Long before people began arriving at the site of the 2010 BCDB retreat, plans were being hatched deep in the depths of Whitehead (or at least 400...). Katie, Sara, and Kevin were busy gearing up for the daunting task of planning a retreat; little did they know what a great success they were about to pull off!

The weekend kicked off with the alumni symposium, which I thought was a great idea, and it turned out really well. The talks were informative and inspired self-reflection of our own career goals and aspirations. We would soon get to know the alumni even better and on a more personal level, I wonder if they knew what they were getting themselves into...

We set out early the next morning, and spent some time on Tara Blvd, which I personally enjoyed. Once we got there we were split into our groups by some interesting jigsaw puzzles and received our nametags. Who wouldn’t want to see Rick in a Barbie nametag?

Then the fun really began with the word puzzles. Katie, Rasagyna, and Beth led us all in a riveting science based game where we had to guess our answers on a whiteboard. Needless to say, it got a bit competitive, and some professors were convincing us to cheat (I won’t name and names, Win)! I think Victor really stole the show, though, I wish we had a video of that so we could watch it over and over. I think Anita quieted him down with a well-placed grape. Then, there was Pictionary, which was interesting in its own right. Secondary messenger was the most ridiculous one. The last of the puzzles were the rebus puzzles, and you could tell how hard they had worked on these; I personally enjoyed the DNA fingerprint.

The next thing on the agenda was the alumni panel. This gave us an opportunity to see them in a more personal way, versus the more formal setting of the previous day, which I thought was really important. We then broke for lunch, which gave us even more of an opportunity to get to know the alumni, as well as people we don’t see on a regular basis.

Lunch was followed by free time, which is where the fun really began. Many started out by canoeing on the lake, although some paddlers left something to be desired (there’s photographic evidence, Kevin). Then there seemed to be a split in the activities between blobbing and kickballing. I heard the kickball game was a close one. The blob was amazing, and fulfilled a childhood dream for me (anyone seen Heavyweights?). Marc Schureck and Mike Koval were champion launchers, and Sara was the only one to make it to the end of the log, although the attempts were quite entertaining.

We then moved on to archery and the high ropes course. The high ropes course (Continued on page 3)
The Director’s Corner  Rick Kahn, Ph.D.

The 2010-2011 school year is off and running, and heading toward steady state, after a flurry of beginning-of-the-year activities that included orientations, TATTO training, welcome parties, and our annual BCDB Retreat. I was asked to write about what’s new in the program and that could be the Foundations course for year 1, the Retreat, the new required Statistics course in the Spring semester of year 2, or other aspects of the program. But in the past few days I have had the chance to read over comments from attendees at the retreat and this morning I got an email from one of the alums who attended the retreat so I decided instead to write about something old – the faculty.

It has always amazed me how much time and effort our faculty devote to teaching and training graduate students. My amazement comes from several places; (1) being trained myself in a world (or at a time) when very little time or effort was spent training students, (2) knowledge that our faculty donate their time to the graduate programs and associated activities without remuneration, and (3) knowing how much time it really takes to perform many of the tasks involved but which don’t appear so time consuming unless one wants them done well. I think many of us are emulating former mentors who played important roles in our own training, as acknowledgement, payback or homage. That is certainly true in my case. I often remember the lessons I picked up from working with Paula Stern at Northwest-ern, who devoted so much of her time to students of all sorts and treated me as a colleague and with respect despite my being a teenager at the time, and only wish I could approach her contributions to training.

I was recently asked to present to the M1 and M2 students in the MSTP program a 7 minute description of our program and fortunately had the chance to speak after other program directors spoke about theirs. It was pretty clear that many of the programs in GDBBS are very similar so I was looking for a way to summarize our program that was both positive and true. Simple – our faculty and our students. We require fewer classes than any other program but every one of our courses is labor intensive on the part of the faculty and provides real depth in aspects of training that we value. I challenge anyone to find a more actively engaged faculty who are as willing to donate their time for students.

