



Science & Medicine Graduate Research Scholars Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Winter 2016

Greetings from the SciMed GRS Program,

We hope you will enjoy reading about the exciting developments in the SciMed GRS Program, enhancing underrepresented graduate student's experiences. We are off to a great start this year with over 30 new students joining this fall as SciMed Fellows. The peer mentors helped give a warm welcome, offering new venues for connection and support; facilitating the transition to graduate school and the Madison Community.

The annual SciMed GRS poster session this fall featured over 40 presenters, showcasing the research efforts of Fellows. We are quite excited about our growing alumni network as they provide excellent role models, mentors and unique perspectives and contributions to our community. We love opportunities to connect with alumni. Please visit us if you are on campus or email news.

- Abbey Thompson, SciMed GRS Coordinator and Dr. Sara Patterson, SciMed GRS Director

2525 Microbial Sciences
1550 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: 608-890-2308
Website:
<https://scimedgrs.wisc.edu>



SciMed GRS Participating Graduate Programs:

- Ag & Applied Economics
- Agroecology
- Agronomy
- Animal Science
- Bacteriology
- Biochemistry (IPiB)
- Biological Systems Engineering
- Biophysics
- Cancer Biology
- Cellular & Molecular Biology
- Cell. & Molecular Path.
- Clinical Investigation
- Comparative Biomed. Sciences
- Dairy Science
- Endocrinology & Reprod. Phys.
- Entomology
- Food Science
- Forest Ecology
- Genetics
- Horticulture
- Landscape Architecture
- Life Sciences Communications
- Medical Genetics
- Medical Physics
- Microbiology
- Molecular & Cell. Pharm.
- Molecular & Env. Toxicology
- Neuroscience
- Nutritional Sciences
- Pharmaceutical Sciences
- Physiology
- Plant Breeding & Plant Genetics
- Plant Pathology
- Population Health
- Soil Science
- Wildlife Ecology



First Year SciMed GRS Students and Peer Mentors at the 2015 Teambuilding Ropes Course on September 12th, 2015.

2015 By The Numbers

- Alumni: 72 (45 PhD; 27 MS)
- Current fellows: 150
- UW Graduate programs affiliated: 36
- National Science Foundation GRFP Recipients in SciMed community: 16
- Ford Foundation Fellowship Recipients in SciMed community: 2



Elaine Welch
Cohort 2011
Genetics

"Being a part of SciMed GRS has provided the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues of various disciplines across campus. The most valuable benefit though is the community and sense of belonging that is provided. It is truly encouraging to have a like-minded group of people, of a similar background, working towards a common goal."



Nadia Khan
Cohort 2013
Cellular & Molecular Biology

"What I value the most about being a SciMed scholar is the great community. I have made so many long-lasting friends that have supported me through the transition to graduate school, and important hurdles such as the preliminary exam. Abbey and Sara are also a great resource of professional connections that no matter what career choice you are considering, they can help you gain the skills and tools necessary to get there."



Daren Ginete
Cohort 2014
Microbiology

"SciMed GRS gave me the flexibility to choose the lab I want. Also, and more importantly, the fellowship allowed me to develop connections and friendships with diverse, like-minded graduate students who are passionate about diversity, outreach, and science."



Zulmarie Perez-Horta
Cohort 2011
Cellular & Molecular Pathology

"Being part of SciMed GRS experience in so many ways! As a SciMed GRS Scholar, I have acquired professional tools and have access to unique opportunities. I truly value the connections I have made, both professionally and personally, that have been a great support system through the ups and downs of being a grad student."



Amy Jancewicz
Cohort 2010
Cellular & Molecular Biology

"I value the non-judgmental support network outside of my program. SciMed GRS is the most welcoming group I've been a part of as a grad student."

Science Peer Mentoring Program: Continues to Grow

The SciMed GRS Peer Mentor Program continues to play a critical role for the incoming cohort both personally and academically. This past year, seven fellows volunteered to serve as mentors to 30 mentees. Having a peer mentor at a large and complex institution is helpful for many navigating the campus and transition.

Peer mentor Axel Ramirez Madera shares that "I believe that sharing my life experiences with mentees can help students better transition to graduate school and even beyond." Not only is Axel helping his mentees by giving them guidance, he is also using this opportunity to reflect on his decisions as a first year student and realize the benefits and consequences of his choices. This type of relationship works as a two-way street benefiting both the mentors and the mentees. Mentors and mentees gather independently in addition to regular SciMed GRS meetings and interactions are designed to help students acclimate to Graduate School. Highlights include a meet and greet at Memorial Union Terrace, an annual winter shopping trip, Salsa dancing, and a teambuilding ropes course. Mentors also help facilitate monthly lunches with the cohort offering insights on the experiences and challenges that many are experiencing during their first year.

