DR. DOROTHY SHIPPEN RECIPIENT OF AFS Distinguished Achievement Award for Graduate Mentoring

Dorothy Shippen, Professor and faculty member of the Department Biochemistry & Biophysics, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences was selected to receive 2015 university-level Distinguished Achievement Award for Graduate Mentoring. Dr. Shippen was notified of her selection in a surprise announcement by Dr. Bill Dugas, Acting Vice Chancellor and Acting Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

The Distinguished Achievement Awards, funded by The Association of Former Students, are among the most prestigious awards that can be presented to faculty or staff members at Texas A&M University. The selection is rigorous and recipients are chosen by a campus-wide committee composed of faculty, students, former students, and staff. The awards honor Texas A&M University faculty and staff members in the areas of teaching, research, student relations, graduate mentoring, extension/outreach/continuing education/professional developments, administration and staff support.

The award recognizes, encourages, and rewards superior faculty mentors of graduate students – those faculty who go well beyond advising by bringing their skills and commitment to a student’s learning and professional development as future teachers, practitioners, researchers, and scholars through mentoring. These are individuals who build enthusiasm for their profession in others, who help graduate students achieve their goals, and who provide opportunities that will introduce students to a community of professionals who can also assist them in their development. Nominees for this award are dedicated to contributing to the overall development of their students as learners and future professionals.

Dorothy Shippen joined the faculty in Department of Biochemistry & Biophysics in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences in 1991 after earning a Ph.D. in biology at the University of Alabama and completing postdoctoral fellowships at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of California, San Francisco. She established the plant Arabidopsis thaliana as a model for understanding the structure and function of telomeres, which are the “caps” on the ends of chromosomes. Dr. Shippen, who has been with the University for 23 years, was a Faculty Fellow 2000 – 2005. She was also awarded the TAMU Vice Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Research in 2007, and the TAMU Association of Former Student’s Distinguished Achievement Award for Research in 2008.

During her years as a professor, Dr. Shippen has mentored more than 11 Postdoctoral Fellows; she has mentored more than 17 Ph. D. students with 4 who are currently in her lab. She has mentored 2 M.S. students and over 70 undergraduate students. Dr. Shippen received an award plaque, an engraved watch, and a cash gift, presented at the annual ceremonies on April 27 in the Rudder Theatre. Congratulations Dr. Shippen! For a full list of this year’s award winners: 2015 Distinguished Achievement Award Recipients Announced

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Grad School Taught Biochemistry and Biophysics Student: How to Become a Scientist

Story from Agriculture & Life Sciences

By: Olga Kuchment

With far-ranging applications in research and medicine, Alfredo Erazo-Oliveras’ doctoral project brought him publications in prestigious journals, a Vice Chancellor’s Award in Excellence for Graduate Research, and other honors. He earned his doctorate in Biochemistry and Biophysics in December 2014. More than that, he has changed dramatically, he says.
“It’s more than getting a Ph.D., it’s also about becoming a scientist,” Erazo-Oliveras says. “Grad school has definitely made my skin thicker.”

Erazo-Oliveras “fell in love with chemistry while growing up in Puerto Rico”, he says, feeling an affinity for the molecules he studied. As an undergraduate at the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras, he did research in the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics at Texas A&M.

“I had never experienced such nice hospitality,” Erazo-Oliveras says. When it was time to decide on a graduate program, “I was looking forward to doing my research in a nurturing environment, and I thought this was the perfect place for me.”

In 2009 he joined the lab of Jean-Philippe Pellois, Associate Professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics.

“We found a way to do research and be successful, but at the same time, have a good time,” Erazo-Oliveras says. “That is super important in grad school, because otherwise you get worn out. With that element of camaraderie, people become not only your lab mates but your friends and your family.”

Erazo-Oliveras’ main project has been to find a better way to deliver proteins, peptides, or small molecules into living cells. The method could, for example, then be used to deliver inside cells molecules that exert a beneficial activity, otherwise known as “bioactive molecules.” The work’s long-term implications are many, from examining the inner workings of cells to advancing the treatment of tumors.