What do I mean faculty donate their time? The graduate school has a faculty of exactly 0 people. We are each employed in one of the other schools (Emory College, School of Medicine, etc) who pay our salary and dictate the factors that will be taken into consideration for promotion, tenure, and salary. Suffice it to say that teaching/training of graduate students is not written large in such lists of factors (though Keith has been banging the drum on this and may be making some progress). Thus, those who are actively engaged in our graduate program do so for the best reasons and do it without expectation of payback beyond the enjoyment and challenge of teaching and of getting younger scientists enthused by the same ideas that drives you every day and the possibility of working together to test those ideas.

Why am I amazed at how much time it takes? If you have to ask it is because you haven’t done it. It used to take me one full week to prepare a one hour lecture (of the PowerPoint variety). It takes me about one full day to critically review a paper or a grant and when I sit on a study section I typically review 10 grants or two full weeks of nothing else. Writing a grant can easily take a full month, with very little else, and writing a paper is a several weeks project at best. If you add up the grants and papers written and reviewed, lectures prepared and presented, seminars, lab meetings, travel to meetings or seminars, meetings with lab personnel, I understand why I never seem to have time to read papers in my field or attend all the seminars I should. And yet despite this we have over half of our faculty already involved in teaching in the BCDB Foundations class in its first year, requiring two weeks of 10 hours/week in class, plus the preparation time required (which is more than that spent in class!)

We also have over a third of the faculty who are on committees charged with running aspects of the program. All volunteer work yet it goes on year after year. So my hat is off to those brave souls who have volunteered their time now and over the years; this is what has made the BCDB program such an outstanding training environment.

I would also like to address the other side of this coin; those faculty in our program who are not as actively engaged. There are many reasons why many faculty members do not participate more, the leading one I assume is that partial list of other duties above and the limit of 24 hours per day. But others include greater activity in other graduate programs, higher teaching load (e.g., in the College), clinical responsibilities, administrative roles, conflicts with the timing of program activities. It is because faculty members do have so many pulls on their time that I remain amazed at the extensive commitment that we have had over the years and that continues.

Finally, I lied when I said that there was no compensation for being actively involved in training students. The payoff was exemplified this past August when we got a chance to see six of our former trainees return and tell us of their successes and the value they each place in the training and opportunities they received from the combination of their hard work and the efforts of the faculty and other students in the program.
was attempted only by the brave, which included Sara, Marc, Crys, Mike, and Anita. There was quite the crowd, and the paparazzi even got involved, but he had to wear a safety helmet, so he wasn’t as well hidden. We then retreated back to our rooms to freshen up before dinner, and then we broke into groups for trivia. The trivia game came down to the last question, with “Grouchy”, “Stop Staring at my Cleavage Furrows” and “XXtraordinary” all within a few points going into the bonus. “XXtraordinary” pulled out the win, and “Your Mama” came back from next to last to steal second place. It was definitely a photo finish.

This was then followed by the most interesting part of the retreat: glow stick cell division. The DNA was being pretty rowdy, which is pretty typical. Following the completion of mitosis, the glow sticks were confiscated and used around the bonfire, some people even donned some tribal outfits. Then, BCDBers, both young and old slowly retired to their rooms after a night full of fun. The retreat was really great this year, we all got to know each other better and meet the incoming class. Having such a fun weekend definitely set the tone for the start of the year. Here’s to keeping that momentum going!
The MS Bike Ride

September 11 to 12 marked the 24th anniversary of a two-day bike ride fund-raising event for multiple sclerosis, a progressive disease caused by autoimmune attack of the central nervous system. The event was organized by the Georgia Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), and held at beautiful Callaway Gardens just under two hours south of Atlanta.

The Georgia Chapter of NMSS contacted Dr. Yue Feng regarding this exciting event, since research in her lab is linked to multiple sclerosis (MS). Dr. Feng and her family, and two BCDB graduate students in the Feng lab whose research is supported by NMSS, Andrew Bankston (4th year), and myself, Mariana Mandler (3rd year), volunteered at the event and met some extraordinary people, including one lady that had just been diagnosed a year and a half ago.