"The most rewarding aspect of being a peer mentor is that the mentor/mentee relationship can evolve into a friendship for a lifetime," says Ramirez Madera. There appears to be a mutually genuine feeling of enjoyment shared between the mentors and mentees. The rooms are full with laughter, joy, excitement and a drive to be successful.



Top: First Year SciMed GRS Students and Peer Mentors at Union South cohort meet-up.

Bottom: Grad Students Daren Ginete (2014 Cohort) & Krizia Perez Medina (2015 Cohort) at Union South cohort meet-up.

2015 Selected Topics & Events

AUGUST:

- SciMed GRS Welcome Dinner hosted by Dr. Sara Patterson

SEPTEMBER:

- Resource and Fellowship Session on NSF, NIH and Ford fellowships

OCTOBER:

- SciMed GRS Annual Poster Session

NOVEMBER:

- Faculty Career Path Talk with Dr. Troy Runge

AND...

- Roundtable Lunch with visiting faculty, Dr. Javier Irazoqui



SciMed Attendees with other UW Associates at SACNAS, Society for Advancement of Chicano and Native Americans in Science, in Washington DC.

SciMed GRS Outreach Committee: Giving back to the Community

By Nadia Khan, Co-Chair of SciMed GRS Outreach Committee

The SciMed GRS Outreach Committee strives to disseminate information about higher education in the life sciences and highlight the importance of scientific research throughout our community. Our main goal is to expose underrepresented minorities of all age levels to STEM fields by engaging in relevant scientific discussions and hands on demonstrations. As minority graduate students, we stand in a privileged position to serve as examples of success and role models for the upcoming generation. Our own experiences and backgrounds provide a gateway to form unique connections with younger students of a similar background, and provide guidance to seek equal opportunity for higher education. The goal of any one of our outreach efforts is to leave a positive image on the younger generation, such that they believe a career in life sciences is absolutely attainable and available to them.

An example of one of our outreach efforts is our collaboration with Centro Hispano Juventud, or a local group in the Madison area that provides afterschool academic and developmental support to Latino youth. In April 2015, we visited four Centro Hispano middle schools to provide a lesson on college prep. We taught about the importance of a college education; the different careers attainable with a college degree; and provided resources about when and where to apply for scholarships and financial aid. Many of these students are from low-income areas of Madison, and often from homes in which college graduates are not represented. The overall feedback we received from Centro Hispano instructors is that students began asking more questions about the college degree track. Some even picked out their “dream schools” to apply to for the future. This is one of the many events we do in the Madison area to carry out our mission of exposing underrepresented students of all ages to higher careers in STEM.

Students interested in becoming involved in the committee, please contact Karla Esquilin-Lebron (esquilin@wisc.edu) or Nadia Khan (nnkhan2@wisc.edu) directly.



Axel Ramirez Madera and Jamie Wilbur help children identify pumpkin, apple, and pea pod seeds.



Jose Rodriguez Molina demonstrates the concept of carbon footprint.

Student Spotlight



Name: Jose Rodriguez Molina

Graduate Program: Cellular and Molecular Pathology

SciMed GRS: 2011 Cohort

Advisor: Dr. John Svaren

What is your favorite part about being part of the SciMed GRS Community?

I believe that professional development opportunities and seminars that are given by SciMed GRS are essential for graduate students. Unfortunately, some graduate programs do not offer these types of seminars or professional development events, and therefore I feel very lucky to have been part of SciMed GRS. Furthermore, I have been able to meet many other graduate students with a similar ethnic background as me. I believe this is one of the factors of the program that helped me adjust to the UW campus a lot easier than if I were to have done it alone.

Jose Rodriguez Molina actively working in Dr. Svaren's Lab on his ongoing project to better understand Schwann Cells.

Do you feel that you get both an academic and personal value from SciMed GRS?

Yes. From an academic stand point, I really believe that the professional development and fellowship seminars, that included how to apply for fellowships and the directions to obtaining a post doc had given me more academic confidence for my professional carrier aspirations. In regards to personal value, this program has allowed me to make friends and feel like I am a part of a family.

Tell us about your research.

My research focuses on Schwann Cells. These cells are located in the peripheral nervous system, and are mainly responsible for insulating electrical currents on nerve cells. Our interest in Schwann cells is to understand gene expression regulation and the role of such genes like Dusp15 (Dual specificity phosphatase 15). We want to learn and understand the normal development and biology of these cells.

How did you get started?

My inspiration for pursuing a graduate degree in Cellular and Molecular Pathology came from many sources, but mainly from the combination of my brother and from my experience with participating in undergraduate research. Knowing that I can make a difference in the world, through science, made me decide to pursue a PhD.

