: iPS cell derivation and chromosome characterization. Studies have reported that iPS cells can be prone to chromosome abnormalities thus affecting the physiology and growth rate of the cell, and may lead to tumorigenesis. Drs. Brown and O’Neill are research colleagues who recognized the need for stem cell and iPS cell chromosome testing in Connecticut and have collaborated to create the chromosome services for the Core. Chromosome testing includes karyotyping by G-banding and fluorescence in situ hybridization with DNA specific probes. Dr. Brown, a clinical laboratory specialist in cytogenetics and molecular biology, is a faculty member in the Diagnostic Genetic Sciences (DGS) Training Program. The iPSCC provides valuable services to researchers but is also a unique learning environment for Dr. Brown’s students. Julianna Crivello and Mallory Nielsen are two current DGS students who have been instrumental to the inception of and the daily routine in the Chromosome Core. The services offered by this new Core can be viewed at ipscc.uchc.edu and were highlighted at the March 22, 2011 StemCONN scientific symposium.
Highlighting Dietetics: Ellen Shanley

Ellen Shanley, MBA, RD, CD-N is the Director of the Dietetics Program in Allied Health Sciences which is home to the Coordinated Program in Dietetics and the Dietetic Internship. The Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) has revised standards and increased the required hours for from 900 to 1200. Ellen and the Dietetics faculty have reviewed the curriculum for the past two years and have implemented a plan to meet the CADE requirements. The graduating class of 2011 will be the first to complete a six-week ‘externship’, which will provide the additional hours necessary to meet the CADE requirement. In addition, Ellen has been helping to alleviate redundancies at the University by combining Dietetics and Nutritional Science Program courses. The shared courses that will be taken by students in both Programs include Community Nutrition, Medical Nutrition Therapy I and II, and Food Service Management I and II.

New Faculty: Katie Martin

Dr. Katie Martin joined the Dept of Allied Health Sciences in April 2010 as an Assistant Professor in Residence. Katie received her PhD from the Tufts School of Nutrition Science and Policy, conducted her post-doctoral work in the UConn Dept of Nutritional Sciences, and most recently worked at the Center for Public Health & Health Policy. Katie’s research focuses on access to healthy food and food security among low-income households. Dr. Martin received a 2010 K12 Award for Mentored Research from the CT Institute for Clinical and Translational Science for her proposal on the implementation and evaluation of Freshplace, an innovative food pantry model in Hartford. This project was reported on the front page of the August 12, 2011 edition of the Hartford Courant, with the headline “A Food Pantry That Does More Than Fill Its Clients Bellies: Freshplace Helps Its Recipients Become More Self-Sufficient”. Katie presented the data she collected from corner stores in Hartford at an AHS Dept Seminar. Katie teaches Food, Health & Politics in the Masters of Public Health Program at the UConn Health Center.

In October 2010, Katie ran her first marathon! Dr. Katie Martin lives in Simsbury with her husband and two sons.

Left to Right: Erika Illyes, Kate Robaina, Dr. Katie Martin, MJ Counsilman, Julie Menounos, Jeanette Goyzueta
New Faculty: Laijun Lai

Dr. Laijun Lai is an Associate Research Professor who joined the Dept of Allied Health Sciences in the spring of 2011. Dr. Lai, an immunologist, earned his MD from the Fujian Medical University in China and most recently worked as an Assistant Professor in the Dept of Immunology at the UConn Health Center. Laijun was one of only ten recipients (out of 89 applicants) of a CT Stem Cell Research Program in 2010. Dr. Lai was awarded a grant of $1 million for his proposal to establish a method for generating functional blood stem cells from human embryonic stem cells. Dr. Lai’s work could have an impact in improving stem cell therapies for blood and immune diseases. Dr. Lai’s research was presented at the StemCONN 2011 conference, a full-day scientific symposium hosted by CT United for Research Excellence and kicked off by Governor Dannel Malloy who pledged his support for continued state stem cell funding. Laijun was also awarded a grant to study antitumor immunity induced by a hybrid cytokine that he discovered and patented. Laijun recently published in *Blood*, *Cancer Research*, and *Transplantation* journals, adding to his long list of peer-reviewed publications in the field, and is also named as a inventor on several patents that have been issued or pending.

Graduate Student Highlight: Carrie Cucci

Carrie Cucci began her undergraduate career at the University of Connecticut in the fall of 2003 as a pre-pharmacy major, however during her sophomore year decided to explore other careers. She knew that healthcare was where she wanted to work and was happy to find the career of dietetics as it sounded intriguing. As she learned more about the Dietetics program, Carrie realized it would be a perfect fit for her since she had an interest in science and a passion for food. Carrie completed her Bachelor's of Science Degree in Dietetics through the Coordinated Program in Allied Health and became a registered dietician in 2008.

