The NICHD Connection

June 2023

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EDITOR IN CHIEF
Shana R. Spindler, PhD
shana.spindler@nih.gov

LAYOUT & DESIGN
Nichole Swan

BACKGROUND PHOTOGRAPHY
See Credits page online

CONTRIBUTORS
Hyo Won Ahn, PhD

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VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 157 • JUNE 2023

Tips for Success from Former NICHD Summer Interns

The NIH Summer Internship Program gives high school, college, and graduate/professional school students an opportunity to experience biomedical research alongside some of the leading scientists in the world, in an environment that encourages curiosity and personal growth. Summer students have the opportunity to design and conduct an independent research project under the supervision of a research mentor while also gaining exposure to important career development activities and skill-building workshops.

To welcome the 2023 NICHD Summer Internship Program participants, we profiled several former interns to highlight the breadth of experiences that can be gained through the program, and we invited each intern to share their top tips for summer success.

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Letter from the Editor

As the new cohort of NIH Summer Internship Program trainees enter laboratories across campus, we want to extend a warm welcome to those who will be joining the NICHD family for the summer. We are excited to learn from the diverse perspectives offered by our incoming students, and we anticipate that the summer internship experience will prove to be a meaningful endeavor for all participants.

To kick-start the learning, we’ve profiled four of last year’s interns to show how the summer experience impacted their academic and research goals. Plus, each student has offered their best advice on how to make the summer a successful one.

In between all of those summer activities, don’t forget to check out the upcoming volunteer opportunities, fellowship deadlines, and skill-building workshops, which can be found in The Rep Report and June announcements. Enjoy the beginning of summer, all!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

This is a newsletter for NICHD fellows, by NICHD fellows. We want to hear from you! Please send your questions, comments, and ideas to our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.
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JULIA GRAFSTEIN
For the past few years, Julia Grafstein participated in the summer program in the laboratory of Karl Pfeifer, PhD, Senior Investigator in the Section on Epigenetics. Last summer, her research included behavioral testing of *Wap1*-deficient mice using central nervous system disorder assessments.

Exposure to multiple research projects helped Ms. Grafstein clarify her long-term research goals. Based on her summer internship experiences, she homed in on a goal to pursue a doctoral degree in genetics.

In addition to revealing her career interest, Ms. Grafstein said that the summer program taught her how to adapt to working on new projects, create her own posters, and complete data analysis. Importantly, the summer internship improved her presentation and scientific inquiry skills, which she felt made her a better scientist overall.

Ms. Grafstein's summer experience was not without challenges. For example, she struggled with designing a project appropriate in scope for the eight-week internship and learning to analyze the data efficiently. But Ms. Grafstein overcame these challenges by reading extensively about the topic and consulting with other members of the lab.

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SUMMER POSTER DAY 2023
Summer Poster Day 2023 will take place in person on August 3rd and virtually on August 4th. Check out the following pages for helpful information:

- Summer Poster Day main website
- “Creating and Presenting Posters” workshop registration
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NITA KANNEY, MPH

Nita Kanney, MPH, joined the laboratory of Edwina Yeung, PhD, Senior Investigator in the Epidemiology Branch, to participate in an epigenome-wide association study of newborn DNA methylation in the Upstate Kids Study. She also participated in science dissemination for the Study of Pregnancy & Neonatal Health.

Among Ms. Kanney’s achievements during her summer internship, the creation of an infographic about epigenetics was particularly memorable. She found that the process of creating the visual helped improve her ability to talk about the topic with a lay audience. Additionally, Ms. Kanney was proud of her work with NIH Biowulf, a high-performance computing system, which she used to perform an epigenome-wide association study.

Meeting the exceptional staff, postdocs, and scientists who contributed to those projects was a highlight of Ms. Kanney’s experience with NICHD. As was the support she received from her mentor and lab mates.

Along with performing omics-based data analysis and writing about the results, Ms. Kanney learned how to effectively communicate complex science and public-health topics to a broad audience. This experience reinforced her decision to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. Ms. Kanney plans to make her future research endeavors accessible through communication to broad audiences.