Erazo-Oliveras worked to design molecules that could slip into cells without causing damage and bring along other molecules such as therapeutics or imaging agents. As any graduate project, it had its ups and downs.

“Sometimes you are second-guessing yourself — not only what you’re doing, but are you doing it right, are you capable. I think every grad student goes through that,” Erazo-Oliveras says. “There’s always someone who comes along and reminds you that first of all, there is nothing wrong with that, and second of all, there’s a light at the end of the tunnel.”

Collaborating with another doctoral student in the lab, Kristina Najjar, helped him make progress.

“Working on something so unique and so useful with someone else, I think that was the best experience in this lab,” Erazo-Oliveras says. The results of their work were published August 2014 in the top journal Nature Methods [http://www.nature.com/nmeth/journal/v11/n8/full/nmeth.2998.html]. Erazo-Oliveras has had several other publications that track the project’s development.

Erazo-Oliveras has worked as a teaching assistant and as a recruiter, and he won the Biochemistry and Biophysics Department Graduate Student Teaching Award in 2013. He often found himself speaking with undergraduates about the graduate school experience.

“You learn to think critically, ask questions and answer questions. You can feel happy for a result and for failure,” he has told students. “Don’t be afraid of getting knocked down. Test yourself.”

Having graduated, Erazo-Oliveras now has a new project: figuring out what he’s doing next. He is looking for jobs in the private sector and in academia.

“It’s a little overwhelming and nerve wracking sometimes, not knowing what the future holds for me,” says Erazo-Oliveras. “But designing new experiments, designing new ways to answer questions, and keeping the mind stimulated — that’s what really attracts me.”

**BIO/BIO PARTICIPATES IN RAISING FUNDS FOR NEPAL EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS**

The Nepalese Student Association at Texas A&M isn’t letting 8,000 miles stand between it and earthquake relief effort to their mother country. And the faculty, staff and students in the department of Biochemistry and Biophysics have opened their hearts, and their pocket books, in expression of concern for these students, their families and their home country — Nepal, in the aftermath of an earthquake of 7.9 magnitude, which occurred on April 25.

The Nepalese students from the Department of Biochemistry & Biophysics, with the assistance of Ms. Betty Cotton, Administrative Assistant to the Department Head, Dr. Gregory D. Reinhart, successfully arranged a delicious meal buffet from Genghis Grill, which was served in the foyer of the Bio/Bio building. Though the actual charge per bowl was only $5, the faculty, staff and students of the department collected approximately $1,000 in donations for the victims of the disaster.

The following is a statement submitted by Manoj Rajaure from the laboratory of Dr. Ryland Young:

“On behalf of Biochemistry Graduate students from Nepal in this department and on behalf of Nepalese Student Association (NSA-TAMU), we would like to express our deepest thanks for all your support during this time of need. We are truly inspired by the dedication and generosity of the BGA family and the department staff, who answer the call when someone asks for help. Be assured your donation will be put to good use and will help people in Nepal overcome this natural disaster.

Thank you, Sincerely, (Signed) Manoj Rajaure, Hem Thapa, Rajan Thapa, Denish Piya, Neeshant Chalise, Rupesh Shrestha”
During such devastating circumstances, the giving and supportive nature of the Aggie Spirit offers a reminder that as Aggies, we are never alone; we are a family!

RAFAEL ALMANZAR NAMED 2015 RECIPIENT OF NEW ADVISOR AWARD

Rafael Almanzar, Sr. Academic Advisor for the Biochemistry & Biophysics Graduate Program’s, was named the 2015 recipient of the TAMU New Advisor Award 2015. Rafael joined the department as Advisor for the departmental Graduate Programs in February 2014. Rafael has been very instrumental in serving and assisting the graduate students toward their goal of earning their degrees in Biochemistry & Biophysics. Rafael’s door is always open to his students, faculty and staff - as well as being an excellent example of a “team player” in the Administrative Staff.

The purpose of the New Advisor Award is to recognize and reward novice professional advising staff who embody the spirit of caring, compassionate, skillful advisement, and genuine concern for the welfare of individual students.

