ORIENTATION FOR MONTANA’S NEW INVESTIGATORS

On the scenic campus of the University of Montana, newly funded investigators, from MSU and UM met for orientation on September 5th. The event, organized by Rikki Olinger and Nikki Graham, included presentations by the Directors of the various Cores. Following a Prayer led by Dr. Annie Belcourt (Blackfeet/Cree/Mandan-Hidatsa), and a welcome by Dr. Jovanka Voyich. Participants introduced themselves and their research projects. They explained to the group what they loved about where they grew up. Most of the Montana State University participants, Cores, and investigators participated via Zoom conference from Bozeman.

Presentations were delivered by the various Cores:

- Administrative Core: Dr. Jovanka Voyich, MSU; Jen Hodges, Fiscal Reporting, MSU; Communications Support, Chelsea Bellon, UM;
- Community Engagement and Outreach Core: Niki Graham, Montana Site Director and CRA, UM;
- Research and Design Core: Dr. Tim Thomas, ANTHC;
- Professional Development Core: Director Dr. Mark Quinn, MSU and Co Director Dr. Doug Kaminsky; MSU;
- Pilot Programs Core: Dr. Kari Harris, UM; Kathrene Conway, UM;
- Tracking and Evaluation Core: Dr. Jacques Phillip, UAE

Orientation for Alaska’s New Investigators will take place in Anchorage. It is being organized by Richard White, Program Coordinator.
MEET DR. MARK QUINN: NEW DIRECTOR OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CORE

Unwilling to be the only figure of the PD Core, Dr. Mark Quinn quickly includes his team, including Dr. Kelly Drew and Gloria Eldridge in Alaska and Dr. Doug Kominsky in Montana as Co-Directors, in discussing and developing new strategies and ideas for investigators. The team plans various workshops including manuscript writing: “It is important to get the research out where it will be useful,” he indicates. Additionally, “It is essential,” he maintains, “that new investigators develop the skills central to the advancement of their careers.” Thus, the Core is actively developing workshops in grant writing and mentoring activities for investigators’ career development.

A small-town boy from northern California, Mark has called Montana home for over 30 years. After high school, he enlisted in the Air Force and later spent three years at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. He completed his undergraduate degree in Point Loma College, San Diego. At the University of California, San Diego, Mark completed a graduate degree in Pharmacology and Physiology. His Postdoctoral training was done at The Scripps Research Institute. He arrived at Montana State University with another professor’s lab from The Scripps Research Institute. Initially he was assigned to the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, then the Microbiology Department, followed by the Veterinary Molecular Biology Department, which is now the Department of Microbiology and Immunology.

For 15 years, Mark has been Chair of the IRB at MSU. He is also now the Chair of the IACUC at MSU. Mark teaches a course entitled The Ethical Practice of Science, and contributes to the Advanced Immunology course. He will be teaching Introduction to Pharmacology this fall. His passion is research focused on the mechanisms of protection against infection by white blood cells. He is also interested in how traditional plants have been used in healing and how chemicals in traditional medicine plants can regulate immune responses.

Mark’s main goal for the Core is to develop new career enhancement opportunities and advertise their services and let researchers know that they are there for them.

“Microbes far outnumber people in the world.”

– MARK QUINN

He has been married for 39 years and smiles with pride as he chats about his children’s achievements. Emily is an accountant for a western wear firm, and after completing his ceramic and art degree at MSU, his son Gregg is a successful tattoo artist in Bozeman.

Soft spoken and mild mannered, one can imagine the soothing sounds of the natural world, and Mark casting flies into the cold waters of Montana’s creeks as he pursues his other passion, fishing. In what spare time he has, Mark balances research with reading and spending time with family.

For undergraduate students who wish for a career in biotechnology or microbiology, he advises his students to pursue their science passions.

“Science can lead to careers in medicine, dentistry, and even law.”

