

# VT PRIME LATE SUMMER EDITION

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Since the [last edition](#):

## INTRODUCING OUR NEW PREP15 (Our 15th Cohort) SCHOLARS!





Pictured above: PREP15 (Dominique Munson, Van Truong, Hagar Kenawy, and Tasmine Clement)

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## Dominique Munson

PREP 15



### ***Who are you?***

"At MSU, I was a member of the NIGMS Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) program to conduct scientific research at MSU and Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine. My research interest is Cancer Biology. I enjoy learning about the reasons for such poor prognosis of various cancers and the current therapeutic approaches. During my spare time, I enjoy spending time with family and being involved in dance classes such as ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop, and modern."

### ***What is one word that describes you and why?***

"One word that describes me is resilient because I never allow negativity and difficulties stop me from achieving my goal."

### ***Why do you want a PhD in the biomedical sciences?***

"I want a Ph.D. in biomedical sciences because I want to become a professor and principle investigator of a cancer biology lab. My research goal is to target an oncogenic gene and create a therapy for cancer patients. I aim to encourage others in the field of science to conquer their goals no matter how hard it may seem."

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## **Van Truong**

PREP 15



### ***Who are you?***

"My family immigrated to the US in 2000 and I grew up in Florida. I have two younger brothers, but often feel more like a parent than an older sister. In middle school and high school, I spent my free time outside of school working with my parents in our nail salon to help out with our family finances. At the University of Florida, I majored in Anthropology because I have always been fascinated about people, the social and cultural worlds that we live in, and how these constructs and forces often prevent so many of us from reaching our potential. Throughout

college, I worked two jobs on top of a full class schedule but always found time

to travel the country and meet new people. Instead of summer classes or studying abroad, I elected to bike across the country solo one summer. To me, this was my "study within" where I could explore the domestic issues that were nearest to the people in our country. If we extend our backyards beyond the little patch of grass behind our houses and extend our empathy beyond the people we hold closest, there is no limit to the people we can uplift and the problems we can compassionately solve...together. I hope to do this in my ideas, art, and scientific work."

### ***What is one word that describes you and why?***

"I believe the word "mindful" is a good one-word description of me because my mind is always full and I am always watching the world around me. I try to be very aware of what other people need, what biases are present, where unseen patterns may lay, how to better engage others, what details might get overlooked, and how we can adjust our attitudes depending the context in order to maximize the opportunities at hand."

### ***Why do you want a PhD in the biomedical sciences?***

"As a research assistant and scientific illustrator in Dr. Golde's molecular neuroscience lab at UF, I was astounded by the beauty in how our bodies grow and sometimes degenerate. When we lose our memories, decision-making abilities, or motor skills due to malfunctions in our system, how can we bridge gaps in knowledge to change this course? From art, I borrow the ability to imagine and visualize new possibilities and with science, I strive to methodologically execute them. I believe many of us, myself included, seek the PhD path in biomedical sciences because we want to answer questions in an unknown universe, learn alongside our mentors and future students, and collaborate in order to illuminate new ideas that could help more people return to their best health and their best selves. I'm not exactly sure how I'll combine my interests in people, neuroscience, social dynamics, and disease, but I am certain that the PhD path is one that I want to undertake."

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# Hagar Kenawy

PREP 15





### ***Who are you?***

"I am someone who attempts to be as empathetic as possible in her every day life. I love to travel, explore new towns and cities, try new foods, and interact with people who have had diverse upbringings than me. I'm also big on spending time with my family, going on runs, and laughing."

### ***What is one word that describes you and why?***

"Humble Hagar. I think this word describes most of my everyday actions. People tend to assume that I am quiet and reserved right

away because I don't talk about myself enough when they are first introduced to me. Truth is, I hate when people feel like they can't connect with me, and I try to mitigate that as much as possible by listening to them more rather than speaking."

### ***Why do you want a PhD in the biomedical sciences?***

"My dream job is to become a chemical engineering professor at a small liberal arts and engineering school. I don't really see myself leaving the sphere of academia since I love being in the center of knowledge, and a college campus is the prime location where I continually see myself grow. There's also a special sort of joy that I get when I teach others."

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# **Tasmine Clement**

PREP 15



## ***Who are you?***

"Who am I" is a question that has me running in circles. It is a question that I can not answer. The answerable question is "What am I?" I am a truly unique consolidation of my experiences and idiosyncrasies, which involuntarily give birth to a walking enigma. I am an introvert, behind my friendly demeanor is a spirit that cringes at the thought of small talk, networking, and what feel like wasted words. I am an adventurer in the journey of dignity for all (including myself). So, the question of "What am I?" leads to the better question of "What do I

want to be?" As a student, I envision myself as a mortal instrument for healthcare policy and research that tackles disparities in the United States and around the globe."

## ***What is one word that describes you and why?***

"Independent. Being free and in control of my own destiny is more important to me than anything. A stamp of independence has been valuable in navigating the world, but it has also been my downfall."

