Message from the Dean

**THE BEST TEACHER I EVER HAD**

As university educators we are involved not only in teaching but also research, service to the School and the University, and activities associated with various professional organizations. Given the breadth of our professional experience, we may, at times, lose touch with the fundamental activity that defines our profession. That is the education of our students. We may even assume that this takes second place to “more important” activities, such as our research. It is an undeniable truth that without a healthy and robust research profile, we as a School will never attain the level of excellence that we aspire to, and teaching and research cannot be separated. But another “truth” is that our degree of excellence will be judged, and rightfully so, by our students and the heights to which they rise.

One of my most beloved mentors and outstanding teachers was professor David Paretsky. Dave once told me that his contributions to science “would be judged by the successes of his students.” Dave was a tough-minded, uncompromising individual who expected nothing but the best of everyone around him. Dave was also one of the kindest, most honest, caring and witty individuals that I have ever known. Dave was the very best teacher I ever had. For nearly four decades at the University of Kansas Department of Microbiology, Dave inspired countless students, including myself, to become scientists and science educators. Dave took pride in teaching and never saw it any less important than his tireless hours at the lab bench. Until his retirement in 1989, Dave continued to teach and work in the lab. Dave defined the Microbiology department that he chaired for many years. He set a tone for excellence in research and teaching that could serve as a model for success.

Dave passed away in January of 2000 and although now gone, he will be remembered fondly and forever by many.

I see a number of parallels between the School of Biological Sciences and the philosophy that Dave brought to his department. Foremost in comparisons is a desire to excel at research while tirelessly working to educate our students. Our students and the success that they attain will define our strength, quality and excellence as an academic unit. Our students are our legacy – an investment in the future generation of scientists.

One of my hopes for the School of Biological Sciences is that as students leave UMKC to begin their professional careers in sciences or continue their education in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy or graduate school, or to become the next generation of laboratory life scientists, countless numbers will consider our faculty members as the “best teachers they ever had.” The ones that inspired them, encouraged them and educated them on their journeys in science.

– Lawrence A. Dreyfus
Dean
New Faculty

Erika R. Geisbrecht, Ph.D., joined the Division of Cell Biology and Biophysics as an assistant professor in January 2008. She completed her Ph.D. training in 2003 under the guidance of Denise J. Montell, Ph.D. at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Her graduate training focused on the identification of genes required for cell migration in Drosophila melanogaster. Geisbrecht continued using the fruit fly as a model organism during her post-doctoral studies in the laboratory of Susan Abmayr, Ph.D., at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research. This research, supported by a Ruth L. Kirschstein post-doctoral fellowship, focused on the characterization of genes required for embryonic muscle development.

Geisbrecht’s current research is focused on identifying new genes that function in Drosophila myoblast fusion by taking advantage of both genetic and biochemical approaches. The primary focus is to identify and integrate new genes and proteins into ordered molecular pathways for a further understanding of the fusion process. Additional interests include applying this knowledge to other developmental pathways in Drosophila where these molecules may have diverse roles, as well as investigating the relevance to vertebrate myogenesis in hopes of better understanding basic muscle biology and disease.

Awards

**FACULTY**

Dr. G. Sullivan Read received a UMKC Trustees’ Faculty Fellows Award for 2008.

Dr. Michael O’Connor received a UMKC Trustees’ Faculty Scholars Award for 2008.

**STUDENTS**

Jason Finley received $1,250 in January from the SEARCH Undergraduate Grant Committee, UMKC. The grant was approved to fund a one-semester project, “Analysis of A-Minor Interaction in the 16sRNA of the Bacterial Ribosome,” under the faculty mentorship of Dr. Michael O’Connor.

Bridget Biersmith received $750 in March from the SEARCH Undergraduate Grant Committee, UMKC. The grant was approved to fund a one-semester project, “Regulation of the Bunched Gene in the Drosophila Ovary,” under the faculty mentorship of Dr. Leonard Dobens.

Tiffanie Fowlkes received $1,500 in March from the SEARCH Undergraduate Grant Committee, UMKC. The grant was approved to fund a one-semester project, “Effect of the G59S Mutation on the Function of the Dynemin-Dynactin Complex,” under the faculty mentorship of Dr. Stephen King.
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<th>MAJOR CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Light Sensing in the Fungi,” 34th Meeting of the American Society for Photobiology, Burlingame, Calif., June 2008, <strong>Dr. Alexander Idnurm</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Sight and Sex in the Fungal Kingdom,” Kaw Valley Mycological Society, Lawrence, Kan., February 2008, <strong>Dr. Alexander Idnurm</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Resources at the Fungal Genetics Stock Center,” Fifth International Aspergillus Meeting, Edinburgh, Scotland, April 2008, <strong>Dr. Kevin McCluskey</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Investigation of HMG-CoA Lyase Function Suggests the Molecular Basis for Human Hydroxymethylglutaric Aciduria,” Association of Medical and Graduate Department of Biochemistry Chairs, January 2008, <strong>Dr. Henry M. Miziorko</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Maintaining Accuracy on the Bacterial Ribosome,” Department of Biology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; and Department of Biochemistry University of Missouri, Columbia, April 2008, <strong>Dr. Michael O’Connor</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Double Time: A Protein Kinase which Sets the Pace of the Circadian Clock in Flies and Humans,” University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, January 2008, <strong>Dr. Jeffrey L. Price</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Evolutionarily Conserved Features of Vertebrate cki delta and Drosophila dbt in the Circadian Mechanism,” Society for Research on Biological Rhythms meeting, Destin, Fla., May 2008, <strong>Dr. Jeffrey L. Price</strong>.</td>
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<td>“Seasonal Changes and Canalization in the Sensitivity of Small Mammal Populations to Changes in Survival and Reproduction,” Annual meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, University of South Dakota, Brookings, June 2008, <strong>Dr. Aaron Reed</strong> and N.A. Slade.</td>
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<td>“Environmental correlates to survival and reproduction in old-field rodents,” Annual Meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, University of South Dakota, Brookings, June 2008, <strong>Dr. Aaron Reed</strong> and N.A. Slade.</td>
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New Personnel

Kenneth Bauman
Research Assistant

Scott Clark
Support System Administrator Specialist

Taron Davis
Research Assistant

Erika Geisbrecht
Assistant Professor

Jill Hontz
Research Associate

Benjamin Iwai
Research Assistant

Denise Magditch
Research Assistant

Kasra Ramyar
Research Associate

Rebecca Thill
Research Instructor

Anju Verma
Research Associate

Christy Wiens
Lecturer
New Research Funding

**National Institutes of Health**


Wyckoff, G., “Role of ZIC and GLI Protein-Protein Interactions in Human Brain Disorders,” $220,050, April 2008.

**National Science Foundation**


**Missouri Life Science Research Board**


**University of Missouri Research Board**


**Faculty Research Grant**


**University of California Irvine**

