As a grad-student in Dr. Katerina Akassoglou’s lab, Melissa Passino recently had the opportunity to attend the EASL conference in Vienna, Austria where she was selected to present a talk in a General Session of the conference. As it turned out the talk was in a room seating thousands, and images of the speaker as well as the slides were projected on a huge screen.

**Q:** How did you react to the unexpected attention to your presentation?

**A:** I was very surprised and very nervous. I had no idea that there would not be concurrent sessions and all the attention would be on me. Also it was not my usual audience—liver specialist rather than neuroscientists.

**Q:** How did you feel once you had gotten through it?

**A:** Dazed, but relieved and proud.

**Q:** What was the research presentation about?

**A:** My thesis research involves looking at molecular mediators of liver injury and regeneration. More specifically, I spoke about my studies examining the role of the p75 neurotrophin receptor (p75NTR) in liver injury and regeneration. We have discovered that this receptor is involved in hepatic stellate cell differentiation.

**Q:** How did the conference affect your investigations?

**A:** It strengthened my understanding of the importance of my research from a clinical perspective.

**Q:** Where do you see the future of liver research headed?

**A:** I hope my research leads to a new understanding of hepatic stellate cells and their role in liver injury and regeneration; perhaps their role as a pharmacological target in liver disease will be rethought.

**Q:** Since you began your studies at UCSD, how have your scientific interests evolved?

**A:** I came to the program with a strong background and interest in biochemistry, but my focus has broadened to include cell biology and signaling mediators and their relevance to disease.

---

**Spotlight on Melissa Passino: Larger than life...**

The **Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)** Program sponsored by ASPET just concluded its eleventh year with Dr. Katerina Akassoglou as its program director. This summer’s group was the best ever with nine students coming from Cal Poly, University of Pittsburgh, San Jose University, Cornell University, Cal State University Northridge, College of Wooster, Harvard University, UC Berkeley, and UC San Diego. Students worked in the laboratories of Professors Vivian Hook, Joan Heller Brown, Morton Prinz, Tony Yaksh, Sylvia Evans, Paul Insel, Katerina Akassoglou, and Palmer Taylor. We hope to have success in recruiting many of them into the the BMS graduate program this year.

**NIGMS Awards for Training in Integrative and Organ Systems Pharmacology**

The National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) funds four institutional short course workshops to support training in integrative and organ systems pharmacology. These programs recognize the importance of studies using intact organ system and in vivo models in the conduct of research. As a result of a proposal written by Dr. Larry Brunton, UCSD was one of the four sites to receive this award. This is the second year that the intensive three-week summer course in Systems Pharmacology and Translational Biology has been held at UCSD, attracting students from industry and various academic institutions, nationwide. The course is open to anyone who is interested for a nominal fee and on a first-come-first-served basis.

**Pharmacology Seminar Course**

Last year the Pharmacology Track Seminar Course was organized by Dr. Katerina Akassoglou and was in the area of “Molecular and Cellular Neurobiology as a Foundation for Drug Development”. Drs. Marc Tessier-Lavigne, Anthony Auerbach and Moses Chao were amongst last year’s invited speakers. The course will be offered again this year with a focus on Inflammation with Dr. Michael Karin and Dr. Tony Yaksh as Organizers. Dr. Ruslan Medzhitov, Yale University and Dr. Dan Littman, Skirball Institute of Biomolecular Medicine, NYU School of Medicine will be part of this year’s course along with an additional 10 speakers.

For further information on the aforementioned programs contact Pat Luetmer at 858-822-4107 or email: pluetmer@ucsd.edu
Jack Dixon Named Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer of HHMI

Mark your calendars, as of February 01, 2007, UCSD’s very own Jack Dixon will be taking over the position of Vice-President and CSO for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Since 2003, Dr. Dixon has served as our Dean for Scientific Affairs working in conjunction with HHMI, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Medicine. Asked why he accepted the position as Vice-President and CSO of HHMI, he had this to say:

“I have done discovery research for better than 30 years. The opportunity to work for an organization that can affect science and science education around the world is really appealing.”

Dr. Dixon’s latest foray into scientific discovery will have him spearheading HHMI’s flagship investigator program. He will continue his research in protein tyrosine phosphates and phosphorylation, maintaining his lab at UCSD’s Department of Pharmacology.

