UF-HHMI Science for Life Graduate Student Award
Bumsoo Ahn

Bumsoo Ahn is a Ph.D. candidate in the laboratory of Dr. Leo Ferreira in the department of Applied Physiology and Kinesiology. His doctoral dissertation focuses on oxidative damage and contractile dysfunction in diaphragm with chronic heart failure. In the long term, he would like to develop pharmacological agents that can prevent diaphragm dysfunction in patients with chronic heart failure. He received the UF-HHMI Science for Life Graduate Student Award for his work with Greg Frye and other undergrads that recently joined their group. Bumsoo and Greg both contributed to a research project on cancer cachexia. In this project they respectively tested contractile properties of skeletal muscles with distinct properties. They found that cancer cachexia decreased force generating capacity of leg muscles and developed an early fatigue during repetitive muscle contractions. Their findings were published in the Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications in 2013. Greg has recently been accepted in the Physical Therapy program at UF.

Alexandria Ardissone

Lexi Ardissone is in the Ph.D. program for Microbiology & Cell Science under the mentorship of Dr. Eric Triplett. Her research focuses on the microbial community in the human gut and the implications in premature birth and autoimmunity, particularly type 1 diabetes (T1D). In general, she is interested in the human microbiome, the variation between populations, factors that contribute to that variation, and the implications this has on human health. She attended the University of Florida for her B.S. in Microbiology and Cell Science (MCS) where she first began undergraduate research under the mentorship of Dr. Joseph Larkin, an immunologist in the MCS department. While there, she assisted in investigating the immune response of NOD mice (a model organism for studying T1D) to different bacteria. This peaked her interest in better understanding host-microbe interactions and the implications for health. Eager to assess the microbial community structure in the human gut, she transferred to Dr. Eric Triplett’s lab (focus on microbial ecology) for her Ph.D. work. She highly values the research experience and guidance she received as an undergraduate and is all too happy to try to pass that on to current undergrads.
Chris Delcher

Chris Delcher is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Epidemiology, a member of the Institute for Child Health Policy, and a fellow in the Department of Health Outcomes and Policy at the University of Florida. He has published more than 12 peer-reviewed papers. His current research focuses on using large surveillance systems to monitor trends in prescription drug abuse, prescription opioid abuse and dependence, and “doctor shopping” behavior. He is an international consultant for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on surveillance systems and often travels to Haiti to help build local public health capacity. His interest in national and international public health grew out of his experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in El Salvador.

Jennie Fagen

Jennie is from the rural Florida panhandle. She first mentored undergraduate students in biology at Chipola College through their peer-teaching program. Jennie later transferred to the University of Florida where she began working as an undergraduate researcher in Dr. Eric Triplett’s lab in Microbiology and Cell Science. The focus of her earliest research was to revive a project on Citrus Greening, a devastating disease in Florida’s citrus-growing regions. After graduating with a degree in Biology, Jennie has continued her research in the Triplett lab as she pursues a Ph.D. in Microbiology. During this time, the Citrus Greening project in the Triplett lab has grown from a single undergrad to a much larger group of nine researchers, including two graduate students, two post bacs, a post doc, and four undergraduate researchers.
Jeff Fortin

Jeff Fortin is a Ph.D. candidate in the lab of Dr. Brent Reynolds, and is enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Program with the Department of Neuroscience in the College of Medicine. Jeff performed research during his undergraduate at Northern Kentucky University, working in Biopsychology and Organic Chemistry labs, and then relocated to the University of Florida to pursue a Ph.D. in the Biomedical Sciences. His research interests include the culturing and grafting of human neural stem cells as regenerative therapy for neurological injuries. His thesis aims to help treat different diseases with specifically designed cell populations, as well as to administer different cell treatments that are customized to the stage of neurological injury. Jeff is receiving the UF-HHMI Science for Life Graduate Student Award for his research with undergraduate student Mark Rohaus (now medical student) on identifying and isolating a slow-cycling cell population in human glioblastoma-derived cells, using a fluorescent dye. This has resulted in a co-authored publication entitled “Identification and Isolation of Slow-Dividing Cells in Human Glioblastoma Using Carboxy Fluorescein Succinimidyl Ester (CFSE).” Additionally, Jeff has helped in training nine undergraduate students over the last three years.