What has been the value of serving as a peer mentor?

I want to help students feel more at home. I feel satisfied by talking with other people and hearing out their concerns, ambitions and finding a way to help them achieve their goals. One of the things that I love about being a mentor is that I can help students with selecting the right mentor and help them be successful and confident about whatever decisions they make.

What are your plans for graduation?

I hope to secure an international Postdoc. I would like to travel to Germany, and spend a few years doing research and assimilating myself into another culture.



Alumni Spotlight

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I was born in Nigeria but grew up in Stevens Point, WI. I completed my undergraduate studies in biomedical science at Marquette University. Prior to beginning my graduate studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison, I obtained a Master of Physician Assistant Studies degree from the University of Iowa.

Can you describe your research in a few sentences?

My research efforts focus on individual, provider, and health system factors, and their impact on social disparities in mental healthcare. My current work, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Connections Program, aims to decrease disparities in mental healthcare by understanding the role of physician assistants and nurse practitioners in the management of depression within primary care settings.

How did SciMed GRS prepare you for your current position?

SciMed GRS provided a safe environment for me to grow as a researcher. Through the program I had numerous opportunities to present by research and get feedback from my peers and the senior faculty. The versatile nature of the program was helpful for learning about other research opportunities and expanding my professional network. I learned about the postdoc position I ended up accepting through an informal conversation with a fellow SciMed GRS scholar.

What are some of the biggest challenges or achievements you have faced in your new career?

In 2014 I was among a select group of junior investigators in the country to receive a two year, \$100,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of their New Connections Program. More recently, I was selected as a Clinical Research Scholar through the Clinical and Translational Science Institute of Southeast Wisconsin. The goal of the Clinical Research Scholars Program is to provide didactic training and individual mentoring in career development and clinical research to junior faculty who are committed to pursuing careers in academic medicine as independently funded, clinical and translational investigator. My biggest challenge is trying to achieve balance. Not only balancing my roles as an academic researcher, mother, and wife. But also balancing my research, teaching, administrative, and service responsibilities.

What advice do you have for new graduates?

Take every opportunity to present your work and continue to build your professional network. When you do add someone to your network try to keep them updated on your research and career goals and progress.

What prepared you to land a faculty position and what would you recommend current SciMed GRS student do to pursue that route?

I had wonderful mentors as a



Name: Dr. Abiola Keller

Degree: PhD in Population Health Sciences, 2012

Currently: Director of Clinical Research/Clinical Assistant Professor, Marquette University

graduate student and postdoc at UW-Madison who were instrumental in helping me navigate the job market. I also found it very helpful to meet with junior faculty who had recently been on the job market to get their feedback on my application materials and insight on how to successfully navigate the process.

What's next for you?

My long term career goal is to lead an independent research program focused on decreasing disparities and improving mental health outcomes for vulnerable populations by identifying and disseminating methods for optimizing healthcare delivery and self-management behaviors among these populations. As my career develops, I will continue to pursue extramural funding and disseminate my research findings in peer-reviewed publications.



SciMed Graduate Research Scholars
 2525 Microbial Sciences
 1550 Linden Drive
 Madison, WI 53706

Nonprofit Org.
 U.S Postage
 Paid
 Madison, WI
 Permit No. 658



WISCONSIN
 UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



SciMed Graduate
 Research Scholars
 2525 Microbial Sciences
 1550 Linden Drive
 Madison, WI 53706
 Phone: 608-890-2308
<https://scimedgrs.wisc.edu>
 We welcome any questions,
 comments and updates!
 Please direct correspondence
 to:
 Abby Thompson
 SciMed GRS coordinator
 Email:
 abbey.thompson@wisc.edu
 Phone: 608-890-2308

Support SciMed Graduate Research Scholars
 I/we wish to join other students/alumni industry, and friends in enhancing service opportunities in the SciMed GRS Program by contributing as indicated below. Please make checks payable to: UW Foundation-Science & Medicine Graduate Research Scholars contributions can also be made online through the SciMed GRS Website: <http://scimedgrs.wisc.edu>

Enclosed in my/our contribution of \$ _____ I choose to specifically designate my gift for the following:

- The greatest need of the program
- Student Support (travel to conferences etc.)
- Programmatic events including invited speakers

I/we wish to pledge \$ _____ each year for _____ Years beginning (year). Please remind me to of the annual amount I have pledged in _____ month.

Please charge my gift of \$ _____ to my _____ American Express _____ Card Number: _____ Cardholder's name (please print) _____ Cardholder's signature _____ date

My company will match this gift; company form is enclosed

Name: _____
 Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: _____

Return Form to: UW Foundation, US Bank Lockbox 78807
 Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807