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PEYTON LEE

Peyton Lee completed her summer internship in the laboratory of Claire Le Pichon, PhD, Investigator in the Unit on the Development of Neurodegeneration. Over the course of the summer, Ms. Lee worked on characterizing functional and transcriptomic changes in a mouse model of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis.

Throughout her internship, Ms. Lee enjoyed hands-on exposure to the techniques that she had learned about in her biology and neuroscience courses at Colgate University. Reflecting on her time in the program, she recalled overcoming the challenge of developing independence with her project and learning how to analyze results with an unbiased and critical mind.

Ms. Lee's appreciation for the Summer Internship Program is evident. She remained in Dr. Le Pichon’s laboratory for an additional six months as part of a Bethesda Biomedical Research study group program offered by Colgate University. After graduation, she will return to Dr. Le Pichon's lab as a postbac for two years. Ms. Lee's long-term goals are to attend medical school, and she says that she “values the opportunity to participate in research—work that will translate into treatment for patients in the future.”

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RAGHIB NIHAL

Raghib Nihal completed his summer internship in the laboratory of Philip Adams, PhD, an Independent Research Scholar in the Group on Gene Regulation in Bacterial Pathogens. The aim of his project was to analyze transposon sequencing (Tn-seq) data in *Escherichia coli* for novel characteristics and to develop a high coverage plasmid for Tn-seq studies in *B. burgdorferi*.

When asked about his internship experience, Mr. Nihal replied that his summer internship was “one of the most impactful experiences he ever had in his academic career.” The respect that his fellow lab mates showed him—by asking about his research and encouraging him to present it to the lab—inspired him to become a better researcher.

Based on Mr. Nihal’s experience last summer, he developed an increased interest in a research career. His mentor, Dr. Adams, encouraged him to branch out to other institutes, and with Dr. Adam’s help, Mr. Nihal secured an internship at the National Cancer Institute.

Initially, Mr. Nihal thought he would focus on pursuing an MD degree without any research component. Now, however, he has an enhanced appreciation for the research side of medicine. For Mr. Nihal, his NICHD experience made him a better student, researcher, and, in his own words, an “advocate for knowledge.”

*Mr. Nihal’s Tips for Success:* The number one tip for success I would have for incoming fellows is to talk with mentors or principal investigators. They are such a wealth of information that it is hard to describe. Even if there may not be an answer, the lab members can almost always point towards a resource or direct you in the correct path for you to make an informed decision. If it is project related, their experience and willingness to take you as a mentee are a testament to their involvement in your success.

There are so many resources at the NIH it is hard to put it all here. The most notable, if I had to choose, would be the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) counselor appointments, career fair, and the poster day. The OITE has resources to help with grad school admissions, interviews, and any future plans one may have after the NIH. This is a resource I wish I had utilized last summer. Additionally, the Graduate and Professional School Fair has many companies and schools that advertise their programs to fellows. I would also encourage everyone to participate in the Summer Poster Day to interact with all of the other institutes at the NIH and present research to the community.
As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the NIH Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me, Dr. Hyo Won Ahn, at hyowon.ahn@nih.gov.

Want to get involved?

FelCom has two open positions:
» Recreation & Welfare and Health and Wellness Council Liaison
» Social Committee Co-Chair

For more information, please email Vasty Osei Amponsa (vasty.oseiamponsa@nih.gov).

If you are interested in running for one of the positions, please submit a statement of interest to FelCom Co-Chairs Vasty Osei Amponsa (vasty.oseiamponsa@nih.gov) and Marja Brolinson (marja.brolinson@nih.gov).

The Child Care Board (CCB) liaisons shared that Child Care Centers are offering enrollment spaces for fall openings and any child’s profile must be updated. Click here to access information on the current status of the NIH Child and Family Programs.

The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) liaison shared two mentoring-related events happening in June:
» myPDO MONTHLY: Inter-Institutional Mentorship and Mentor Training
  June 7, 1 p.m. ET
» NPA SMARTSKILLS: Recipe for Success: How To Mentor—and be Mentored
  June 27, 3 p.m. ET

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The Women Scientist Advisors Committee (WSA) liaisons shared action items from the NIH Women’s Listening Session in November 2022, presented by Emma Kaufman, JD, Acting Principal Strategist in the NIH Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. The key themes included:

» Greater representation of women in mid-level leadership and scientific positions
» Safety
» Pay inequality
» Acknowledgement of all staff regardless of grade level

Additional information can be found in the NIH DEIA Strategic Plan.