## ***Why do you want a PhD in the biomedical sciences?***

"A PhD is an investment that will test my character and allow for self-discovery. It is as a checkpoint on the path to working on science policy and assisting vulnerable populations. The best thing would be to obtain a government position developing policy to direct funds and advance research in the area of infectious disease."

## More PREP15 News

These PREP15 ladies got straight to work and engaged in a three day PREP "bootcamp".



Pictured above: Dr. Konate, (get name), Naya Eady, Dr. Smith, Dr. Mackey, Dr. Achenie, and PREP15 (Dominique Munson, Van Truong, Hagar Kenawy, and Tasmine Clement)

## Words from the Wise

**\*Advice from the PREP 14 scholars to the incoming PREP 15 Scholars\***

***What is one piece of advice that you would like to give the incoming PREP 15 scholars?***

"Take advantage of the numerous resources offered to enhance your academic and professional skills. Make sure to network and learn as much as possible!"

**-Mintesinot Kassu**

"Take advantage of all the forums, meetings with faculty, conferences, and resources offered from PREP. It really is a great program to be a part of."

**-Deon Brown**

"Definitely take advantage of every aspect of your PREP year, including networking, academics, and lab work. More importantly, take advantage of every challenge you may face, it is only preparing you for the next step of your science career."

**-Duneia McManus**

"My one piece of advice is to keep an open mind. The PREP year is a great time to step out of your comfort zone, and try something new before starting graduate school."

**-Naya Eady**

### ***What did you take away from the PREP experience?***

"It is important to be able to effectively disseminate the significance of your scientific research to the overall community. This will not only benefit your own research, but will also allow other non-scientists to value the work that you do and encourage them to promote research among all STEM fields."

**-Mintesinot Kassu**

"PREP reiterated a common theme throughout my undergrad years prior: networking is key. It goes without saying that you must work hard but networking can help your chances of getting accepted into a graduate program, earning a summer research experience, and especially securing a future job. Take advantage of the network!"

**-Deon Brown**

"What I took away from my PREP year is that being a good scientist comes with bumps in the road and with that what makes you better is learning from and overcoming those challenges. Trial and error but never making the same mistake twice."

**-Duneia McManus**

"I took away a sense of community from my PREP experience. I have made



some life long friends within my cohort. It's always nice to have a support system when experiments go wrong to help build you up again. I also gained a sense of independence during the PREP year. I am gradually learning to believe in myself more. I think confidence is essential to being successful in graduate school."

**-Naya Eady**

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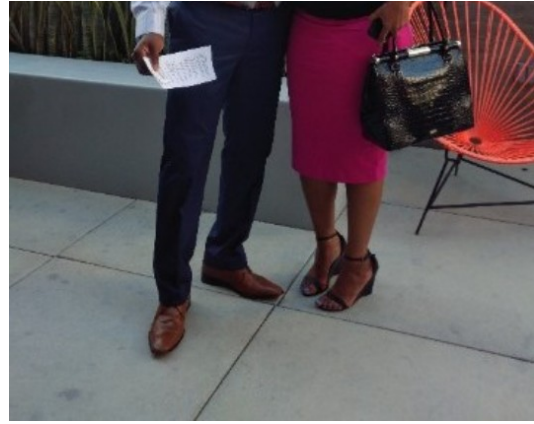
## Current Scholar News

- **Van Truong, PREP15**, recently had a [paper published in the Journal of Neuroscience](#), for which she also did the artwork.
- **Jamelle Simmons, IMSD Predoc**, was a volunteer at VT's inaugural "[Explore VT](#)", a five-day camp for underrepresented and underserved high school students, initiated by a friend of IMSD and PREP, [Menah Pratt-Clarke](#).
- **Ben Okyere, IMSD Predoc, (Theus lab)** has been busy: He even made the front page of a recent meeting report (see below). He told us

"I attended two meetings. The first is called the scientist mentoring and diversity program. The goal of the program is to mentor and receive career development coaching, mostly in industry. I was selected as one of their scholars and thus also received a scholarship of \$2500 to attend BIO Convention.

The BIO Convention is one of the biggest international biotech meetings yearly, where industry people network and collaborate to solve the next big problem or disease. I had the opportunity to meet and network with top brass in many companies including Merck, Amgen, and Johnson and Johnson."





Current IMSD trainee, Ben Okyere (left in both pictures) had a great time at the BIO Convention, exclaiming "Look who made front page of BIO Convention." He also, during a workshop, met up with PREP alum, Dr. Tamishia Vaughan (right in right picture), and the two stopped and posed for a picture.

## Alumni News

Look who showed up to hang out with his "PREP/IMSD" relatives: Snider Desir, PREP9, and his wife, Michelle.





