Visiting Faculty

We’re pleased and honored to welcome **Dr. Feng Chen** as a visiting faculty in our department. Dr. Chen is an associate professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China. He’s researching cyanobacteria in the Great Salt Lake area and observing teaching techniques that he can share with his university. In March, Dr. Chen’s wife, Chen Wuyi, and his three year old son, Chen Siran, will be coming to join him in Utah.

Dr. Chen enjoys traveling, photography, and badminton. He likes the residents of Utah and loves talking to everyone. Lately he has traveled north and south, east and west, of the Great Salt Lake (more than most Utahns), enjoyed visiting Park City, Deer Creek, Antelope Island, and Arches National Park. He’s taken some gorgeous photos of Arches that would be comfortable hanging in an art gallery. Feel free to drop by 753 WIDB and say hello to Dr. Chen, discover something about cyanobacteria and China, and welcome him to our campus community.

Faculty Honors

**Dr. Brian Poole** was honored by the Utah Chapter of the Lupus Foundation on November 6, 2010. Lupus is a disease caused by the body attacking its own DNA. Symptoms are expressed in many and varied ways, from arthritis to kidney failure to mimicking many other diseases. It takes an average of 4 doctors and 3 years to diagnose it. No new drugs have been developed in decades which target this disease. Dr. Poole is active in presenting and advocating research and awareness of lupus.

Student News

**Aubrey Wilson** is our newest graduate student, just beginning her molecular biology PhD program in winter 2011 semester. She will be working with Dr. Sandra Burnett. Aubrey graduated just a few years ago from BYU with a major in molecular biology. She’s married and has a little girl. She enjoys the outdoors and is interested in teaching.

MBBIO Secretary

Hurray! **Heidi Olsen** is our new department secretary. She comes to us with an Associate’s degree from LDS Business College, a bachelor’s degree from BYU-Idaho, and a mission in Taiwan. She plays the French horn, loves working with horses, and enjoys the outdoors. Her favorite hikes are in southern Utah and Timpanogos. We’re so glad she’s here.

Graduate Students

Welcome back Marcus! **Marcus Gustafsson** just returned from a mission to San Jose, California. He’ll be completing his master’s degree in Dr. Kim O’Neill’s lab, working on DNA repair. Marcus is an outdoor enthusiast. He loves physical activity, especially snowboarding and skiing in the winter. He enjoys listening to music, reading and traveling as much as possible.
Grants

The U.S. Department of State awarded a three-year grant to Dr. Brent Nielsen. The grant title is “Building Capabilities for the Molecular and Biochemical Characterization of Photosynthesis and Oxidative Stress Gene Expression in Halophytes with Potential Use as Non-Conventional Crops.” This is a joint project with faculty at the University of Karachi, Pakistan.

Out Reach

Dr. Brad Berges visited Dixie State College in St. George, Utah on November 10. He presented information about his research (mechanisms used by viruses to cause diseases) in a seminar to fifteen or twenty interested students and faculty. After, he informally discussed graduate school, including MMBIO programs. Dr. Don Warner in the Biology Department expressed an interest in coming to BYU this summer to learn more about tissue culture techniques. Dixie College is transitioning from a 2-year to a 4-year school. It was satisfying to plant some seeds for students to think about life after a bachelor’s degree.

Dr. David Erickson visited the University of Nevada in Las Vegas on November 15th. He spoke about his research (molecular transmission of the plague bacteria Yersinia pestis to flea and mammalian hosts) to about 80 students. He also met with students at the end of his presentation. Though there was interest in Dr. Erickson’s research and BYU in general, many were wary of BYU’s honor code. “Would I really have to give up coffee?” emphasizes one of our challenges.

Inter-college Collaborations

Collaborations between colleges can solve unique problems.

MMBio graduate student Jeffery Wu, Esq. is working under the direction of Dr. Brad Bundy in the Chemical Engineering Department in an interdepartmental collaboration. Jeff’s work focuses on controlling enzyme orientation during covalent immobilization by incorporating unnatural amino acids site-specifically during translation. In addition to employing traditional MMBio techniques to manipulate the translation system for optimal unnatural amino acid incorporation efficiency, Jeff also is gaining training in organic chemical synthesis and chemical engineering. Jeff’s long term goals are to apply his J.D. and future MMBio Ph.D. training and credentials for patent law applications.

Homeland Security has awarded a grant to Dr. Rich Robison to explore the use of a portable GC/MS system to detect molecular signatures of possible bio-threat agents. Collaboration with Dr. Milt Lee in the Chemistry department and Dr. Dennis Toller in the Statistics Department is an example of successful research being accomplished through expertise in multiple colleges.

Conferences

American College of Rheumatology Scientific Meeting held in November in Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Brian Poole attended this conference. Dr. Poole was given an award for his research in Lupus at the Papillon Gala.

Autumn Immunology Conference held November 19-22 in Chicago, Illinois.

Dr. Sandra Burnett attended this conference. Dr. Burnett is also the Undergraduate Program Coordinator and was instrumental in coordinating recruiting opportunities for students at the conference.

Guest Speakers

Dr. Kent Golic, professor of Biology at the University of Utah, spoke at the MMBIO Seminar on November 18th. The title of his presentation was “New Beginnings at Chromosome Ends.”

Dr. Jeff Chen, professor of Plant Molecular Genetics at the University of Texas at Austin spoke to our MMBIO students on November 4th. The title of his presentation was “Molecular Mechanisms of Polyploidy and Hybrid Vigor.”