Carrie’s next step in her career began when she enrolled in the Graduate Program in Allied Health. Carrie, while working on her graduate degree, was employed as a graduate assistant by Student Health Services, working 10 hours a week as an outpatient dietitian. Carrie’s graduate curriculum included coursework and research, with her thesis in the area of dietary protein and iron metabolism. Carrie completed her Master’s degree in August 2010 under the mentorship of Dr. Jane Kerstetter. Carrie is now a PhD candidate in Nutritional Sciences. Her research is being conducted under the advisement and mentorship of Dr. Jane Kerstetter. Making the decision to pursue a PhD was a more difficult one for Carrie in comparison to a Master’s degree. She felt capable but was unsure if she wanted research and academics to be her primary career focus. After some deliberation, Carrie is now pleased with her decision and realizes her future holds many opportunities.
Rachel Baron and Kayley Gardner, students in the Allied Health Sciences Degree Program, completed a 2010 study-abroad semester in South Africa. Rachel and Kayley agree that their experiences during this semester were both enjoyable and educational.

Rachel, a fifth semester junior majoring in Allied Health Sciences, is from Ridgefield, CT. Rachel applied to UConn tracking an AHS major and knowing she wanted a career in the medical field. Rachel has been working in different healthcare settings since the age of 15, including a pharmacy, a physical therapy clinic and most recently a doctor’s office. Rachel learned of the South Africa study abroad program at UConn with the associated medical setting internships and knew this was the perfect opportunity to combine her interest in a study abroad and patient care.

Kayley Gardner is also a fifth semester junior in AHS. Kayley is from Setauket, Long Island, NY. She began her college career unsure of her major but in short time realized she wanted to pursue a nursing career and that a degree in Allied Health Sciences would prepare her well for nursing programs. Kayley has always had a strong desire to study abroad and so the UConn South Africa program permitted her to meet this goal while gaining experience in health care.

Rachel and Kayley spent four months in South Africa completing college classes as well as an internship and community service work. Rachel’s internship was at a government run non-profit clinic located in an especially poor community. Rachel, the first non-nursing major to work in this clinic, and her co-workers visited local homes to provide children with measles vaccinations. Clinic services, including HIV/AIDS testing, family planning, treatment for infectious diseases, and emergency room and pharmacy services were located in one building, and surprisingly to Rachel, were offered free of charge. Kayley had the opportunity to work in the research unit of the clinic studying short bowel syndrome. Additionally, she spent many days in local communities providing HIV/AIDS testing. Kayley also shadowed a physician in the Burn Unit at the Children’s Hospital.

Both Rachel and Kayley had the opportunity to visit and tour several hospitals in South Africa and completed community service. Rachel organized an art program at the local high school and Kayley volunteered at another medical clinic. Rachel and Kayley can both attest to the positive life changing experiences of study abroad, especially in South Africa. They recommend the program to their fellow Allied Health students. Rachel’s future plans include applying to Physician Assistant programs and Kayley is looking toward accelerated nursing programs with the goal of becoming a Nurse Practitioner.
Alumni News: Matthew Sara

Matthew Sara graduated from UConn in July 2009 with a Bachelors of Science degree in Medical Technology. He started medical school at the UConn Heath Center in Farmington one month later. Matthew, now a second year medical student believes his coursework, labs, and internship in Medical Technology were a perfect springboard for medical school and prepared him well with examination skills in the diagnostic process.

Matthew intends to specialize in internal medicine because he enjoys patient contact and is appreciative of the wide range of settings in which an internal medicine doctor can practice. Matthew’s other subspecialty interests include: sports medicine, hematology, oncology, and infectious disease. Matthew’s anticipated medical school graduation date is May 2013.

CANR Career Night

Career night is an annual event sponsored by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources designed to bring together current students, alumni, and employers. Current students can learn about career options in many different fields of study, internships and jobs available, and meet with Department of Allied Health Sciences alumni. Pictured below are the alumni who graciously volunteered at the November 2010 Career Night.

Left to Right Front: Rebecca Brown, Jaye Ellen Smith, Kara Kujawski, Matthew Sara, Karen Fox, Lauren Laveneziana, Melissa Woods

