

VT PRIME

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VT PREP & IMSD EXTRA: NEWS FROM THE PREP/IMSD FAMILY

A Message from the Program Directors

Welcome to the Winter 2015-16 edition of VT PRIME. We have been very pleased with the reception of our quarterly newsletter and appreciate the community's feedback. Virginia Tech has recently been going through important and significant changes that indirectly and directly affect our IMSD/PREP family. Among these changes includes a new President and Provost and more recently the announcement of the appointment of a new administrator responsible for Inclusion and Diversity. We provided a description of Dr. Menah Pratt-Clarke in this edition of VT PRIME. We also hope you enjoy reflections by some of our illustrious alumni who were the guest speakers this Fall at our biweekly IMSD/PREP forum. Our 13th attendance at ABRCMS is also featured, and we hope the photos convey how much fun our scholars and everyone else involved have at this major networking event.

Program Directors: Ed Smith, Eric Wong, David Bevan
Project Associate: Leemar Thorpe, Catherine Einstein, Ombudsman: Anne McNabb

Suggested Readings:

A Conversation with Black Women on Race, Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson

READ ARTICLE [HERE](#).

Students' Protests May Play Role in Supreme Court Case on Race in Admissions, Adam Liptak

READ ARTICLE [HERE](#).

Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell

For trainees and others, the message we think you will get from this book includes the "power of messaging." Always try to make your message have "stickiness" and be very cognizant of the "power of context" in your messaging.

Save the Date:

IMSD/PREP/Carver Forums: **Thursdays at 12-1:15**; January 21, Dr. Elaine Nsoesie, IMSD alum, Assistant Professor, University of Washington.

MAPRS VCU: **May 25-26, 2016**, Contact Drs. Joyce Lloyd and Sarah Golding [HERE](#) for more information.

PREP application deadline: **March 1st, 2016**.

VT Graduation: **May 13-14**, 5 IMSD Undergraduates and 1 PhD scholar.

Dr. Karey Sutton, Keynote Speaker for 2015 Orientation

Our keynote speaker for our 12th Orientation was Dr. Karey Sutton, Second PREP Cohort and a 2010 PhD graduate from VT. Now the Lead Research Specialist at the American Association of Medical Colleges, Dr. Sutton engaged current scholars at various networking meals in small groups. Her path from Howard through VT PREP, a dissertation that focused on genome technology in minority communities, and a Postdoc at UNC Genomics Center was the basis of her keynote address. She provided her IMSD/PREP family her "back to school beatitudes" including "figure out nonnegotiables very early," "keep things in perspective," "try to work on something serious frequently," and "be your best advocate even as you nurture and cultivate existing and new networks."



Stephanie Adams, Head of Engineering Education

Dr. Adams was the last speaker in our Fall 2015 IMSD/PREP Biweekly Forum: arguably our best semester of talks ever.

In her message when reflecting on her path in academia, Dr. Stephanie Adams, a dropout twice, advised our trainees to:

1. Take everything that comes to you, even if it means being strong enough to quit your job.
2. Do not be afraid to go anywhere: after all she went to Lincoln, NE from "sunny Richmond, VA."
3. Do not get too far ahead of yourself: patience can help you make progress later on in life.
4. Write, write, write.



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NEXT ISSUE:

Profiles: Dr. Rikakis, Provost
 Dr. Roger Avery, former CoPD for PREP and Associate Dean, Vet School

VISITING ALUMNI

During the Fall 2015 VT-PREP and IMSD forums, a number of alumni came to talk to students about life after PREP and IMSD.



Snider Desir was a member of the 9th PREP Cohort from 2011-2012. He chose to attend VT because it was the most exciting college environment he had ever seen. He felt so much joy being here. The faculty had outstanding

personalities and seemed eager to have him in their labs. Snider had an outstanding PREP experience while he was here, but he jokingly advised Dr. Ed Smith to put a little less pressure on the students.

