



# BGS FALL 2011 NEWSLETTER

## Letter from the BGS Dean and Director



The summer is drawing to a close and it is almost time to welcome our 26<sup>th</sup> incoming class of new BGS students. This is always an exciting time of year for BGS faculty, staff and current students, when we get acquainted with the newest

members of BGS.

There are 116 new students entering the Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Cell and Molecular Biology, Genomics and Computational Biology, Immunology, Neuroscience and Pharmacology Ph.D. programs this fall. We hope that you will join us in welcoming these students at the fall reception on September 6, 2011.

In 2004, President Amy Gutmann instituted the Penn Compact, which stressed the importance of local and global engagement by the University community. In our last newsletter, we highlighted efforts on the part of current BGS students to do outreach to the Philadelphia community, particularly in introducing elementary and high school students to science.

In this issue, we've chosen to feature some of the global aspects of BGS, including interviews with some of our new incoming international students, who come from at least 14 different countries (Burma, Canada, China, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Iran, Israel, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, U.S. and Vietnam). We also feature some recent awards by current international students and alumni. We're interested in hearing from current students and alumni about all their achievements, whether in Philadelphia or across the globe.

**Susan Ross, Ph.D.**

Associate Dean of Biomedical Graduate Studies



## BGS CONVOCATION

**Tuesday, September 6, 2011**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

**BRB II/III Auditorium**

### Featured Speaker

**David B. Roth, M.D., Ph.D.**

Chair, Department of Pathology & Laboratory  
Medicine at the  
Perelman School of Medicine

**“A recombinase that guards the genome  
during lymphocyte differentiation”**

### RECEPTION

**4:00 p.m. – 6 p.m.**

**BRB II/III Lobby**

## IN THIS ISSUE

- ♦ Penn's SOM Takes on New Name (p. 2)
- ♦ Steven Reiner Steps Down as IGG Director (p. 3)
- ♦ International Student Spotlight (p. 4)
- ♦ BGS Alumni & Student Awards (p. 6)
- ♦ Alumni Appointment at Harvard Med (p. 8)
- ♦ Upcoming Events (p. 9)

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**Correction:** In the Spring 2011 newsletter, it was reported that Christa Heyward was the founding member of PGWISE, which should have read *the first Pluralism Chair of GAPSA*. Christa also served as BGAPSA's VC of Finance.

## **UPenn School of Medicine Receives \$225M Gift from Raymond and Ruth Perelman**



After the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine received a generous gift of \$225M from Raymond and Ruth Perelman - the largest single gift to a medical school in U.S. history – **the school has been renamed the Raymond and Ruth Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania**.

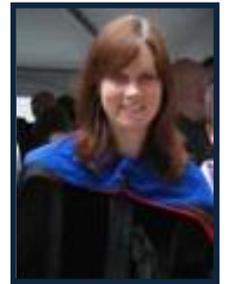
With this endowment from the Perelmans, the SOM will focus efforts on more advanced research in medicine and the biomedical sciences, as well as recruitment of more world-reknoned faculty.

To read more about this gift, and the unfortunate passing of Ruth Perelman on July 31, 2011, please visit: <http://news.pennmedicine.org/inside/2011/08/philanthropist-and-friend-of-penn-medicine-passes-away.html>

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## **Leah Sabin, Ph.D. (CAMB-2011), Receives the First BGS Public Health Certificate**

During the BGS graduation ceremony on May 16, 2011, **Leah Sabin, Ph.D.**, received the first-ever- awarded certificate in the BGS Public Health Certificate Program (PHCP). Leah completed the program under the mentorship of Dr. Gary Smith, a professor in the School of Veterinary Medicine. Leah's PHCP project was entitled "A Model of Rift Valley Fever Virus Transmission Dynamics between Mosquito and Domestic Ruminant Populations in the Greater Philadelphia Metro Area". Leah received her Ph.D. in CAMB under the guidance of Sara Cherry in the Department of Microbiology.



Currently, Dr. Sabin is a postdoc in the laboratory of Greg Hannon, Ph.D., at Cold Spring Harbor, New York, where she is studying the role of long noncoding RNAs during normal hematopoiesis and malignant transformation.

The Public Health Certificate Program (PHCP) was started in 2005, with the goal of providing supplemental training to doctoral candidates who are interested in public health.

**For more information on the Public Health Certificate Program, please visit:**  
[http://www.med.upenn.edu/bgs/pub\\_health\\_certificate.shtml](http://www.med.upenn.edu/bgs/pub_health_certificate.shtml)

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## **The Rita Allen Foundation Awards Rahul M. Kohli, MD, Ph.D, with \$500,000 Grant**



**Rahul M. Kohli, MD, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor of Medicine and Biochemistry & Biophysics (CAMB), will receive a \$500K grant from the Rita Allen Foundation to produce revolutionary results in a study on DNA Modifying Enzymes.