## Where Are They Now?

- **Dr. Jennifer King** (PREP1), sent us an update that she was offered and she has accepted a tenure track position as Assistant Professor at Ursinus College, where she has been a Visiting Assistant Professor. Her current research focuses on the immunological effects of antiretroviral therapy on the central nervous system as well as alternative pharmacological approaches to HIV associated neurocognitive disease.
- **Michaela Jones** (PREP13): "Things are going pretty well. The first year is coming to an end and it has been a great one. Classes were definitely intense/challenging, but I learned so much physiology. I am in the process of my last rotation and next will be to pick my lab home for the next few years. I just passed my written preliminary exam and so now I'm able to breath again! Life seems to be balancing out and I am taking the summer to explore and enjoy Minnesota."

**Postcard from MAPRS @TWD**  
**2017**



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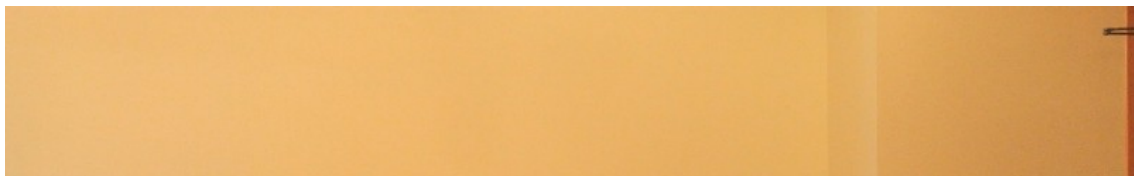
MAPRS @TWD 2017 was held in Baltimore, Maryland. Discussions at TWD included relevance of GRE to graduate admissions and changes coming to IMSD. MAPRS 2018 will be held at Duke University.



Program directors gathered to converse freely and enjoy a nice meal.

## PREP/IMSD/Carver Summer Forum

PREP, IMSD, and Carver trainees and alum and guests gathered on July 7, 2017 at the Inn at Virginia Tech to network and provide updates on their current statuses. Topics included research, family life, cultural differences/revelations, and more.







**Dr. Ketia Shumaker**, associate professor at the University of West Alabama, currently a visiting faculty at VT joined the PREP/IMSD/Carver family at a networking luncheon @theInn. Dr. Shumaker told our scholars that against the advice of her PhD mentor to pursue a postdoc, she applied and accepted a position at a predominantly teaching institution. She has been there for thirteen years and enjoying her tenured status, though with a heavy teaching load. Her research is primarily in the summers through collaborations at Research 1 universities like Virginia Tech and Penn State. She advised our trainees to be patient, work hard, and to continue communicating with each other, because the community spirit that she noticed will be helpful to them in problem solving.

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## Good Luck Dr. Culver!

We said goodbye to our longtime evaluator and friend [Steven Culver](#). Dr. Culver accepted a position at [North Carolina A&T](#). Though he will be missed, we wish him the best.

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## Save the Date

### **VT PREP/IMSD Moving-in 2017 (PREP 15 & IMSD 10)**

- **Orientation week:** August 17-25
- **Responsible Conduct in Research:** August 21, 23: Coordinating instructor: [Ms. Vicky Ratcliffe](#)
- **Mentoring 101 Workshop:** August 22: Presenter: [Mr. John Massey](#)
- **IMSD/PREP/Carver Orientation Day (Inn @VT):** August 17: 11-130  
Keynote speakers: [Dr. Leah Banks](#), PREP Alum (4th Cohort, Jill Sible, Mentor), Postdoc, Cold Spring Harbor Labs, NY and [Dr. Gordon Laurie](#), professor at UVA and director of the NIH funded T32 [Biotechnology training program](#)

### **ABRCMS 2017**

- The 2017 Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students will be held November 1-4 in Phoenix, Arizona.
- **June 30:** Registration & Housing Open  
**Aug. 25:** Student Travel Award Deadline  
**Sept. 8:** Abstract Submission Site Closes  
**Nov. 1-4:** ABRCMS 2017

### **SACNAS 2017**

- The 2017 [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science Conference](#) will be held October 10-14 in Salt Lake

Americans in Science Conference will be held October 19-21 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

- To view the agenda, please click [here](#).
  - To register for the event, please click [here](#).
  - In addition to the conference, SANCAS will also have an optional [pre-conference](#), a [field trip](#), and multiple [Native American programs](#).
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## A Book/Podcast We Think You Will Appreciate

- **New York Times Bestseller**: "[The Best Advice I Ever Got: Lessons From Extraordinary Lives](#)," a novel by Katie Couric, can be described as a collection of inspirational thoughts/ideas by successful people meant to promote self discovery in others.
  - Famous athlete, Mario Balotelli, advised in his piece that one "should stand for something you know is true; ..."life is not a recipe ....or a series of recipes.....remember recipes are just suggestions...."
  - Here is a recipe for delightful quick dinner: <http://eugeniekitchen.com/spaghetti-aglio-e-olio/>
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## **Next Time on VT PRIME**

# INTRODUCING OUR NEW IMSD10

(Our 10th Cohort)

# SCHOLARS !

Find Out More

Please visit us on Facebook  
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*This edition was completed with help from our summer intern and program assistant  
Monica Hackett, Health Science/Premed major, Spelman College.*

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Tech

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