

# VT PRIME

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The Newsletter of VT-PREP & VT-IMSD

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**Welcome to the Winter edition of VT PRIME: The Newsletter of VT-PREP & VT-IMSD. Happy New Year and best wishes for 2018!**

*If you have any feedback or comments about the newsletter, please send us an email at [vtprep@vt.edu](mailto:vtprep@vt.edu).*

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Fall was a busy and productive one for the PREP/IMSD family that included a ["Take note" article about our training programs in the VT News](#) and:

- [Degree Completions](#)
- [Meetings Attended: SACNAS & ABRCMS](#)
- The [visits](#) of scientists and graduate students from industry and academia to participate in our two guest seminar [series](#):
  - "Scientific Journeys including alumni reflections on their Journeys in Biomedical Sciences and Engineering"
  - "What can you do with your PhD?"

We appreciate your continued support of our PREP/IMSD family. Your support and participation are vital to the success of our trainees and alumni as we begin our spring semester. We hope you can visit us at our [Facebook](#) page and websites: <http://www.prep.apsc.vt.edu/>  
<https://imsd.apsc.vt.edu/>

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## Recent Degree Completions

Three "family" members completed their PhDs: Drs. Snider Desir (PREP), Natalia Gonzales (PREP) and Nina Lauharatanahirun (IMSD). We wish them the best in their future endeavors.



**Nina Lauharatanahirun, PhD (IMSD Scholar, 5th Cohort)** successfully defended her dissertation on November 21, 2017. Her thesis was titled: *"Neuroeconomic predictors of adolescent risky decision making"*. Nina worked in the lab of Dr. [Brooks King-Casas](#) in the Department of Psychology. While pursuing her PhD, Nina..... [read more about her accomplishments during her studies, and the advice she gave to our scholars, as well as her plans to pursue a Post Doc at Penn](#) where we already have several

alumni including Davia Blake and Drs. Brittany Taylor (PREP) and Kristen Davis (PREP).



**Natalia Gonzalez, PhD (PREP Alum, 7th Cohort)** successfully defended her thesis on September 6, 2017. Her thesis was titled: "*Integrative genetic analysis of behavioral and metabolic traits in an advanced intercross line of mice*". Natalia attended the University of Chicago and....[Read more about her accomplishments during her studies, her plans and advice to our scholars...](#)



**Snider Desir, PhD (PREP Alum, 9th Cohort)** successfully defended his thesis on December 19, 2017, in the Department of Integrative Biology and Psychology at the University of Minnesota. His dissertation was titled: "*The Role of Tunneling Nanotubes in Mediating Intercellular Communication in Cancer*." Over the course of Dr. Desir's PhD studies at the University of Minnesota....[Read more including the advice he gave to our scholars.](#)

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# VT @SACNAS 2017

In Salt Lake City, the VT SACNAS attendees had a great time including their interaction with IMSD alum Albert Hinman (glasses on the right) now at Stanford. Also in the picture below are [Andrea Rolong](#) (BEAM PhD Student), [Javier Gonzales - Rocha](#) (MAOP PhD Student), Anthony Millican and [Ms. Lindy Cranwell](#) (Director of International Graduate Education), all from the College of Engineering.



# VT @ABRCMS 2017

This was Virginia Tech's 16th year at ABRCMS. It was a very successful conference and we were represented by five different units, and we interacted with several alumni including Drs. [Anjolie Diaz](#) (IMSD, currently Assistant Professor at Ball State), [Marquea King](#) (MAOP), Brandy Huderson (PREP, currently Assistant Professor at University of the District of Columbia), [Alexa Hendricks](#) (Wake Forest University), Ms. [Sarah Sam](#) (Cal Tech).



The PREP/IMSD attendees at the Pre - Conference "PREP Networking Event"



Dr. Brandy Huderson (PREP Alum) Assistant Professor, UDC, providing comments at the VT@ABRCMS Alumni Networking dinner. On her



In the picture above is the "Hokie Aisle" in the 'Exhibitors' Hall'. The banner was provided by ICTAS. The VTCRI/TBMH/Medical School booth is

left are Dr. Marquee King (EPA Toxicologist) and [Dr. Ketia Shumaker](#) (Associate Professor at the University of West Alabama)

on the right showing Jay Read and Christina K. Brogdon. On the left are the PREP/IMSD/MAOP booths showing Hagar and Tasmin as well as Dr. Jody Thompson.

Click [here](#) for additional pictures of VT@ABRCMS 2017.

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# Guest Speakers in our Two Series

This fall saw some great guests as part of our series “Scientific Journeys and Alumni Reflections on their Journeys in Biomedical Science and Engineering” and “What can you do with your PhD?”