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DR. JINGJING SUN: AI/AN CTRP EARLY STAGE INVESTIGATOR AWARD:
INVESTIGATING ON THE FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION, ARLEE SCHOOL DISTRICT

“My hometown (in China) is home to the famous Yellow Mountain, an attractive tourist destination like the Yellowstone National Park in Montana. The scenery is so beautiful and magical. Unlike mountains in Montana, the mountains are known for their peculiar-shaped granite peaks.”

As an undergraduate in China, Dr. Jingjing Sun was an English Major at Anhui University in Anhui Province with the dream of hosting a TV show where she would travel around the world and share her passion for food, people and culture with her viewers. In her junior year, she began tutoring children English for an after-school program. She found it challenging as the students weren’t interested in learning anything from her. She searched for ways to “grab students’ attention” as she recalls that the students couldn’t wait to get out of the classroom. As she wandered through the university library, Jingjing came across a handbook about the psychology of learning, which described motivation, meta-cognition, and how to set up a classroom where students felt they belonged and experienced the joy of learning. Looking back, Jingjing suspected that it must have been a textbook in Educational Psychology used in the States. After that experience, Jingjing decided to change her career path and applied for graduate schools in the U.S.. Searching to the top programs found in US News, she applied to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and Vanderbilt University, and was thrilled to be accepted into the Ph.D. program in Educational Psychology at UIUC. The mentorship she received from her doctoral adviser and other faculty members in the program was instrumental in building a solid foundation for her research. She recalled reading and critiquing journal research articles, and joining senior doctoral students in writing a book chapter even before she started her Ph.D. program. She earned two Master’s Degrees, one in Education Psychology and one in Applied Statistics, as well as a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology.

“The opportunity to discover something new about how children learn and develop is so exciting! At the end of my Ph.D. program, I really wanted to pursue the research path and I feel well prepared by the village of mentors that had generously supported me over the years. I want to inspire this passion I have for research in the next generation.”

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Four years ago, Jingjing piled all of her possessions in her tiny car and moved from the mid-west to the west to join the University of Montana. She recalls her first year of professorship, “It was a steep learning curve. As a professor, you jump from one side of the table of being a student and sheltered to the other side where people expect you to be independent and do everything.”

Today, Jingjing’s investigation is taking her to the Flathead Indian Reservation to work with the Arlee School District. After having successfully completed a one-year development award with her collaborators, Drs. Anisa Goforth and Lindsey Nichols, Jingjing’s current project, entitled Project SELA (Social Emotional Learning Arlee): Improving Mental Health for Native American Youth through Social-Emotional Learning, will continue to develop a culturally appropriate, multi-layer Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program through Community-Based Participatory Research that includes SEL trainings for children, educators, and community members. The grant presents an unique opportunity to truly engage the community and school in developing each phase of the study.

Jingjing acknowledges her husband as the best supporter of her career.

GROWING OLDER, STAYING STRONG
Maya Pedersen, University of Montana researcher and doctoral THD candidate, and Mattea Grant Hoy, Tribal Health Department fitness specialist informed the Elders Committee about the Growing Older, Staying Strong elderly fitness health program they are working together on that promotes health and fitness across the lifespan of individuals. “We are looking for your guidance,” Pedersen told the Elders Committee. Willie Stevens of THD has been working with the program and expressed his satisfaction with it. “I am happy to be involved with this health improvement effort,” he said. “We want your involvement and would appreciate your guidance.” The research project uses a community-based approach to increase physical activity among American Indian Elders living on the Flathead Reservation. It will focus on intergenerational participation. “Physical activity is a good way to prevent or help with chronic health problems,” Pedersen said. “We want to work with you to find ways and how we can increase physical activity, and how to get your involvement.” “This will promote intergenerational activities,” Grant-Hoy said. Mary Jane Charlo said that field trips for Elders would be a good way to be physically active. She also said Elders should not have to work with numerous kids, and intergenerational activities should perhaps be one-on-one Elder-youth match ups instead of one Elder with a group of kids. She also suggested exercise classes at the tribal fitness centers as that would expose the Elders with community members. Tribal Council Elmo District Rep. Leonard TwoTeeth said that it would be a challenge to get the Elders together in some of the proposals. He suggested transporting them to Walmart and let them walk there (mall walks).