OITE is forming a committee this month to plan the upcoming National Postdoc Appreciation week in September. If you are interested in joining the committee, please send an email to the FelCom OITE rep Emily Summerbell (emily.summerbell@nih.gov).

NEW! The Women Scientist Fellows Committee within FelCom was recently established. If you are interested in joining this committee, or know someone who might be, please reach out to the co-chairs Eva Hellsberg (eva.hellsberg@nih.gov) and Rebecca Voglewede (rebecca.voglewede@nih.gov).

Did you know that there are several ways to stay informed on postdoc activities and events?

» Fellows listserv is the main source of FelCom event advertisements, so don’t forget to sign up.
» Visiting fellows can also sign up for the Visiting Fellows listserv.
» There is an NIH postdoc Slack channel to connect with other postdocs and join social events (sign up with a non-NIH email).
June Announcements

INTRAMURAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE SEPTEMBER 8

In 2018, DIR launched a competitive research funding opportunity for NICHD postdoctoral, visiting, and clinical fellows—the Intramural Research Fellowship (IRF). Its main objective is to promote grant writing among our intramural trainees, while enhancing awareness of the various application components of an NIH grant. These research fellowships are specifically for NICHD intramural fellows within their second or third year of training, preparing them for the process of applying for an NIH grant.

More information about the fellowship details (eligibility, scoring, review process, submission requirements, etc.) can be found at the Intramural Research Fellowship website.

For applications that result in an award, the appointed lab will receive $25,000 for one fiscal year (FY24) toward the fellow’s stipend, equipment, and/or travel to a scientific conference related to their proposed work.

The application deadline is Friday, September 8, 2023. There is a mandatory virtual training session for all prospective applicants on Wednesday, June 7, 1–2:30 p.m. (via Zoom). Please refer to the June Events for more information about this training session.

NICHD DIR WELCOMES OUR NEWEST DEVELOPING TALENT SCHOLARS

Established in 2011, the NICHD Developing Talent Scholar Program exposes young trainees to Division of Intramural Research activities, committees, retreats, forums, and workshops on team science, management, and grant writing. Each Scholar also has the opportunity to work in an NICHD lab, contributing to the lab’s research initiative. Please join us in congratulating our two new (and one continuing!) 2023 Developing Talent Scholar Program awardees:

» Regina Stasser de Ganzalez (Mentor: Anirban Banerjee, PhD)
» Sarah Alsuleiman (Mentor: Matthias Machner, PhD)
» Samra Beyene (Mentor: Timothy Petros, PhD) *

*This is Ms. Beyene’s 2nd year in the program

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FELLOWS RECRUITMENT INCENTIVE AWARD (FRIA) CONTINUES TO GROW NICHD’S TALENT POOL

Sarah Sheppard, MD, PhD, MS, has been awarded the 2023 FRIA award for her support of postdoc Luciana Daniela Garlisi Torales, MD. Dr. Torales studies the underlying molecular causes of a type of vascular malformation known as complex lymphatic anomalies. She is also investigating a novel genetic cause for central conducting lymphatic anomaly, one of the complex lymphatic anomalies.

The objective of the NICHD FRIA is to encourage investigators in the Division of Intramural Research to recruit a diverse group of individuals, including those from groups traditionally underrepresented in science, for potential postdoctoral fellowship appointments in NICHD laboratories.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION FOR SCIENTIFIC RETREAT DUE THIS MONTH

Please mark your calendars for the annual NICHD Intramural Scientific Retreat on Tuesday, September 26th. This will be an in-person event and will take place in the Porter Neuroscience Building.

The retreat organizing committee invites all scientific staff, fellows, graduate students and postbacs who are interested in presenting their work at this retreat to submit a title and a brief abstract of up to 150 words. Please use the submission form that was circulated via email on May 30th and return the completed abstract submission to Amaressa Abiodun at amaressa.abiodun@nih.gov by COB on Friday, June 16th for consideration.