- In September, Dr. Maiysha Jones, talked about “Being a toxicology PhD in Industry”
- In October, we welcomed VT alum Vidhya Sivakumara, PhD, Team Lead, Senior Terminology Analyst, IMO
- In November, PREP alum Kevin Hughes, PhD candidate, Yale University (currently a research fellow at NCI, Frederick, MD)

\*Some of these are available on our [Youtube Channel](#)\*

## 1. "Scientific Journeys and Alumni Reflections on their Journeys in Biomedical Science and Engineering "

Our speakers discussed their journey from graduate school to their current careers, as well as any future plans. They also gave current IMSD/PREP/Carver scholars advice on everything from selecting the thesis advisers to how to respond to sights or perceived sights and upright hostile environment.



**Dr. Martha Muñoz (Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech)**

A new faculty in the Biological Sciences Department reflected on her journey from Puerto Rico to the "Bronx" and as a "Nuyorican" at Harvard, and now a tenure-track faculty with us at VT. She encouraged trainees to consider international research and how these opportunities helped her to determine her research interests. She counseled trainees to be mindful of colleagues who are bringing drama to them and seek comfort in community and relatives like she did at a challenging time of her journey.



**Dr. Veronica Segarra (Assistant Professor, High Point University)**

talked with us about how creativity, curiosity, and persistence helped her to complete her PhD and remain focused on her position as a PI at a predominately undergraduate institution (PUI). She advised IMSD/PREP/Carver scholars to "*keep a perspective of the big picture and be your own cheerleader*" in order to recover from failures and continue on their journeys.

[Click here to watch Dr. Segarra's seminar.](#)

**Dr. Chad Dechow** : [Click here to watch Dr. Dechow's reflection on his journey from a Dairy Farm in New York to a tenured Associate Professor in Genetics at Penn State University.](#)



Kevin Hughes (PhD Candidate, Yale University, Research Fellow at the National Cancer Institute)

As shown below Kevin was part of our 11th Cohort. In 2015, Kevin Hughes was among 35 students (out of 16,000 ) who received the National Science Foundation-s (NSF) prestigious graduate research fellowship. Among the many things he stated was that PREP scholars should not be afraid to take chances even if their GPA is a 3.0 and to invest into the Grant writing course they will take as it helped him be immediately competitive for the prestigious NSF fellowship at Yale.

## 2. "What can you do with your PhD":

- Maiysha Jones, PhD: Senior Scientist, Procter & Gamble.

Dr. Jones spoke with our scholars about her graduate school experiences and her

current career at Procter & Gamble. She also shared her reasons for her career choice in industry rather than academia. Dr. Jones assured our scholars that they can be successful and utilize their graduate degrees in job sectors other than academia and encouraged scholars to actively research career options.



The picture above shows Dr. Jones with left to right are: [Diana Novo](#), [Brittany Nichols](#), [Dr. Maiysha Jones](#), [Chanelle Brown](#), [Tasmine Clement](#) and Kaischa Greer

**- [Vidhya Sivakumara](#), PhD, Team Lead, Senior Terminology Analyst, [IMO](#).**

Dr. Sivakumara was a peer mentor to several of our trainees including Drs. Chevon Thorpe and Shernita lee. She counseled trainees to be mindful of “big name PI in choosing your research mentor” and to consider the process of obtaining a PhD as a skill that you can use in industry and elsewhere outside academia including “project management.”



Vidhya, during her seminar at the PREP/IMSD/Carver Biweekly Forum; andcaption text here. Use the block's Settings tab to change the caption position and set other styles.



At a networking dinner with her VT research and administration mentors including Drs. Grayson and Kennelly (<https://www.biochem.vt.edu/people/faculty/kennelly-peter.html>) on either side of Vidhya and Dr. Chevon Thorpe, PREP alum and current Assistant professor, VCOM (<https://www.vcom.edu/staff/chevon-n-thorpe>)

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## News about/From Current Scholars



**Alexis Trent (IMSD, 6th Cohort)** attended the Public Policy Institute hosted by The American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering (AIMBE) on October 30-31, 2017... [Read More...](#)



**The PREP 15 scholars and Drs. Konate and Smith** attended the 2017 [Industry Career Panel](#) discussion at UVA as guests of Dr. Gordon Laurie and the NIGMS [BTP](#). The career panel consisted of several industry professionals and provided a great insight into industry as a "career option" for PhDs in the biomedical sciences.



One of the hallmarks of our training program is the interaction with family members. In December, 2017 we welcomed the father of current **IMSD trainee Alex Nin Velez**, Mr. Nin

Feliciano. Dr. Smith said that his flan is one of the best he has ever had.

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# A Profile of VT PREP's 3rd Cycle

The 2016-17 academic year marked the end of our [3rd cycle](#), which included our 11th - 14th Cohorts. A total of 29 trainees participated in our program (from 427 applications). Twenty six (89.7%) applied to and were admitted into PhD programs (as shown for each Cohort below). Twenty, or 77% continues in the PhD programs into which they matriculated. The success of the 3rd cycle has continued with our transition Cohort (14.5/15) since all four trainees have multiple invitations for interviews.



