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Fall 2017 Issue

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Welcome to the Fall edition of VT PRIME: The Newsletter of VT-PREP & VT-IMSD. This fall we welcomed our 15th cohort of PREP Scholars (featured in our Summer newsletter) and our 10th cohort of IMSD Scholars (featured below). We appreciate your continued support of our PREP/IMSD family. Your contributions and participation are vital to the success of our trainees and alumni.

Please bear with us as we continue to update our mailing lists.



Drs. Smith and Mackey with the new cohort of IMSD scholars.

From left to right: Dr. Ed Smith, Jefferson Salan, Chris Garcia, Alexandra Nin-Velez, Dr. Habsatou Konaté, Kandace Donaldson, Gabrielle Smith, Katrina Colucci-Chang, and Dr. Zach Mackey

**Meet our 10th Cohort of IMSD
Scholars**



Gabrielle Smith (Virginia) completed her undergraduate degree at University of Virginia's College at Wise in Mathematics. Her research interests include road ecology, wildlife resources, public health and data analytics. She is currently completing rotations within the Genetics, Bioinformatics, and Computational Biology (GBCB) program.

Fun Fact: Gabrielle is both a cello and piano player.



Christopher Garcia (California) received his undergraduate degree in Chemistry from California State University Stanislaus. His research interests include drug synthesis and discovery. He is currently completing rotations in the Department of Chemistry .

Fun Fact: Christopher was once a sponsored snowboarder.



Kandace Donaldson (New Mexico/ Arizona) completed her undergraduate degree in Biomedical Engineering at Arizona State University. Her research interests include biomechanics and tissue mechanics. She is now completing rotations in Biomedical Engineering within the School for Biomedical Engineering and Sciences (SBES).

Fun Fact: This past summer, Kandace visited Edinburgh, Scotland.



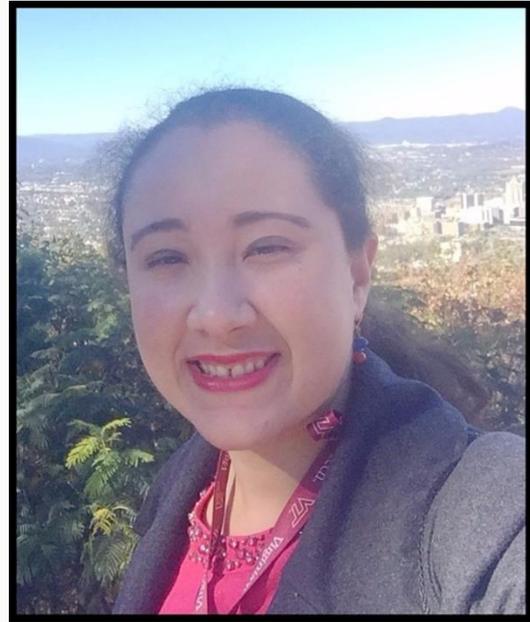
Jefferson Salan (Florida) completed his undergraduate degree at Florida International University in Psychology. His research interests include episodic memory and neural correlates. He is currently completing rotations within the Department of Psychology.

Fun Fact: Jefferson lived in Guatemala for 3 months at the age of 16.



Alexandra Nin-Velez (Puerto Rico) completed her undergraduate degree in Animal Sciences, with a minor in Biological Sciences, from Purdue University. She is interested in studying the heritability of microbiomes across animal species. She is currently completing rotations.

Fun Fact: Alexandra is a soccer player.



Katrina Colucci-Chang (Puerto Rico/ Falls Church) completed her undergraduate degree in Bioengineering at George Mason University. Her research interests include cardiovascular and human factors. She is now completing rotations in Biomedical Sciences within the School of Biomedical Engineering and Sciences (SBES).

Fun Fact: Katrina was once a brownie level Girl Scout.

PREP/ IMSD/ Carver 2017 Orientation

As part of our orientation activities we hosted several speakers, participated in a mentoring workshop, and completed the Responsible Conduct in Research Program.



Dr. Leah Banks (PREP Cohort 4 - Dr. Jill Sible, current PostDoc at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory), spoke to our students about her scientific journey to date.

