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10 Awarded IGERT Traineeship

Ten graduate students receive prestigious IGERT Award; five are CEAS students.

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Photos by: Katie Hageman



PI, Dr. David Butler, Trainee, Andrew Breidenbach

The Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) Award is one of the most prestigious available to graduate students. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) since 1998, each IGERT is awarded to a university in a particular research focus area. IGERTs educate U.S. and naturalized Ph.D. scientists and engineers based on disciplinary knowledge and interdisciplinary training. IGERT award winners receive an annual \$30,000 stipend to support their work. UC is privileged to have one of these IGERTs.

The grant is currently led by Dr. David Butler, Head of the Biomedical Engineering Program in the College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS). Co-PIs include Drs. Ronald Millard and Steven Hoath from the College of Medicine and Drs. Joel Fried and Dionysios Dionysiou from CEAS. Dr. Fried is an emeritus faculty member at UC and currently the Wright Brothers Institute Chair of Nanomaterials at the University of Dayton.

Trainees were accepted into the program this year from pharmacy, medicine and engineering. However, this program is an ideal example of collaboration. IGERT students interact as if there is no disciplinary divide to achieve success.

In autumn 2010, interested students were required to submit a proposal for research to be conducted in the area of Bioapplications of Membrane Science and Technology. Based on submissions, the proposals were ranked by three committees of professors in the areas of biomedical sciences, biomedical engineering, and engineering (non-medical).

Congratulations to this year's IGERT winners. They include Andrew Breidenbach (CEAS), Jon Burkhardt (CEAS), Terri La Count (Pharmacy), Kayleigh MacMaster (COM), Andrew Paluch (COM), Christine Pellino (COM), William Platten (CEAS), Kyle Rich (CEAS), Shada Salem (CEAS), and Guarav Tolia (Pharmacy).

UC was awarded its IGERT in biomembrane research in 2003 and has been quite successful. Nineteen students have successfully completed the selective program, and the incoming class is ready to make its mark.

Kirsten Kinneberg, a fifth year PhD student in the Department of Biomedical Engineering, is one of our IGERT success stories and an advocate for the program. "The IGERT program has presented opportunities for collaboration that I never would have imagined. By joining people together with varied backgrounds, we have learned a lot about each others' disciplines and how these could apply to our own research. In graduate school, we are all so focused on our research projects that it is sometimes hard to think outside of our own field. I'm grateful that the IGERT program has exposed me to diverse research topics and I think my own projects have benefited from this. I took courses I would not have taken otherwise, and had opportunities to travel and network. In fact, the IGERT program functions as an introductory course in interdisciplinary networking, communications and collaborations, skills that are important for any career," Kinneberg said. Kinneberg is assisting the IGERT PI this year as part of her Preparing Future Faculty program at UC.



Trainee, Kayleigh MacMaster

Students who receive this award have three unique opportunities to participate. 1. *They normally take part in an IGERT exchange program in Washington, D.C.* This year, the 2011 IGERT Trainee Competition will be held online in May. UC will be represented by one trainee poster at the event. Twenty-four trainees will be selected as finalists across the US and will be invited to present their posters in the atrium of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Washington D.C. on Wednesday, May 25, 2011. A second round of judging will then take place at NSF and the top 10 finalists will receive a \$3000 travel supplement. The other finalists will receive a \$1000 travel supplement.

2. *IGERT trainees are also funded to speak at national research conferences.* IGERT funds cover the cost of each trainee's travel expenses to present his/her biomembrane research at one national meeting of scientists. Funds are provided if the trainee is invited to give a podium or poster presentation.

3. *Trainees can also apply for summer fellowships to study internationally in a laboratory performing work that relates to their research.* Up to three of our trainees will be selected for this award. Those who participate are expected to learn new techniques and bring these new ideas and methods back to the US, UC, and advisor's laboratory when they finish.

Research projects that students conduct while in the IGERT program often continue into their professional careers. For example, the research that Kinneberg is currently completing is a continuation of her IGERT experience. Kinneberg hopes that her biomembrane research in orthopaedic sports medicine will “promote tendon integration into bone and that it can be used to facilitate rotator cuff repair after shoulder injury.”



Trainee, Gaurav Tolia engaging with other trainees

The University of Cincinnati, in conjunction with the IGERT program, is also expected to host a local conference on biomembrane research. “We anticipate that this will be a one-day event featuring poster presentations by IGERT trainees from UC as well as students from other regional universities involved in biomembrane research” says program coordinator Dr. Anne Vonderheide. UC is looking to invite other IGERT program schools from Ohio and Kentucky. The emphasis for the conference is exclusively focused on biomembranes and will include poster sessions, keynote speakers, and a chance for all students to interact and talk about their research.

Professor Dionysiou, one of the current co-PIs, emphasizes that, “... this program provides opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning experiences as well as for national and international collaborations. Specifically, he notes the IGERT program provides opportunities to conduct collaborative research in other countries. “This is a win-win situation for all IGERT trainees, advisors and PI and co-PIs. We are fortunate to interact with such bright students,” says Professor Butler, the IGERT PI.

Learn more about IGERT by [clicking here](#).

Learn about the Colleges involved:

[College of Engineering and Applied Science](#)

[College of Medicine](#)

[College of Pharmacy](#)



IGERT Trainees from left to right: Kyle Rich, Kayleigh MacMaster, Christine Pellino, Jonathan Burkhardt, Terri La Count, Gaurav Tolia, Shada Salem, Andrew Paluch, William Platten, Andrew Breidenbach

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