Back: Kara Pisacane, Angela Doody LaRue, Rebecca Craig, Andrea Brown Rhodes, Jeff Tamsin, Katherine Callahan, John D’Adamo
Community Service has been forefront with the Allied Health Club officers this past year. Club members volunteered three weekends at a local soup kitchen, raised over $600 for the American Lung Association and co-sponsored a 5K run to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Club members climbed 34 floors and over 600 stairs in “Tackle the Tower”, an event to help the American Lung Assoc. In order to promote health education on campus, Club members manned a table titled “Stress Management 101” at the fall events of Cornucopia and the Student Health Fair. Stress balls, relaxing green tea, dark chocolates and pertinent stress reduction information were distributed. A favorite activity of the Club has become the yearly Valentine’s service project. Club members create thoughtful, homemade Valentine cards. Laughter, conversation and eating cookies mark this fun evening. Valentines were later distributed to a local long-term care facility. The Club hosts a speaker each semester. Orthopedic physician’s assistant Michael Zande, PA-C was invited for the fall semester. He gave some great advice on being competitive in the PA application process and detailed the PA scope of practice. Deborah Bubela, PhD, PT, PCS and her presentation “Physical Therapy – A Career in Helping Others Move and Function” were well received in the spring semester. The Club continues to recruit dedicated officers who wish to donate some time to help organize these worthwhile events.

Gabrielle “Brie” DeLisi, a student in the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Concentration, recently completed a five-month paid internship at Pratt & Whitney in E. Hartford, CT. Pratt & Whitney, a business unit of United Technologies Corporation (UTC), designs, engineers, manufactures, and repairs jet engines. Brie was provided with an opportunity to engage in OSH practices, including ergonomic assessments of workstations and development of an online ergonomic training for employees. Brie also learned how to develop and communicate OSH strategic plans, lead and follow up on meetings, and to work in cross-functional teams. Brie presented her internship experiences at the Feb 21 Dept of Allied Health Sciences Seminar. Brie’s internship was a positive experience for both Brie and Pratt & Whitney. In fact, Pratt & Whitney was so impressed with Brie’s performance that she was selected for the UTC Environmental, Health and Safety Leadership Program. After graduating in May 2011, Brie will spend 2 years rotating through three UTC business units. The program grooms selected individuals for OSH leadership positions at one of UTC’s units.
The Center for Environmental Health and Health Promotion sponsored a conference and movie screening in October 2010. The conference featured seven internationally known speakers, including Randy Olson, a scientist turned film-maker whose films gently poke fun at how scientists communicate with the public. The conference was entitled “Mixed Messages in Public Health; It’s no wonder folks are confused.” Each of the invited speakers discussed important issues in public health, and how the scientific message to the public has gotten confused. Issues included risks associated with cell phones, bisphenol A (better known as BPA), mercury in fish and nanotechnology. Dr. Silbart, working closely with Jessica Beaudet, a graduate student in AHS, put together the program in hopes of raising awareness about how scientific messages get translated to the public – and how these messages often get lost in translation. The result is a confused public that cannot put risks in perspective. For example, Dr. Silbart's opening remarks featured a newspaper photo of an obviously pregnant woman smoking a cigarette. The caption to the photo describes the concern the woman has regarding the effect that nearby jackhammers (due to construction) are having on her unborn fetus.

The conference Keynote address was given by Dr. Geoffrey Kabat, a senior epidemiologist at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. His talk was entitled “Cell Phones, Science and Fear: How Our Society Manufactures Hazards.” Dr. Rochelle Tyl, an internationally known expert in endocrine toxicology from RTI; and Dr. Gary Ginsberg, a world-renowned toxicologist from the CT Department of Public Health, each provided their assessment of the risks associated with BPA. A panel discussion followed. Dr. William Fitzgerald, a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Marine Sciences at the University of Connecticut was followed by Dr. Emily Oken, an Assistant Professor of Population Medicine, Harvard Medical School who discussed the risks and benefits of fish consumption during pregnancy. A final talk on “Nanotechnology and Nanotoxicology: Hype vs. Reality” was given by Dr. Günter Oberdörster, Professor of Environmental Medicine, University of Rochester. On the Thursday evening prior to the conference, Randy Olson screened his recently released movie entitled “Sizzle”. Approximately 80 students and faculty gathered in the Chemistry building to watch the movie, and a spirited question and answer session followed. Randy was also the featured noon-time speaker at the next-day conference, and he spoke to a crowd of nearly 100 people on the topic “Don’t Be Such A Scientist: Talking Substance in and Age of Style.” Both events were covered extensively by the UConn Daily Campus and with two publications in the highly circulated “EPI Monitor”. Copies may be obtained from Dr. Silbart.

Faculty Accomplishments

According to a New Study in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Americans Still May Not Be Getting Enough Calcium! Much attention has been given to a recent publication from Jane Kerstetter and her colleagues in the Dept of Nutritional Sciences. J Am Diet Assoc. 2011: 111(5). Mangano KM, Walsh SJ, Insogna KL, Kenny AM, Kerstetter JE.

Valerie Duffy and her doctoral student, Shristi Rawal, have been awarded a contract through the NIH to develop and implement an assessment of taste and smell functioning for the next National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, a nationally-representative survey of the nutrition and health of adults in the United States (www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes.htm).