**To read more about Dr. Kohli and his research, please visit:**  
<http://www.med.upenn.edu/apps/faculty/index.php/g20000320/p6341532>

## Message from IGG Chair:

This summer represents a time of change for the Immunology Graduate Group (IGG). After eight years as Chair of IGG, **Steve L. Reiner, M.D.** is stepping down as Director of the graduate group.



Much of the tremendous success of IGG over the last few years is due to Steve's outstanding leadership and tireless stewardship of the graduate group. Our continued upward trajectory in national rankings, the superb quality of our graduate students, the remarkable scientific and professional development of our trainees and faculty and the growth of a large and vibrant Immunology training environment have all occurred in no small part due to Steve's remarkable dedication and vision for the Penn Immunology community.

We are indebted to Steve for his service to the IGG. We look forward to the next phase of IGG moving forward on the strong foundation built over recent years, and continuing the upward trajectory of our science and trainees.

**E. John Wherry, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Immunology Graduate Group

## KEYSTONE SYMPOSIA™ on Molecular and Cellular Biology *Connecting the Scientific Community*

**Christopher A. Hunter (CAMB)**, John J. O'Shea (NIAMS), and Fiona M. Powrie (Univ. of Oxford) are organizing the 2012 joint Keystone Symposia meetings entitled:

**"The Biology of Cytokines" and  
"TH17 Cells in Health and Disease"**

**FEBRUARY 5-10, 2012**  
Keystone Resort – Keystone, Colorado

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### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

**Diane J. Mathis**, Harvard Medical School  
**Tadatsugu Taniguchi**, University of Tokyo

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*BGS students interested in participating can apply for a travel award or scholarship, register, submit an abstract, or see the full program at:*

[www.keystonesymposia.org/12Q1](http://www.keystonesymposia.org/12Q1)

### Deadlines:

**10/5/2011 – Abstract & Scholarship**  
**11/7/2011 – Late-Breaking Abstract**  
**12/5/2011 – Early Registration**



As a special feature to start off the fall semester, we are putting the spotlight on some of our incoming students, from several countries around the globe, who are honored to join the Penn family. In their own words, they will share with us their research interests, personal hobbies, and why they chose BGS programs for their Ph.D.!

## Thu Thi Duong - Vietnam



**Thu Thi Duong**, a native of *Vietnam*, is very proud of being accepted to Penn and explains why she considers studying at Penn to be “*my dream*”.

“From the viewpoint of an international student, the field of biomedical science at the Perelman School of Medicine is very strong. Receiving a Vietnam Education Foundation

Fellowship made me more confident to apply for the BGS program, although I know of the highly competitive rate of admission for international graduate students. “

In the past, Thu has worked on stem cell research and applications, reproductive technology, and stem cell and gene therapy in the treatment of type1 diabetes.

While at Penn, Thu will continue researching stem cells and regenerative medicine, and approaching clinical treatments for human diseases.

During times of relaxation, Thu enjoys singing, traveling, participating in social activities, and making new friends.

*“The picture of me is the image of a Vietnamese girl in Ao Dai, the traditional dress of my country. I am so happy to wear it.”*

## Feven Tameire - Ethiopia

Faculty members of the BGS program made quite an impression on **Feven Tameire** during her search for the right graduate school. As she states, “the faculty members were very enthusiastic about their research and I got the impression they were very involved in providing advice and guidance to see the success of their graduate students”.



Feven also believes that studying at Penn will expose her to diverse and exciting research topics, specifically in the CAMB program, which she states “encompasses a wide range of laboratories that investigate cancer biology and molecular basis of disease.”

As an undergraduate, Feven investigated mechanisms that regulate polarized growth in budding yeast, and focused on the protein that regulates this growth, Zds2p.

During her studies at Penn, Feven’s research interests will include cancer, tumor immune-therapy, translational research, and tumor micro environment.

As hobbies, Feven likes to explore new places and learn new things, and that is usually when she isn’t out kayaking or playing ping pong.



## Efstathios (Stathis) D. Gennatas - Greece



As someone who has always had an interest in Neuroscience, **Stathis Gennatas** began studying psychology and biology during his high school years in *Athens, Greece*. He later continued his studies in medical school and worked in the field of

Neuroimaging in San Francisco, California.

What brought Stathis to the BGS program was “Penn’s strengths across Neurology, Psychology, Psychiatry and Radiology”. Because of what he considers “Penn’s true collaborative environment”, Stathis decided Penn was the ideal graduate school for him to pursue his research interests.