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CONGRATS TO THE 2023 VIRTUAL POSTBAC POSTER DAY WINNERS

Congratulations to all NICHD postbacs who participated in the 2023 Virtual Postbac Poster Day competition on April 19–20, 2023. Over 50 NICHD postbacs joined the event! Teams composed of graduate students, postdocs, and NIH scientific staff scored the posters and student presentations for all postbac participants.

Announcing the NICHD postbacs (and their mentors) who received a top 20% score:
» Keith Ameyaw (Brant Weinstein, PhD, and Leah Greenspan, PhD)
» Tyler Bruno (Dan Sacket, PhD, and Benjamin Feldman, PhD)
» Juwaan Douglas-Jenkins (Gisela Storz, PhD, and Rilee Zeinert, PhD)
» Elizabeth Giordano (Mary Dasso, PhD, and Vasilisa Aksenova, PhD)
» Yi Hsien Hsieh (Juan Bonifacino, PhD, and Jennifer Kunselman, PhD)
» Alexandra Jean-Louis (Katherine Grantz, MD, and Jessica Gleason, PhD)
» Summer Khan (Mathias Machner, PhD, and Candice (Yuen Yan) Chang, PhD)
» Georgia Krikorian (Sarah Sheppard, MD, PhD, MS)
» Celia Martinez-Aceves (Brant Weinstein, PhD, and Jong Park, PhD)
» Katerina Melnyk (Forbes Porter, MD, PhD, and Niamh Cawley, PhD)
» Golnar Mostashari (Bruce Tromberg, PhD, and Timothy Quang, PhD)
» Emily Petroni (Philip Adams, PhD)
» John Prevedel (Brant Weinstein, PhD, and Kiyohito Taimatsu, PhD)
» Allison Saul (Katherine Rogers, PhD)
» Dhyanam Shukla (Sarah Sheppard, MD, PhD, MS, and Scott Paulissen, PhD)
» Daniel Soliman (Philip Adams, PhD)

NIH UNITE: ENDING STRUCTURAL RACISM (ESR) ACTIVITIES
The NIH UNITE initiative was established to identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported and the greater scientific community.

The ESR Intranet includes various resources like the Toolkit, Newsletter, FAQs, and other information.

UNITE Milestones and Progress and the Co-Chairs Corner (public ESR webpages) are other avenues to stay informed on UNITE efforts.
June Events

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 1–2:30 PM
Intramural Research Fellowship Training
*Mandatory for all prospective IRF applicants (attendance is a requirement for submission)*
*Registration required (check your emails!)*

This training session will cover various components of an NIH grant application and review processes, as well as tips for preparing an IRF application. Additional information can be found on the Fellows’ Wiki at Intramural Research Fellowship (IRF).

A link to register for the training event was provided in an email announcement from the Office of Education. Please contact Ms. Veronika Harker (veronika.harker@nih.gov) with additional questions or to receive the registration link.

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 12 NOON
Lunch Social with NICHD Trainees

Grab your lab mates and your lunch and join Dr. Erin Walsh from the Office of Education outside Building 10 (South Entrance). This will be a great opportunity to chat with your friends, meet other trainees, and network with the Office of Education. Plus, food trucks should be available on campus for those of you purchasing food.

This is a weather permitting event and more information will be circulated by email, from Dr. Walsh.

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THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 10 AM–12 NOON
The 2023 Three-minute-Talk (TmT) Program Final Competition

Imagine describing your research in less than three minutes. See how it’s done!

We invite you to join the final TmT virtual event for 2023, where our NICHD finalists will present their research stories with others from NHGRI, NIDCR, NIAMS, NEI, NCATS, NIDCD, NIAID, NIDDK, NIEHS and NLM.

A Zoom link will be circulated to NICHD trainees and staff a few days prior to the event.

ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS
NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education Events
For more information and registration, please visit Upcoming OITE Events.

NIH Library Training and Events
For more information and registration, please visit the NIH Library Calendar.