He would have not gotten through the first year of graduate school without the preparation from VT PREP. PREP completely changed his outlook on how science is performed. The program also provided him with intellectual tools to fight his way through the initial years of his PhD program.

Snider is a 4th year PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Integrative Biology & Physiology. He is keeping his options open and does not have a definite plan for the next 10 years, although he has developed a strong interest in having a career in administrative/student development at the college level. He is also looking into post-doctoral positions that could lead to a research faculty position.

He would advise any graduates thinking of continuing their education in grad school to undergo a researched focused year where the students learn what it is to be a graduate student. This will also help students know exactly what they want to do with their PhD.

During his visit to Virginia Tech, he was impressed by the success and size increase of the PREP/IMSD program since his departure 3 years ago. He thinks the leaders of the program are very dedicated to the students and provide them with the tools necessary for both short and long term achievements. The current students seem to have aspirations beyond his Cohort's outlook. He stated, "It's easy to see now why the VT PREP/IMSD is the best in the country."

Kevin Muite was a member of the 8th PREP Cohort from 2010-2011 as a graduate student. His talk was titled "From VT PREP to University of Chicago PhD Candidate in Immunology." He chose VT to assist in his education because he found the resources available to PREP students to be of the highest caliber. When he started graduate school in Chicago, he found he was already prepared for life as a graduate student thanks to his experience in the VT PREP program. This allowed him to quickly start his research and successfully pass his preliminary exams.

He is currently in his 5th year of graduate school at the University of Chicago. While there he has had the opportunity to present at several national conferences and attend an elite international conference in Brazil. He has received the John Wallace Young Investigator award and external funding for his research. He looks forward to graduating in the summer.

Kevin is not certain where he wants his career to be in 10 years. Hopefully, he will be somewhere making a difference for disadvantaged people throughout the world.

His advice to undergraduate students thinking about grad school is to take advantage of the laboratory facilities around their campus.



He says the best way to be sure if graduate school is something you may be interested in is to work in a lab doing research that interests you.

During his visit to Virginia Tech, he was amazed to see how large the program has gotten and many great students are currently enrolled in PREP/IMSD. He was encouraged by the amount of support his former mentors gave to him. Kevin stated, "I look forward to helping the program in any way I can in the future."

Jasmine Williams was a member of IMSD from 2009-2011 as an undergraduate student. Her talk was titled "From VT IMSD to Pitt PhD Student in Psychology." She chose to study at VT because of the current students' love for their school and the faculty and staff's commitment to student excellence. She felt it was the right place to be.

Her experiences in IMSD helped the transition to grad school flow more seamlessly. Dr. Smith and Dr. Dunsmore always had such high expectations of the students. While at the time she felt it was overly ambitious, she now feels that is the spirit you need to succeed.

Jasmine completed a summer research program each year of her undergraduate career at VT (MAOP, IMSD, and McNair). Looking back on it, she wishes she had worked harder to spend the summer at a different institution. Her love for Blacksburg hindered her from even temporarily relocating.

She is a 4th year doctoral student in Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. She is currently a K. Leroy Irvis fellow and graduate fellow at the Center for Urban Education. Her experience overall has been great. She has been blessed to have various mentors and advisors that push her beyond what she thinks she can do. If she had to choose, her most proud moments so far are getting her first author publication and being awarded a \$10,000 grant.

Her 10-year career goal is to be Dr. Ed Smith when she "grows up." Her advice to undergraduates is to get lots of experience in research, writing, presenting, and more writing (especially in the behavioral sciences.) She also advises PREP/IMSD leadership to assist undergraduates in locating research experiences at other institutions and connecting all scholars with the alumni network.

Before her visit to Virginia Tech, she forgot how welcoming and loving the VT community was. She was happily surprised to see such a close-knit PREP/IMSD cohort. She stated, "I came back to Pittsburgh and bragged about how great my alma mater is serving young scholars of color, and, for that, I am a proud alum."



VISITING ALUMNI CONT.