“I think you can be a better scientific leader if your feet are on the ground and you are dealing with the same things as the investigators.”

National Academy of Sciences

Michael Karin, Ph.D., has been selected for membership in the National Academy of Sciences in recognition of distinguished and continuing achievements in science. Dr. Karin is a leading world authority on signal transduction pathways that regulate gene expression in response to extra cellular stimuli. His key achievements include definitions of elements that mediate gene induction by hormones, cytokines and stress, identification and characterization of the transcription factors that recognize these elements and the protein kinase cascades that regulate their activities.

FACULTY HONORS AND AWARDS

Katerina Akassoglou  Young Investigator Award, 2006 International Fibrinogen Research Soc.
Laurence Brunton  UCSD Equal Opportunity/ Affirmative Action and Diversity Award
Ronald Evans  Albert Lasker Basic Medical Research Award
Nora Laiken  Kaiser Award for Excellence in Teaching
J. Andrew McCammon  Elected to American Academy of Arts and Sciences
Susan Taylor  2007 ASBMB William C. Rose Award
Tony Yaksh  Jacob Javitz Award for renewal of NS13541

Roger Tsien kicked butt in 2005-06 with his sights set on 2007 Scientific Domination!

2005: Perl Prize in Neuroscience; J. Allyn Taylor Intl. Prize in Medicine; Distinguished Scientist Award, San Diego Chapter of American Chemical Society
2006: ABRF Award, Association of Biomolecular Resource Facilities; Lewis S. Rosenstiel Award for Distinguished Work in the Basic Medical Sciences; Elected to Royal Society of Lon-

PHARMACOLOGY EVENTS

Annual Retreat
Pharmacology is hosting its annual retreat for the incoming Biomedical Sciences (BMS) graduate students to introduce them to our faculty and their research. Each lab will have a poster presentation showcasing the highlights of research in their labs. This year’s retreat will be on Tuesday, September 19th in the Leichtag Lobby and will include a talk by an alumnus of the program Dr. Steve Sine of the Mayo Clinic, College of Medicine. Steve received his Ph.D. in 1980 under Dr. Palmer Taylor’s mentorship.

Seminar Series
We will continue our Seminar Series this fall on Tuesdays at noon. We have already scheduled Dr. Timothy Hla from the University of Connecticut Health Center on October 10th, Dr. David Sinclair from Harvard Medical School on November 7th, Dr. Ruslan Medzhitov from Yale University on January 9th, Dr. Dan Littman from Skirball Institute of Biomolecular Medicine, NYU School of Medicine on January 30th, and Dr. Paolo Sassone-Corsi from the University of California, Irvine on April 10, 2007.
**NEW FACES**

**JING YANG, PH.D.** Assistant Professor of Pharmacology and Pediatrics joined the department in the Spring of 2006. She received her doctorate degree in Molecular Cancer Biology from Duke University in 1999, for studies dissecting the molecular machinery controlling cell entry into mitosis. She subsequently joined Dr. Robert Weinberg’s laboratory to pursue postdoctoral training at MIT’s Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research. During her postdoctoral work she developed a unique mouse mammary tumor model to identify key regulators of tumor metastasis. She discovered that Twist, a transcription factor known to serve as a master regulator of early embryonic morphogenesis, plays an essential role in tumor metastasis. She further demonstrated that Twist contributes to tumor invasion and metastasis by activating a latent developmental program termed an epithelial-mesenchymal transition (EMT). Dr. Yang also found that high levels of Twist expression are correlated with invasive lobular breast carcinoma, a highly infiltrating tumor type in human. This work was described in Dr. Yang’s 2004 article in Cell entitled, “Twist, a Master Regulator of Morphogenesis, Plays an Essential Role in Tumor Metastasis.” These impressive findings shed new light into cancer metastasis with Twist being arguably the first gene regulator so definitively tied to human cancer metastasis.

Dr. Yang’s current research efforts are directed towards delineating the signaling pathways that connect Twist, EMT, and tumor metastasis and discovering additional novel mechanisms underlying these processes. Her laboratory, located on the fourth floor of the Biomedical Sciences Building, uses cellular and molecular biological approaches, coupled with functional genomics and mouse genetics, to achieve her long term goal of elucidating key molecular mechanisms controlling cell invasion and metastasis.