The take home message from Dr. Leah Banks' keynote presentation during the orientation was that "to be successful on this journey, one must be passionate about what they want to do and to do what makes them happy." Dr. Banks also stressed the "importance of having a healthy mentor-mentee relationship. Joining a lab where one feels accepted and respected and your research ideas are appreciated is important. In addition to having a supportive mentor, it's also imperative to have strong support groups (friends/colleagues/family members) that will hold you accountable and encourage you in those challenging moments. She

also emphasized the importance of networking.” “Speaking with the right person can open many doors later down the road,” she went on.



Dr. Gordon Laurie (University of Virginia, Professor and Director of the Biotechnology Training Program), gave a presentation to our scholars entitled "Preparing the Next Generation of Biomedical Scientists: Novel Approaches to Diversity in Grad School." Dr. Laurie reported that 33% of the BTP trainees are from underrepresented populations. The BTP program includes innovative activities such as a 2 to 3 month externship in industrial science for graduate students.

2017 IMSD Mentoring Workshop

"Mentoring is something you do with people, not to or for them."
- Dr. Jerry Wilbur



Dr. M. Antonio Silas and Dr. Shernita Lee (Prep Alum) gave a talk entitled "The Role of Mentorship in My Educational Journey," for the students who attended the workshop.

The mentoring workshop was organized by [John Massey](#). The speakers included John Massey (Mentoring 101), Alicia Cohen (Identity and Assumptions), Nikeshia Arthur (Equity and Accessibility), Dr. Shernita Lee (Preparation for Your Future), and Dr. Antonio Silas (The Role of Mentorship in My Educational Journey).

In the mentoring workshop, Dr. Lee told participants in her reflection about her experience as a graduate student and postdoc at predominately White Institutions. She advised trainees to "make long- and short-term plans and try to stick to them," "network, network, network" and "do not be afraid to make mistakes but learn from them." In his reflection, Dr. Silas advised that "you have a conversation early in grad school with your advisor about expectations," and to "make your advisor become part of your growth."

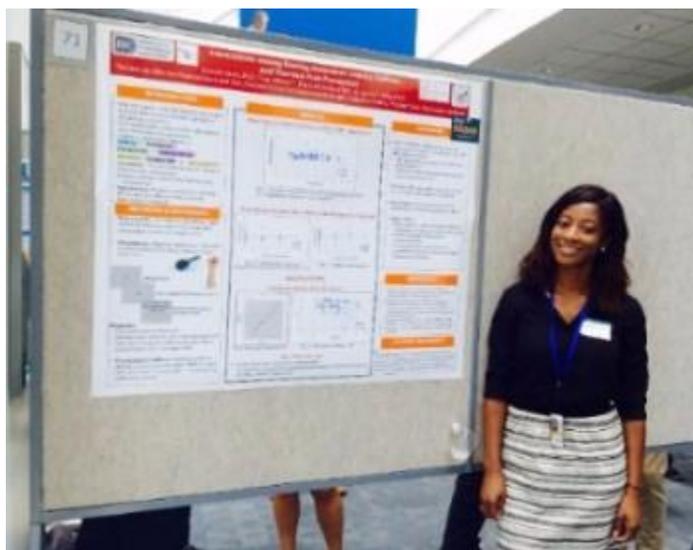
Current Scholar News

A lot has happened since our last newsletter including conferences, the beginning of the fall semester and other life-changing events . . .

Alexis Trent (IMSD Cohort 6) passed her preliminary exam on August 29th, and is now an official PhD candidate in Materials Science Engineering.



Ariel Leon (IMSD Cohort 7) welcomed her baby girl, Marion Leon Wepking, on July 27th, 2017. She was born 9 lbs and 5 oz, and is healthy and doing well. Congratulations!



Shara Grant (IMSD Cohort 6) conducted research as part of the Graduate Summer Opportunity to Advance Research (GSOAR) program at the NIH in Bethesda, MD. Visit the [IMSD website](#) to read more about Shara's experience.

Our PREP Scholars, featured in our summer newsletter, have also been very busy:



Dominique Munson (PREP Cohort 15) attended UNC preview weekend. She will also attend an upcoming STEM Research Symposium at Emory University.