The nominee shall have performed as an academic advisor for two (2) years or less as of January 1 of the award year and may not be the recipient of this award in consecutive years. Any student, staff or faculty member may make a nomination.

"It is an honor to receive the 2015 New Advisor Award presented by the UAC and Texas A&M. I would like to thank everyone who nominated me and to all the BGA members who signed Claudia's nomination letter for further support. It has truly been an incredible and rewarding experience for me since arriving at Texas A&M from the concrete jungle in The Bronx. In my short time here, I honestly didn't imagine how much of an impact I would be towards the BGA and the department. I genuinely care about all my students and to know that I can play a role in their education, career, and personal lives is the best award I can get in my career"

As recipient of the New Advisor Award Rafael received a plaque and a cash award of $500 at the UAC Awards Breakfast on Thursday, May 7, 2015.

Congratulations to Rafael! Your diligence to serve those you represent has been another excellent representation of the Biochemistry & Biophysics department!

UAC AWARDS BREAKFAST & GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING

The 2015 annual University Advisors and Counselors Awards Breakfast & General Business Meeting was held on Thursday morning, May 7 in the Gates Ballroom in the MSC.

The announcement of the 2015-2016 UAC officers was presented during the meeting, and we are proud to announce that Ms. Trina Gregory, Undergraduate Academic Advisor for Biochemistry & Genetics in the Department of Biochemistry & Biophysics was elected to serve as a second term Secretary on the Executive Board, of the Texas A&M University Advisors and Counselors.

The UAC organization strives to provide support for advising and counseling at the university. The quality of advising and counseling at certain critical stages can impact the students’ educational experience, retention and ultimately the student’s entire life. In providing support for advising and counseling, the University Advisors and Counselors seek to provide the optimum atmosphere for the student’s academic development through increased professional communication.

As members of the UAC, academic advisors are strongly encouraged to become active members of the National Academic Advising association (NACADA). This organization’s membership includes academic advisors and counselors at institutions throughout the country. The NACADA provides opportunity for its membership to network with advisors from other institutions and to share effective advising strategies and programs. Membership and opportunities for leadership are open, at no charge, to all faculty administrators, professional staff, or any person interested in student advising and counseling.

Trina has served as Biochemistry and Genetics Undergraduate Academic Advisor for the Biochemistry Department for 6 years, and is loved and respected by her students, as she gives counsel and guidance to them from entry level through graduation.

E.F. MEYER, PROFESSOR EMERITUS, BIOCHEMISTRY & BIOPHYSICS OBITUARY

Edgar F. Meyer, Ph.D., former faculty with the department of Biochemistry and Biophysics passed away April 26, in New Mexico, where he moved with his lovely wife Catarina in 2002. His obituary follows:

Edgar Meyer, 79, resident of Taos, passed away on April 26, 2015. His life was led by his faith, his love for his family, his passion for teaching and the beauty of molecular sculptures.

After earning a PhD in Chemistry from the University of Texas (Austin, Texas), postdoctoral fellowships at the ETH (Zurich, Switzerland) and MIT (Cambridge, Massachusetts), he worked as a scientist and professor of Biochemistry during a 36-year tenure at Texas A&M University (College Station, Texas). Besides numerous publications in refereed journals and lectures in the field of crystallography, he held positions as a visiting scientist at Brookhaven National Laboratory (Upton, NY), the ETH, and the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry (Munich, Germany). His accomplishments include pioneering work in the use of color raster graphics for molecular modeling, networking in the
biological and life sciences as well as initializing the Brookhaven protein data bank.

His passion for the sciences continued after retiring and moving to Taos, where he produced molecular sculptures with a milling machine and a 3D printer.

Ed Meyer was preceded in death by his parents, Edgar and Lydia Meyer. He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Catarina (Catherine) Pestalozzi Meyer, son Erik Meyer (Sarah Aubert), daughter Claudia Meyer Horn (James Horn), son Felix Meyer (Claudia Ziegler), grandchildren Dominic, Maurice, Sofia, Oscar and Emmett, and brother Don Meyer (JoAnne).

To his family he will be remembered as a loving and caring husband, father and grandfather; to his friends and colleagues he will be remembered as an inquisitive and witty scientist, professor and sculptor with a pervasive urge to create and explore.