**PIETER DORRESTEIN, PH.D.** As a result of last year’s recruitment effort, Dr. Pieter Dorrestein joined our ranks as Assistant Professor of Pharmacy, Chemistry & Biochemistry and Pharmacology (pending) on September 1, 2006. He earned his Ph.D. in Chemistry from Cornell University in 2004 while working with Professor Tadgh Begley on the mechanism of biosynthesis of the thiazole-phosphate moiety of thiamin (vitamin B1). He then carried his postdoctoral training under the mentorship of Drs. Neil Kelleher (U of Illinois) and Christopher Walsh (Harvard) focusing in on a wide range of areas including development of new methods for post-translational modification analysis of complex mixtures by “top-down” FTICR-MS, to determination of the biosynthetic mechanisms for several polyketide synthase reactions. Pieter’s long-term goal is to use large-molecule mass spectrometry to solve problems in the biosynthesis of novel post-translational modifications and secondary metabolites. He brings unique skills and experience in mass spectrometry, particularly the high mass resolution of Fourier transform ion cyclotron mass spectrometry (FTIC-MS) for measuring post-translational modifications of proteins as well as unique natural products produced by marine and terrestrial eukaryotic and prokaryotic genomes.

Pieter’s laboratory will be located on the fourth floor of the Biomedical Sciences Building.

---

**DEPARTURES**

**Brown Lab:** Dr. Tammy Seasholtz joined Science Media, but will continue as an Assistant Adjunct Professor at UCSD. Julie Radeff Huang has relocated to the East Coast.

**Insol Lab:** Joan Kanter (SRA IV) transferred to Dr. Tsien’s group and is now their new lab manager. Dr. Evan Riddle (postdoc) took a position in the Pharmacology Department at the University of Utah as an Assistant Research Pharmacologist.

**McCammon Lab:** Dr. Joanna Trylska (postdoc) started a faculty position at the University of Warsaw (Poland) in January 2005. John Morgan completed his PhD and will be returning to the UCSD School of Medicine to complete his MD. Jessica Swanson completed her PhD and has started her postdoctoral work with Professor Greg Voth at the University of Utah.

**Newton Lab:** Tianyan Gao (post-doc) is beginning a faculty position in the dept. of Pharmacology at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston.

**Tsien Lab:** Amy Palmer (postdoc) moved to the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Lei Wang (postdoc) is now at the Salk Institute as part of their chemical Biology and Proteomics group. Peter Wang went to the new Bioengineering Department at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Diana Platero,** our Education and Programs Manager, accepted a position in the UCSD Music Department where she can work directly with student affairs.

**Shanley Miller,** our Fiscal Manager, was recruited to the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department.

We wish everyone the best of luck in their future endeavors!

**Meet Wei Deng - Our New Department Business Officer**

After an extensive search, Wei joined Pharmacology in February 2006 to serve as our new Business Officer. With 12 years of UC administrative experience, most recently as Administrative Director for the UCSD fMRI Center, Wei is already using her expertise in program and financial management to enhance our department’s administration and achieve organizational goals. Wei’s office is located on the second floor of the BSB (email at wedeng@ucsd.edu or telephone 858-534-2683).

---

**On the Move**

**Palmer Taylor’s Lab** is moving to the new SSPPS Building in mid-September.

**Tracey Handel** and **Vivian Hook’s** labs have also relocated to SSPPS.

**Joseph Adam**’s lab is now located on the 4th floor of the BSB.

**David Williams’ lab** is now located in CMM East.
Please be sure to visit the department website (http://pharmacology.ucsd.edu) often to get the latest programmatic information. Our site is updated regularly with feature articles, current news, seminars and events. If you would like to share or contribute information, please send your thoughts and comments to pharmeducation@ucsd.edu.

We hope you enjoy and find this newsletter useful in providing relevant articles and resources on a variety of topics. Our newsletter is published bi-annually. If you wish to contribute articles for consideration, please send your information to pharmhr@ucsd.edu. The Editor reserves the right to modify articles for size and substance. We make every effort to ensure accuracy and can not be held liable for errors.

We would like to acknowledge the staff who contributed their time and expertise to the Fall 2006 Pharmacology Newsletter. Thank you!!