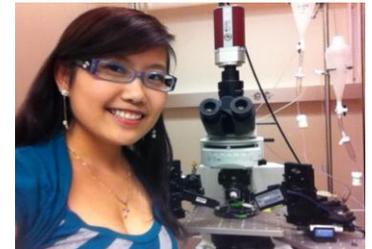
Before applying to Penn, Stathis joined the UCSF Memory and Aging Center where he states he investigated “network structure and function in the healthy brain as well as in neurodegenerative diseases”. This led to performing “structural and functional connectivity analyses using structural, diffusion and resting state/task-free functional MRI data , and correlating network connectivity and other imaging-derived metrics with cognitive behavior”.

While in the BGS program, Stathis will focus on using imaging to study brain networks and their dynamics, whether in the context of neurology, psychiatry or cognitive neuroscience.

To clear his mind, Stathis enjoys composing and recording music, and also plays synthesizers and the electric guitar.

## Khaing Win - Burma

From the country of *Myanmar (Burma)*, **Khaing Win** looks forward to her travels across the globe to join the Penn community in her pursuit to learn more about new aspects of neuroscience.



Khaing’s interest in neuroscience began at a young age when she became curious about the brain and mechanisms that contribute to neuropathology. While taking a neuroscience course, as an undergrad, Khaing conducted an experiment to test cortisol levels during stressful conditions in college students. What Khaing was exploring is how escalating stress could trigger a series of neuroendocrine responses in her subjects. It was this independent experiment, and neurological issues suffered by two family members, that guided Khaing in her career choice to, one day, become a Neuroscientist.

During Khaing’s internships, she studied at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, as well as MIT, and worked in the laboratory of Dr. Li-Husei Tai where her research project involved “identifying mechanisms of the serotonin-1A receptor in dentate gyrus mediating antidepressant response”.

While at Penn, Khaing’s research interests will include neurodegeneration and neuroprotection, as well as pharmacological effects of neurotransmitters.

In her spare time, Khaing likes to shop, watch movies, cook, dance, tutor and travel.

# CIRCLE OF *Excellence*



**Sarah Clark, PhD (CAMB – 2011)**, was awarded with the ***Jon Samuel Kanefield Prize for Cystic Fibrosis Research***

on June 10, 2011. This award will provide Sarah with funds for her travel to

the Gordon Conference this academic year to present her research on “How phyosphorycholine influences Haemophilus influenzae colonization and antibody response to the bacteria.”

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) awarded **Jie Xu (MD/Ph.D. -**

**CAMB)** and **Ankit Jain (MD/Ph.D - Neuroscience)** with ***2011-12 International Student Research Fellowships***.



The HHMI fellowship supports international students who are excelling in their fields of study, and provides them with annual stipends and educational allowances for years 3-5 of their Ph.D. programs.

**Barbara E. Corkey, Ph.D., (BMB-1981)**, Professor of Medicine and Biochemistry at Boston University, received the American Diabetes Association’s prestigious ***2011 Banting Medal for Scientific Achievement Award***.



The Banting Medal for Scientific Achievement Award is the Association’s highest scientific award and honors an individual who has made significant, long-term contributions to our understanding of diabetes, its treatment and/or prevention. The award is named after Nobel Prize winner Sir Frederick Banting, who co-discovered insulin treatment for diabetes.

**Shih-Wen (Wenny) Lin, Ph.D. (CAMB-2008)** is currently a Cancer Prevention Fellow in the Division of Cancer Epidemiology & Genetics at the National Cancer



Institute where she recently received the ***2011 NCI Director’s Innovation Award***. Dr. Lin was honored with this award for her research proposal entitled “Immunoglobulin gene repertoire and gastric cancer.”

Dr. Lin also chaired the “Immune Markers and Cancer Symposium” at the 3<sup>rd</sup> North American Congress of Epidemiology meeting this past June in Montreal, Canada.

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## Additional BGS Student & Alumni Awards

 **B&B/BMB 2011 Retreat Poster Prizes were awarded to:**

**Ed Ballister** (BMB - Advisor: Mike Lampson) – **1<sup>st</sup> Prize for the Josh Wand Award**

**Tanya Panchenko** (CAMB – Advisor: Ben Black) – **Second Place**

**Morgan DeSantis** (BMB – Advisor: Jim Shorter) – **Third Place**

 **Mike Kisley, Ph.D. (INSC -2000)** received the **2011 Outstanding Teaching Award** at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. He also recently received funding from the National Institute on Aging to support his research on age-related changes in the interaction of attention and emotion.

 **Stephanie Murphy, VMB, Ph.D. ( BMB - 1996)** received the **2011 Nathan R. Brewer Scientific Achievement Award** from the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science. She will be presented with the award on October 2, 2011, at the San Diego Convention Center, where she will also give the Nathan R. Brewer lecture.

 **Jessica Panzer, Ph.D. (INSC - 2006)** received the **2011 Meg Olivia Barkman Scholarship** during her pediatric neurology residency at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and will continue on at CHOP as a research fellow with Marc A. Dichter, MD, Ph.D.