Brittany Taylor was a member of the 8th PREP Cohort from 2010-2011 as a post-bac student. She is currently a PhD Candidate at Rutgers University in the Biomedical Engineering program. Brittany will complete her

studies in Spring 2016.

Her 10-year goal is to become a full professor at an R1 institution. To new undergrads interested in graduate school, she suggests that they get involved in research early whether that is through programs at their schools or through NIH REU experiences.

Her advice to PREP/IMSD leadership is to continue to listen to the needs of the PREP/IMSD students and create a liaison between the scholars and the coordinators.

During her visit to Virginia Tech, Brittany was enthused by the number of new buildings on campus. She thought it was great to see the growth of the campus and all the renovations. She stated, "It is still a beautiful campus, and the food is still delicious! As always, I am impressed with the IMSD/PREP program and the caliber of training and students."

Ramine Alexander, PhD candidate, HNFE, VT and PREP alum from the 9th Cohort was the last of our alumni speakers. Her talk was called "From VT PREP to Virginia Tech PhD Candidate in Human Nutrition Foods



and Exercise and MPH." Having received a NIH supplemental grant, Ramine has experiences that our scholars can use and learn from beyond "succeeding in Grad School."

She has efficiently juggled her MPH program with the conduct of her research dissertation and also advised the scholars to "teach back other minorities and young people as way to give back and to enhance ones own learning."

Erica Arroyo was a member of our 8th Cohort and is currently a PhD candidate in Neuroscience at UCLA. Her talk was called "From VT PREP to UCLA PhD Candidate in Neuroscience."

Her long-term goals are to pursue a career as a principal investigator at a top academic institution in the U.S. Erica also hopes to mentor underrepresented students in effort to promote diversity in neuroscience and biological research. Diversity outreach programs, including VT-PREP, have bolstered her own academic success.

Erica has recently been appointed to serve as the Graduate Student Association representative for the UCLA Taskforce on Trans Advocacy and Inclusion. This taskforce has been assembled to continue expanding the success and to promote an environment conducive to learning, no matter what an individual's gender identity may be.

Erica is also interested in researching how defects in synaptogenesis during early post-natal development may contribute to sensory hypersensitivity in FXS using a well-defined mouse model, *Fmr1* KO.



Menah Pratt-Clarke: New Vice Provost for Inclusion and Diversity

Menah Pratt-Clarke will be the new vice provost for inclusion and diversity and the vice president for strategic affairs at Virginia Tech. She will also hold a faculty appointment as a professor in the School of Education in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Her bachelor's degree and master's degree are both from the University of Iowa, and her master's degree, law degree, and PhD are from Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Pratt-Clarke is thrilled to start her new position at Virginia Tech and has said that "[VT's] motto, 'Ut Prosim' (That I May Serve), reflects the unique and distinctive quality of this special institution. [She is] looking forward to serving the institution and helping to build upon the strong foundation and commitment of InclusiveVT."

READ ORIGINAL ARTICLE [HERE](#).



SACNAS 2015



VT's first participation in the SACNAS conference was in 2003 when Dr. Janet Rankin, Chair of the Advisory Committee, joined other leaders in PREP including Ms. Marilyn Kershaw (Ombudsperson), Reinhardt Laubenbacher and Ed Smith in beautiful Albuquerque, New Mexico. This year, IMSD undergrads and Ed Smith along with other VT faculty and staff were also there at the SACNAS 2015, the best yet in National Harbor, Washington DC.

ABRCMS 2015

In Seattle, on November 11-15, ABRCMS celebrated its 15th anniversary—and what a show. It was our 13th participation in this vaunted networking event and conference. In 2003, Virginia Tech's first participation, only three of us were there. This year, about forty attendees and four recruiting booths were from VT. MAOP, the grad school, TBMH, SBES/BME, and CVM were all represented. Our alumni were there and our scholars made several presentations including both oral and poster. (More photos available on our website.)