## **Cohort 10.5/11 (Transition between 2nd and 3rd Cycles)**

**Leah Guthrie** (Albert Einstein College of Medicine), **Sheldon R. Lawrence II** (University of Florida), **Karla Rubi Sanchez** (Delaware State University) in the Dept. of Biological

Sciences, **Cynthia Alicia Traugher** (Case Western University), [Tere M. Williams](#) (Albert Einstein University)



### Cohort 11

**Top:** **Kevin Hughes** (Yale School of Medicine), **Leland Fleming** (University of Alabama), **Jephter Buahen** (University of Delaware), **Brittany Rice** (University of Kentucky) **Seated:** **Angelica Melvin** (Administrative Support at VT ICTAS), **Alexa Hendricks** (Wake Forest School of Medicine), **Simone Campbell** (Emory University), **Tere Williams** (Albert Einstein University).



### Cohort 12

**Top:** **Chanelle Brown** (Virginia Tech), **Richard Sawyer**(Virginia Tech ), **Adewole Oyalowo** (Brown University), **Leland Fleming** (University of Alabama at Birmingham) **Seated:** **Jasmine Reed** (University of Rochester), **Johanel Carceres** (Indiana University), **Alexandria Kelley** (N/A)



### Cohort 13

Top: **Roland Beard** (Syracuse University), **Zakiya Matthews** (University of Bridgeport ), **Herbert Portillo** (Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine), **James Dulaney** (Georgia State University) Seated: **Twymenia Liggins** (N/A), **Cassandra Eng** (Carnegie Mellon), **Michaela Jones** (University of Minnesota), **Shakarr Wiggins** (Weill Cornell Medical College)



### PREP Cohort 14

Left to Right: **Minte Kassu** (Northeastern University), **Naya Eady** (Cornell University), **Duneia McManus** (University of Miami), **Ed Smith** (Professor), **Mariana Ruiz - Velez** (Barry University), **Crystal Kennedy** (Duke University)

# 2017 End of the Year

# Holiday Celebration

## VT IMSD/PREP/Carver

Thank you to everyone that attended and supported our holiday celebration! As usual, this annual event consisted of our many scholars, alumni, mentors, and program support. Our guest speaker was PREP alumni Leland Fleming. Leland spoke about his current research at the University of Alabama, and he gave our scholars excellent advice on thriving in graduate school. This celebration was a great experience for our IMSD/PREP/Carver family and we are already looking forward to next years event!



[Leland Fleming](#) (PREP Cohort 11/12, University of Alabama at Birmingham).



Leland Fleming with the **PREP 15 Scholars** following breakfast at The Inn. .



The MC for our holiday celebration, Dr. Zachary Mackey (coPD, IMSD and Assistant professor, Biochemistry)



CoMCS of the Celebration, [Ed Smith](#) and [Dr. Randy Grayson](#)



[Dr. Saied Mostaghimi](#), Associate Dean, CALS, making welcoming remarks at the Holiday Celebration. Dr. Danny Axom (Graduate Director, Department of Psychology) and [Trevin](#)

Glasgow are shown in the foreground.



The talented Carver fellow, Robert T. Bass, sang solo a Christmas favorite and recited an original poem that you can find here.

Please find additional photos including the vote of thanks given by Carver Fello Kadijah Russell at our Facebook page.

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## Books/Podcasts we recommend for Our Community

Option B, by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant. (2017).

A quote we like is "Because ...resilience is a muscle... ...we can use community to build it...."

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## Internship/Career Opportunities

- **Academic Pathways Postdoctoral Scholars Program at Vanderbilt University**  
<https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/basic-sciences/research-opportunities-academic-pathways-scholars>
- **Intramural NIGMS Postdoctoral Research Associate (PRAT) Program (Fi2)**  
<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-16-130.html>
- **Intramural NIAID Research Opportunities (INRO) program**  
<https://www.epa.gov/research-fellowships/graduate-research-internship-program-grip-opportunities-epa>
- **Women in Science Grant, L'Oreal' USA for Women in Science, Feb. 2nd, 2018.**

**UPCOMING CONFERENCES and MEETINGS (Spring Semester)**

- 2018 MLK Events at Virginia Tech: <https://ccc.vt.edu/awareness/mlk.html>
  - [Dr. Kiarri Kershaw](#), January 16: *Understanding and Addressing the Contributions of Racial Residential Segregation to Cardiovascular Disease Risk* (Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine - 2 Riverside Circle, Roanoke, VA 24016. Room M106 at 5:30p.m.)
  - [2018 Spring VT - PREP/IMSD and Carver Biweekly Forum Schedule](#)
  - [2018 Understanding Interventions Conference](#) **will be held in Baltimore, Maryland on March 2nd - 4th, 2018.**
  - **MAPRS: The 2018 Mid Atlantic PREP and IMSD Research Symposium will be held at Duke University on May 15- 16, 2018.** .
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***In Our Next Quarterly:***

- *A profile of [Dr. Jordan Booker](#) , who will be starting as Assistant Professor at the University of Missouri.*
- *Tales from PREP Scholars about their experiences in Graduate School Interviews.*
- *Profiles of recent undergraduate IMSDs.*

*\*\*This edition of the newsletter was coauthored by \*\**

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