Adrienne Gauna

Adrienne Gauna is a Ph.D. candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program of Biomedical Sciences. She is a student in the advanced concentration of Immunology and Microbiology and is conducting her dissertation research with Dr. Seunghhee Cha from the departments of Oral and Maxillofacial Diagnostic Sciences and Oral Biology. Adrienne was awarded a NIH TL1 training grant through the UF Clinical and Translational Science Institute, which supports training in the development of a career in clinical and translational research. Her primary focus is in understanding the pathogenesis of the autoimmune condition Sjögren’s syndrome (SjS) and in developing diagnostic and therapeutic practices for SjS. Adrienne is receiving the UF-HHMI Science for Life Graduate Student Award for her work with undergraduate students Geidy’s Perez and Lauren Dupre, who are currently attending the UF College of Dentistry. Her work with Lauren Dupre generated significant data that resulted in publication in the European Journal of Immunology examining the role of microRNA-146a overexpression in SjS. Furthermore, studies undertaken with Geidy’s Perez resulted in publication in PLoS One, regarding the negative outcomes of self-targeting M3R autoantibodies in SjS patients. After graduation Adrienne plans to continue her clinical-related research and mentoring in an academic research environment.
Kimberly Hawkins is a Ph.D. candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program of Biomedical Sciences with the Department of Neuroscience under the direction of Dr. Eduardo Candelario-Jalil. Kim discovered her passion for neuroscience after her father had a stroke during her sophomore year of undergraduate studies. After she received her B.S. degree in Psychology with a minor in Neuroscience from Texas A&M University, she came to the University of Florida to pursue her doctoral degree. Her dissertation entails enhancing a natural pathway in the body, called resolution, to stop damaging neuroinflammation after ischemic stroke. She is first author on two peer-reviewed publications and has presented her research at numerous regional, national, and international conferences. She has won numerous awards, including Best Poster Award at the North Central Florida Society for Neuroscience Chapter Conference (2013 and 2014), an International Society for Neurochemistry Travel Grant (2013), and a grant from the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Research Trust Fund at the McKnight Brain Institute (2013). Kim is receiving the UF-HHMI Science for Life Graduate Student Award for her mentorship of two undergraduate students who are both authors on her recent publication.

Jacob Richards is a Ph.D. candidate in the lab of Dr. Michelle Gumz, and is enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Program with the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in the College of Medicine. Though born in Fort Worth, Texas, Jacob spent his early years overseas in Indonesia with his parents, who worked for a non-profit. Jacob completed his undergraduate studies in Medicinal Chemistry at Palm Beach Atlantic University in South Florida before pursuing his Ph.D. at the University of Florida in 2010. His dissertation entails studying the role of the circadian clock protein Per1 and its regulation of blood pressure. His recent work is focusing on the potential targeting of Per1 for the treatment of high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. He has published seven first authored peer-reviewed publications, presented his work at multiple international meetings, and received several local and international awards. Jacob is currently funded with a pre-doctoral fellowship by the American Heart Association. He has assisted the mentoring of over ten undergraduates in his tenure at University of Florida, including co-authoring five publications with them.
Michael Schulz

Michael Schulz is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Chemistry under the supervision of Dr. Kenneth B. Wagener. He received his B.S. in Chemistry in 2010 from the University of Iowa. While an undergraduate student, he conducted research in the labs of Ned Bowden and Amnon Kohen at Iowa, and George Whitesides at Harvard University. Since coming to the University of Florida, his research interests have been diverse and include olefin metathesis polymerization and depolymerization, conjugated polymers, and polymer-based radiopharmaceuticals. He is an author on 13 publications, two book chapters, 34 presentations, and two patents. He also received a grant from the National Science Foundation to conduct research at Kyoto University for three months in 2013. With the encouragement of Dr. Wagener, he formed his own “research group” with three outstanding undergraduate students, Rachel Ford, Chelsea Sparks, and Cristian Perez. These mentoring interactions have resulted in numerous presentations and two publications, with several more to come. Inspired by his own experiences in undergraduate research, Michael is passionate about providing encouragement and opportunities to the students he mentors. When he’s not in the lab, Michael also enjoys music and is a member of the UF organ and carillon studios.

Wendy Yoder

Wendy M. Yoder is a Ph.D. candidate in the Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Program in the Department of Psychology under the mentorship of Dr. David W. Smith. Her research utilizes olfactory psychophysics to investigate age-related neural and cognitive dysfunction in both human and rodent populations. By integrating objective cross-species measures of behavioral correlates, her work aims to provide both the construct and predictive validity for future olfactory biomarkers. Determining the precise olfactory alterations that precede cognitive impairment could enrich populations for clinical trials by providing earlier intervention, prior to widespread, irreversible neuronal loss. In conjunction with her experimental endeavors, Wendy has mentored over 20 undergraduate students. With their assistance, she has authored four peer-reviewed publications and presented over 30 posters (including seven poster awards) at both national and local conferences. To further promote scientific writing within her laboratory, she has assisted four undergraduate students (interdisciplinary studies, major in neurobiological sciences) with their senior theses, as well as two recipients of the University Scholars Program. Wendy has received numerous academic awards, including a fellowship from the Parkinson Disease Foundation to apply translational olfactory measures. In her spare time she enjoys classic literature, film, design, acerbic wit and dressing her cats in absurd attire.