

THE DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR GENETICS

News Letter #15 (April 1, 2020 – December 1, 2021)

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic started around March 2020. As the awareness and concern rose, various measures were recommended or mandated by the University to limit social interactions. For almost a year, whenever possible, people worked remotely, including our department personnel. All meetings and presentations were virtual. As we transition back to campus, continue to move through the pandemic, and create a “new normal”.....here are some of the highlights of past year and a half.....

Faculty News

Funding Update:

- ❖ New NIH grants:
 - Dr. Kuchay: R35 MIRA (Maximizing Investigators' Research Award) for Early Stage Investigators - R35GM137452-01 for 5 years
 - Dr. Merrill: 1 R01 GM139894-01 for 4 years
 - Dr. Segev: R35 MIRA (Maximizing Investigators' Research Award) - 1R35GM141479-01 for 5 years
 - Dr. Hay: 1R01CA258299-01A1 for 5 years
- ❖ Dr. Chronis received an Impetus Foundation grant for 2 years

Other News:

- ❖ Drs. Vadim Gaponenko, Toru Nakamura and Miljan Simonovic were promoted to full Professors, starting August 2020.
- ❖ After many years of dedicated service, Dr. Kaplan retired in June 2020 and Dr. Tyner was appointed Interim Head.
- ❖ After more than 30 years of committed service, Mr. Abdul Khan retired in June 2021 and Rekha Pandya was hired in his position.
- ❖ Dr. Karen Colley was appointed the Interim University Librarian and Dean of Libraries in August 2020. She was also appointed Acting Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs in May 2021. She continues to serve as Dean of the Graduate College.
- ❖ Congratulations to Dr. Ackerman on receiving the 2021 Departmental Faculty of the Year Award for the University of Illinois College of Medicine, Chicago Campus. This honor is awarded based on a demonstrated record of excellence in teaching, research, service, or patient care.



- ❖ Congratulations to Dr. Kuchay on receiving the 2021 Departmental Rising Star Award for the University of Illinois College of Medicine, Chicago Campus. Nominees for the Departmental Rising Star Award are selected based on their strong potential to be future leaders in their chosen field.



- ❖ Dr. Benevolenskaya was appointed Faculty Director of the Genomics Shared Resource for the UI Cancer Center, as well as RRC. She will provide high quality service for obtaining multidimensional genomic data (e.g. ChIP-seq for transcription factors; DNA methylation arrays; RNA-seq, Drop-seq and 10xGenomics for gene expression). She was also appointed Leader for the Lung Cancer Working Group (LCWG) in the UI Cancer Center.
- ❖ Dr. Simonovic resigned from the department in November 2021 since he accepted position of Program Director at NIGMS.
- ❖ Dr. Merrill is taking a partial leave of absence for 1 year to help establish a company, Cellgorithmics Inc., that he started with former BMG graduates, including Ryan Clarke, CEO of the company. Recent BMG Ph.D. recipient Anu Puppala has accepted a position of Scientist in the company.

- ❖ Dr. Segev organized and chaired Special Interest Group for Mechanisms and Regulation of Membrane Trafficking at the ASCB/EMBO 2020 Annual Conference held virtually in December 2020.
- ❖ Dr. Kuchay was an invited featured speaker for 2021 FASEB Summer Research Conference on Protein Lipidation: Enzymology, Signaling and Therapeutics. Talk title: Lipids and lipid-bound chaperone control compartmental protein targeting via ubiquitin proteasome system (June 30th-July 1st, 2021).
- ❖ A collaborative study led by Masuko Ihnishi-Fukai and Tohru Fukai, formerly Faculty at UIC COM, now at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University, with scientists from Wake Forest along with Drs. Kaplan, Merrill and Regan has been accepted for publication in Nature Cell Biology. The work describes how CTR1, the human copper transporter, reacts as a previously unrecognized redox sensor in endothelial cells, when VEGF acts to stimulate developmental and reparative angiogenesis. The study describes an important mechanism for ROS sensing through CTR1 to drive neovascularization. The title of the article is "Cysteine Oxidation of Copper transporter SLC31A1/CTR1, drives VEGFR2 signaling and Angiogenesis".
- ❖ Costa Symposium for 2020 and 2021 were presented virtually:
 - The 14th Annual Costa Symposium was presented by Ralph J. DeBerardinis, M.D., Ph.D. from UT Southwestern Medical Center on 10/28/2020.
 - The 15th Annual Costa Symposium was presented by Sankar Ghosh, Ph.D. from Columbia University, New York on 11/10/2021.

Faculty in the news:

- ❖ Dr. Merrill (2/16/21)
[UIC researchers invent new gene-editing tool | UIC Today](#)

General News

- ❖ Benevolenskaya lab placed second in 2020 UIC Freezer Challenge! They won second place out of all UIC participating labs, saving an average of 46 kilowatt hours per day by taking energy-saving actions like defrosting their freezer, cleaning out old samples, sharing freezer space with a colleague, and temperature tuning.
- ❖ Paula Zappia (Research Assistant Professor - Frolov lab) won first place award for best poster at the Midwest Drosophila Conference (2021) which was held virtually on Oct. 23-24, 2021.

New Employees

We welcome the following new employees:

- ❖ Ms. Alyssa Garcia (Research Specialist - Lavie Lab)
- ❖ Dr. Sameer Bhat (Postdoctoral Research Associate - Kuchay Lab)
- ❖ Mr. Kenneth Joves (Vst Research Specialist - Chronis Lab)
- ❖ Dr. Jing Li (Vst Research Assistant Professor - Hay Lab)
- ❖ Dr. Nikhil Chauhan (Vst Research Assistant Professor - Ackerman Lab)
- ❖ Ms. Nicole Young (Manager of Research Operations)

Placement Students:

2020

- ❖ Isabel Liseth, University of Bath, UK (Frolov lab)
- ❖ Sara Garcia, University of Lisbon, Portugal (Hay Lab)

2021

- ❖ Anton Westacott, University of Bath, UK (Frolov Lab)
- ❖ Paloma Serena Tarodo, University of Bath, UK (Benevolenskaya Lab)

BMG Retreat

The 13th BMG Department Retreat was held via Zoom on Nov 13, 2020. A total of 9 presenters including 2 students, 1 research specialist, 3 research assistant professors, and 3 faculty members gave exciting talks. It was our first virtual retreat, but all participants had a great time! We hope to get back to in-person retreat in 2022!

We thank the retreat organizer Dr. Sojin Shikano!

Student News

New Students:

We welcome the following new GEMS students:

- Adhikari, Ritika - Shafi lab
- Leung, Hin Wa (Eva) - Chronis lab
- Ruprecht, Adam (MD/PhD student) – Segev lab

Awards:

- ❖ Alex Rader (Frolov lab) won "Best Poster" at the Gary Kruh Cancer Research Symposium in April 2021. She also gave a talk at the Annual Drosophila Research Conference in March 2021.

Thesis Defense:

- ❖ Congratulations to the following students who successfully completed their Thesis Defense:

Name	Lab	Thesis Defense	Current position
Majd Ariss	Frolov	May 4, 2020	Scientist, Cell Signaling Technology, Saugus, MA
Adam Didier	Nakamura	May 7, 2020	Microbiome Scientist III, Millipore-Sigma, Chesterfield, MO
Anu Puppala	Simonovic	April 30, 2021	Scientist, Cellgorithmics, Inc., Chicago, IL
Alex Terry	Hay	May 17, 2021	3rd year Medical Student, Stony Brook, NY



Congratulations to Hannah Pennington (Merrill Lab) who got married to Alex Kluger on November 13, 2021!



Just for laughs.....