Van Trong (PREP Cohort 15) has been selected to attend the 6th Annual Outreach Conference for Mathematical Modeling and Public Health hosted by the Center for Communicable Disease Dynamics at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.





Tasmine Clement (PREP Cohort 15) attended the 2017 ICB Symposium: Being Precise in Precision-Medicine Measuring Exposure in Diverse Populations at Case Western Reserve University. While at the conference, Tasmine networked with PREP alum.

Left to Right: Tasmine (PREP Cohort 15), C. Alicia Traugher (PREP Cohort 10).



Hagar Kenawy (PREP Cohort 15) attended a conference for the Science Mentoring & Diversity Program organized by the International Center for Professional Development (ICPD). While at the conference, Hagar networked with VT and IMSD alumni.

Left to right: Adwoa Sarpong-Dwomoh (IMSD Undergrad Alum, PhD Candidate in Biomedical Engineering at Virginia), Vipul Davé (Enterprise Resin Director and Fellow at Johnson & Johnson, Medical Device Global Supply Chain at Johnson & Johnson), Hagar Kenawy (PREP Cohort 15, Lafayette College).

Scholar Spotlight



Benjamin Okyere (IMSD Cohort 7), earned the prestigious Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award, a predoctoral fellowship grant, from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The ninth student in Virginia Tech history to receive this award, Ben's \$116,000 grant will advance his research in the laboratory of Dr. Michelle Theus, who is also his IMSD faculty mentor. His research aims to "find therapeutic targets aimed at ameliorating the neurological deficits after a stroke." Identifying such targets could lead to drastic changes in the way that patients who experience ischemic strokes are treated acutely, with the hope of extending life expectancy and reducing disease burden as it is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States.

To learn more about Ben's research, check out the press release from VT News below:

<https://vtnews.vt.edu/articles/2017/08/vetmed-okyere.html>

**Upcoming Events of Interest to
IMSD/PREP & Carver Community:**

<https://imsd.apsc.vt.edu/Events.html>

Alumni News

Dr. Mariam Konaté (PREP Cohort 4, Columbia University, currently a research scientist at NIH), recently returned from her wedding in Lutry, Switzerland.

She also contributed to two recently published manuscripts:

[Lui, J.; et al. Biochem. Pharmacol. 2017, 143, 25–38.](#)

[Antony, S.; et al. Mol Carcinog. 2017, 1–20.](#)



Alexa Hendricks (PREP Cohort 11) received the F99/K00 Blueprint Diversity Specialized Predoctoral to Postdoctoral Advancement in Neuroscience Award from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

[Armand Meza](#) (IMSD undergraduate alum) is now a PhD Candidate in [Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) and has coauthored a

recently published manuscript based on his contributions at VT:

Michelle H. Theus, Thomas Brickler, Armand L. Meza, Sheryl Coutermarsh-Ott, Amanda Hazy, Denis Gris, and Irving C. Allen. Loss of NLRX1 exacerbates neural tissue damage and NF- κ B Signaling following brain injury. *Journal of Immunology*. (In Press).

Dr. Muna Suliman ([PREP Cohort 4](#)), received her PhD at VCU and sent us a short update in which she revealed her first, first-author publication.

[Directed evolution provides insight into conformational substrate sampling by SrtA](#)

Muna Suliman, Vishaka Santosh, Tom C. M. Seegar, Annamarie C. Dalton, Kathryn M. Schultz, Candice S. Klug, William A. Barton

Research Article | published 31 Aug 2017 PLOS ONE

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0184271>

Books/Podcasts We Recommend for Our Community

“**The Four Agreements**” [By Don Miguel Ruiz](#), which advises that you:

- Be impeccable with your word
- Don't take anything personally
- Don't make assumptions
- Always do your best

Recent diversity news at VT and elsewhere of interest to our community:

[Hires mark new growth for InclusiveVT](#): a news story about the progress being

made at VT in faculty diversity in different disciplines including STEM;

And this excerpt from the Wall Street Journal:

[Colleges Move to Close Gender Gap in Science](#)

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](#)

****This edition of the newsletter was coauthored by Channele Brown, Dr. Ed Smith, and Laura Dahora****

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