 **Jason Stadanlick, Ph.D. (IMUN - 2008)** recently received the **Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award** and first-authored a manuscript in the July 15, 2011 issue of The Journal of Immunology (Vol. 187, No. 2, pgs. 664-675).

 **Betty B. Tong, Ph.D. (CAMB - 1997)** received the **2011 Award for Excellence in Technology Transfer** from the Federal Laboratory Consortium for Technology Transfer (FLC). This award recognizes federal employees who have accomplished outstanding work in the process of transferring a technology developed by a federal laboratory to the commercial marketplace.

 **Nan Wu, Ph.D. (PHRM - 2010)** was honored as a **2011 recipient of the Chinese Government Award for Outstanding Self-Financed Students Abroad.**



*Congratulations* to our BGS alumni who have moved on to promising careers and have been appointed to the following positions:



**Jeffrey Dvorin, MD, Ph.D. (CAMB - 2002)** has recently been appointed to his first faculty position as an **Assistant Professor in Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School.**

Dr. Dvorin is also an Associate Physician in the Infectious Diseases department at the Children's Hospital of Boston.

**Thomas LaBean, Ph.D. (BMB - 1993)** is now an **Associate Professor in Materials Science and Engineering at the College of Engineering at North Carolina State University.** His laboratory will focus on the design and construction of molecular materials based on biopolymers and structural DNA nanotechnology.

**Edward Lee, M.D., Ph.D. (INSC - 2004)** was recently appointed as an **Assistant Professor in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine.** Dr. Lee's laboratory will study the interaction between obesity and neurodegenerative diseases.

**Karen Lounsbury, Ph.D. (PHRM - 1993)** has been appointed as a **Professor in the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Vermont, College of Medicine.**



**Riju Ray, Ph.D. (PHRM - 2007)** recently joined **GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals** as a **Senior Manager in the Clinical Development Department.**

**Douglas M. Swank, Ph.D. (CAMB - 1995)** has been appointed as an **Associate Professor of Biology, with tenure, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute** in Troy, New York.

**Charles H. Vite, DVM, Ph.D. (CAMB - 2003)** is currently being funded by R01NS073661 (4/2011) to rigorously evaluate the mechanistic, pharmacologic, and toxicity issues associated with intrathecal cyclodextrin therapy in Niemann-Pick type C disease. He is also involved with the NIH in formulating a clinical trial to begin in the Summer of 2012.

**Jeongsik Yong, Ph.D. (BMB - 2002)** has been appointed as an **Assistant Professor of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Biophysics, at the University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences.**

## 2011 CAMB ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

October 11, 2011  
Perelman Quadrangle  
8:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Keynote Speaker:

**Dr. Marianne Bronner**

Albert Billings Ruddock Professor of Biology  
California Institute of Technology

### **“Gene Regulatory Events in Neural Crest Development and Evolution”**

The CAMB Annual Symposium is a full day of science and social interaction for CAMB faculty and students. Talks will be presented by two faculty members, six students, and a keynote speaker.

## 2011 IMMUNOLOGY RETREAT

October 28-30, 2011  
Willow Valley Resort &  
Conference Center

Lancaster, PA



Anyone interested in more information about this retreat should **contact Tim Johnson** at: [timjohns@mail.med.upenn.edu](mailto:timjohns@mail.med.upenn.edu)

## 28<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PHARMACOLOGY STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

October 24, 2011  
Independence Seaport Museum  
Penns Landing  
Philadelphia, PA

Keynote Speaker:

**David Scheinberg, M.D., Ph.D.**  
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

### **“Targeting Alpha Particles and Nanotubes to Cancer”**



## **Cell and Molecular Biology**

- ***Igor Brodsky, Ph.D.***, Assistant Professor of Pathobiology, School of Veterinary Medicine
- ***Alice Chen-Plotkin, MD***, Assistant Professor of Neurology, School of Medicine
- ***Wenqin Lui, Ph.D.***, Assistant Professor of Neuroscience, School of Medicine
- ***Christopher Lengner, Ph.D.***, Assistant Professor of Animal Biology, School of Veterinary Medicine
- ***Sunny Shin, Ph.D.***, Assistant Professor of Microbiology, School of Medicine

## **Neuroscience**

- ***Karin Borgmann-Winter, MD***, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, School of Medicine
- ***Beth Winkelstein, Ph.D.***, Professor of Bioengineering, School of Engineering and Applied Science

## **Pharmacological Science**

- ***Eric J. Brown, Ph.D.***, Associate Professor of Cancer Biology, Department of Cancer Biology

To include information in the next newsletter, please write to Jamie Lipford at [jlipford.upenn@gmail.com](mailto:jlipford.upenn@gmail.com)

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