Scholars taking in Seattle and posing for a memorable shot: Shakarr, Kimberly, Cassie, Michaela, Twymenia, and Herbert (in front).



Kisha and Ariel being awesome advocates at our recruiting booth at VT for URM students.



Sarah, one of 8 presenters, discusses her poster, a major component of the VT IMSD/PREP family participation.



Some of the senior members of the IMSD/PREP family take time from networking in the hallways to pose: Ed, Tristan, Zac (Biochem), and Jody (MAOP).



Our Annual Networking at ABRCMS IMSD/PREP family dinner with alumni: Snider (PREP alum and PhD candidate, Minnesota) is in front on the right.

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS NEWS

Dr. Doris Zallen, professor of Science and Technology in Society, recently retired. In addition to being the Research Advisor to one of our most successful PREP scholars (Dr. Karey Sutton, Lead Research Specialist at American Association of Medical Colleges), Dr. Zallen was also instrumental in developing the first Responsible Conduct in Research training program at Virginia Tech. This program has been a long-time core requirement of training grants by NIH but has never been implemented at VT until now. Since PREP was VT's first competitively funded NIH training grant, Dr. Zallen's efforts were central to our continued success. She was integral to the first two cycles of the R25 and continued to be a significant contributor to the development of our scholars. For many years, her Tuesday night interactions with the trainees (as a part of the HR Bioethics course) was eagerly looked forward to by our most successful scholars.



In November, according to her lab's website, Natalia Gonzales, PREP Scholar, 7th Cohort, currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Chicago, was awarded the 2015 International Mammalian Genome Conference Trainee Scholarship. This scholarship supported her attendance to IMGC 2015 and the associated Trainee Symposium in Yokohama, Japan. At the conference, she won the "Outstanding Presentation Award."

In recognition of her outstanding presentation, Natalia was awarded the book "Genetics of the Mouse" from Springer. The title of her talk was "Genetic Architecture."

Jasmine Reid, 12th PREP Cohort, made the front page of the Web Page of the University of Rochester's Toxicology PhD program's. [READ ARTICLE HERE.](#)

Dr. Serena Parks, PREP Cohort IV, accepted a new position at the Children's Bureau, ACF, Department of Health and Human Services (Washington, DC) as a Child Welfare Program Specialist.

Dr. Mariam Konate, PREP Cohort IV, PhD Columbia University, started a new position as Research Scientist, National Cancer Institute, NIH.

Dr. Tameshia Ballard, Peer Mentor, PREP alum Dr. Tamishia Vaughan, wedded in Wilmington, NC.

Dr. Terry Kershaw, husband of our first Ombudsperson, Ms. Marilyn Kershaw, passed away unexpectedly at the University of Cincinnati.

Degree Completions:

Dr. Roberto Padilla, IMSD scholar, defended his PhD Dissertation in Chemistry at Virginia Tech. Started his new job as Research Scientist at KBI Biopharma, Durham, North Carolina

Dr. Emmanuel Ekwueme, completed his PhD in Biomedical Engineering at Rutgers University. Started a Postdoc position at Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School



2015 HOLIDAY PARTY



Our Christmas holiday celebration this year was the best so far. Including the leadership of IMSD scholars in our 8th Cohort Ms. Brittany Boribong, Kendra Bufkin, and Michele Paisier, almost 70 of us gathered at Bull and Bones to celebrate an awesome year in the IMSD/PREP/Carver family. Program leaders including Dave Bevan and Randy Grayson, Founder and former Director of MAOP and Current Director of Carver Fellowships and Professor Emeritus, PPWS, were joined by faculty from Psychology (Dr. Martha Ann Bell), Vet School (Nathan, Tonya LeRoith, and Bill Huckle), Biochem (Jake Tu and Zac Mackey), and Chemical Engineering (Luke Achenie). Our Keynote speaker was Dr. Glenda Gillaspay, new head of Biochemistry Department, who reflected on her career path to tell the students to take even high risks like her decision to leave her first faculty position to seek ungaranteed position at VT.



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