Services were held on May 02, 2015 at the Sangre de Cristo Lutheran Church, 116 Dona Ana Drive, Taos, NM.

Dr. Meyer joined the Texas A&M University department of Biochemistry faculty as an Assistant Professor in June 1967. After his retirement he received Emeritus status with the University in September 2003.

STUDENT OVERCOMES TRAGEDY AND RECEIVES AGGIE SPIRIT AWARD

By Tara Hale

The Faculty Senate Aggie Spirit Award recognizes outstanding courage and determination in the face of adversity while attending Texas A&M University. Stephanie Stryker ’15, an undergraduate student from the department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, has overcome so much during her time in Aggieland and was a recipient of the Aggie Spirit Award on Monday May 11, 2015.

Eligibility for the Aggie Spirit Award is based on the stated intent of the Faculty Senate to recognize outstanding courage and determination in the face of adversity while attending Texas A&M University. “Adversity” should be broadly interpreted; adversity might arise from a temporary or permanent physical, mental, or emotional condition, family circumstances, or a variety of other factors.

Dr. John Mullet, a Professor in the Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, and head of an undergraduate research lab where Stryker has been working for the last two years, describes Stryker as resilient, and said that she exemplifies all of the qualities of true Aggie Spirit in spite of an incredible personal tragedy. “Stephanie joined my laboratory as a student worker in the fall of 2013,” Dr. Mullet said. “We found her very intelligent, diligent and a person who exhibited a positive and upbeat personality.”

“Late in November 2013, Stephanie lost most of her immediate family in a car accident. Both of her parents and one of her younger brothers passed away in the accident,” Dr. Mullet said. “Stephanie left school and went home to care for her younger brother and I did not anticipate her returning to Texas A&M University in the spring. However, she decided that continuing her education was the best path forward and she also asked if she could continue working in our laboratory during the spring semester.”

“This young, vibrant, and well-grounded collegiate managed to pull her life together against all odds so that she could resume her education and professional training,” Dr. Mullet said. “Her positive attitude about life was not diminished despite life’s adversity.”

Since returning to Texas A&M University, Stephanie has completed her required research credit under the guidance of Ashley Mattison, a graduate student in Dr. Mullet’s lab, in addition to continuing to work part time.

Mattison, who works closely with Stryker, describes Stephanie as caring, optimistic, hilarious and dedicated. “Stephanie has a great sense of humor and always has great stories to tell while we work together,” Mattison said. “The way she enjoys all of the little things in life still is very inspiring. Looking at her day today, you would have no idea what happened to her family less than two years ago.”

Stephanie’s dedication and hardworking nature has also helped her in her course work. “I am amazed that Stephanie was able to retain a positive outlook despite everything that happened to her while she has been here at Texas A&M University,” Dr. Mullet said. “I know she will succeed because Stephanie is a person that has faced college years filled with turmoil without letting it derail her dreams and goals.”

UPCOMING EVENTS IN BIO/BIO

Faculty Meeting, N127 3:30 PM .................... TBA
BICH ORP Retakes ............................... May 18 & 19
Faculty/Staff Holiday, Memorial Day ............. May 25
1st Day Summer 2015 Classes .................... May 26

Drawing in Steel: Found Object Sculpture
George Tobolowsky
Public Art Sculpture Gallery
College Station & Texas A&M University
May 9 – December 17, 2015

You may have noticed the three sculptures displayed in close proximity to the Biochemistry building. These sculptures have been placed here by the Brazos Valley Arts Council
through December 17, at which time they will be returned to Dallas.

The Arts Council, City of College Station, and Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts are proud to host sculptor George Tobolowsky during his residency at Texas A&M University. A Dallas native, George Tobolowsky earned degrees in business and law from Southern Methodist University. While at SMU he also studied sculpture under Texas artist James Surls. Tobolowsky creates abstract metal sculptures from steel and stainless steel “found objects” obtained from scrap yards and fabrication plants that he assembles into balanced compositions. His art will be on exhibit in Wolf Pen Creek Park, located in College Station, as well as on the Texas A&M University campus.