“Research has shown that mall walks have positive health effects,” Pedersen said and that Walmart walks could work like that. The group will return in the fall after the Elders Committee summer hiatus for updates.

UM and THD are seeking tribal community members to join and serve a one-year commitment on a Community Research Mentor (CRM) panel that will meet eight to 10 times beginning in August 2019 and going through July 2020. A CMR panel interest meeting is scheduled for June 18 from 12-2 p.m. at the Agnes Kenmille building on the Salish Kootenai College campus. A lunch will be provided. Folks interested in joining the CRM panel should contact: Maja Pedersen at (907) 590-9694; or email, at: maja.pedersen@umontana.edu.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BLACKFEET NATION

The AI/AN Center for Translational Research (CTRP) wishes to extend well-earned congratulations to The Blackfeet Agriculture Resource Management Plan on the one year anniversary of their awarded grant of $1.25 million dollars to be distributed over five years. The funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will assist the Nation in their struggle against suicide and substance abuse.

Written by Loren Birdrattler and Kimberly Paul, Ph.D. candidate, and former awardees for the AI/AN Center for Translational Research Program, the grant will utilize traditional Blackfeet culture and equine therapy. Loren Birdrattler was awarded a Community Grant and Kim Paul was awarded a Diversity Grant from AI/AN CTRP.

“The SAMHSA funding, under the Blackfeet Tribe and Pikiwani Lodge Health Institute, will add to the current cultural reclamation work in our communities while creating a continuation of opportunities toward building connection to the land, Blackfeet Country and the Niiitsitapiiikw way of life. In this way, we strongly believe that we can assist others who are working in the areas of substance misuse and suicide reduction by offering culturally relevant alternatives.

– Anonymous, quoted in Glacier Reporter, October 10, 2018
HIGH PRAISE FOR THE CTRP AI/AN CORES: DR. BRAD HARRIS AND NATHAN WOLF

Brought together through their love of fish and the natural world, Drs. Brad Harris and Nathan Wolf are the director and associate director, respectively, of the Fisheries, Aquatic Science, and Technology (FAST) Lab located at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage. Harris is a native Alaskan, born in Anchor Point just outside of Homer, grew up commercial fishing, and transferred to working on fisheries research boats. He completed his undergrad at Texas A&M. After a stint as the captain of an oil spill recovery vessel in the Beaufort Sea, he completed his MSc & Ph.D. in at the University of Massachusetts.

Wolf’s route to working with fish in Alaska was more circuitous, having completed his undergraduate and MSc work in the UK. He earned his Ph.D. in Wyoming as an animal physiologist. He also has some Sami heritage, sparking his interest in traditional subsistence activities.

The FAST lab, started in 2011, currently has 3 full-time faculty, 1 post-doc, a dozen graduate students, the majority of whom are women, and 13 affiliate faculty in other institutions world-wide.

Both strive to balance research priorities with life and family. When asked about hobbies, Harris remarked with a smile, “We like to carry 100 pounds of sand and rocks in backpacks up to the mountains.” Their work on traditional foods and medicines takes them into Alaska native villages where they are learning traditional ways from the local residents. This year the pair developed their AI/AN CTRP proposal, Examining Realized Constraints and Perceived Barriers to the Collection and Consumption of Fish Among Alaska Native Communities. The proposed project represents a unique collaboration between Alaska Native communities, the FAST Lab at Alaska Pacific University (APU), and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC).

They highlighted the amazing resources and mentoring they received from the various AI/AN CTRP Cores and have high praise for Kyle Wark, Alaskan Clinical Research Navigator for the AIAN CTRP Community Engagement & Outreach Core, Dr. Denise Dillard, Alaska Site Director, Gretchen Day and Peter Hauck from the RDEB Core.

For more information about the AI/AN CTRP Program visit the website at www.Montana.edu/aiian. If you have something you would like to see featured in an upcoming edition please send a note to the communications coordinator and look for the next newsletter in August.

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