She seemed perfectly normal in meeting and conversation but mentioned she had been having terrible pains in her feet and joints. After visiting over 10 doctors she was finally accurately diagnosed, was prescribed Copaxone, a drug thought to slow disease progression, and has been free from new lesion development for the last 6 months!

As this was both Andrew’s and my first time volunteering for such an event related to our own research it was very heart-warming and motivating for both of us, especially when interacting with the patients. It was a great opportunity for us to step back and view just how important our work is by advancing biomedical research. The event was a great success. There were at least 1300 registered bikers that rode either the 100-mile track on Saturday, and the 35-mile or 65-mile track on Sunday. Close to $1,000,000 was raised, which certainly brought us one step closer to stopping the devastating disease, multiple sclerosis. If such a sponsored event exists that supports research for elimination of a particular disease related to your work, or even unrelated to your work, I recommend you somehow get involved!!

For more information visit: www.nationalmssociety.org/chapters/GAA/index.aspx

Places to Go Around Georgia

As the weather starts to cool down this fall, take some time to explore the beauty and adventure that Georgia has to offer. If you are interested in getting away for a day trip or even overnight, here are a few locations that are a must-see around the state:

- Only 68 miles north of Emory, Dahlonega, GA is a great weekend getaway. Not only does the area boast some great hiking and waterfalls, you can also experience the fabulous culture by visiting one of the wineries or art stores around the square. Each year more than 200,000 people visit the area to browse more than 30,000 vendor booths and eat lots of great southern food at the Gold Rush Festival. Don’t miss the festival this year October 16th-17th.
  -> For more information on hiking trails, waterfalls, wineries and more in Dahlonega, visit www.dahlonega.org

- Unicoi State Park, located 85 miles north of Emory, is another great destination for camping, hiking, mountain biking, as well as shopping and great food in Helen (only 2 miles away). Unicoi encompasses more than 1,000 acres of land with a 53 acre lake and multiple places for you to stretch your legs and enjoy nature!
  -> Learn more about Unicoi at www.gastateparks.org/info/unicoi

- Every weekend in October, Helen hosts an Octoberfest festival that features polka dancing, Bavarian food, and drinking until the wee hours of the morning. Check it out any weekend this year from September 23rd to October 31st.

- For those of you more interested in a beach trip, check out Cumberland Island, the southernmost barrier island off the coast of Georgia. Accessible only by water, this camping experience is rustic and beautiful, complete with wild horses. Ferries depart St. Marys, GA daily.
  -> For more information on activities and reservations, check out www.nps.gov/cuis
Know your EC: Qualifying Exam Director

Paul Doetsch, Ph.D.

"I have been a faculty member of the BCDB Program since its inception in the Division of Biological and Biomedical Sciences and have been involved in graduate student training and education at Emory since 1985 - well before most of our current students were born! Of the 16 PhD’s who have graduated from my lab, 5 have been BCDB Program students. It has been a great experience to be a part of a successful program that has expanded and flourished in so many ways over the years. Of course, as our program has grown and diversified over time, it presents several challenges for identifying the areas and sub-disciplines that should comprise the core background of our students as they delve into their doctoral research projects. The written qualifying exam ("Qual Part 1") that is administered at the end of the first year, is the first major indicator for revealing whether or not a student has an adequate breadth and depth of knowledge crucial for high quality scientific inquiry and bench experimentation. For first year students, the weeks preceding the qual exam are met with trepidation and stress.

The job of the "qual exam czar" is to configure a comprehensive test that fairly and realistically assesses a student’s understanding of basic concepts in biochemistry, cell and developmental biology. Students must be able to apply those concepts to solve a host of problems ranging from data analysis and interpretation, to proposing experimental strategies and methods, to construction of models and posing mechanisms. It is not only a daunting task to take the exam but also to put it together and that is the primary responsibility of the qualifying exam director. This executive committee position is usually held for a period of three years and next spring will mark the third qualifying exam that I will coordinate for the Program.

Students might wonder how the exam is actually configured. For an exam given in late May each year, the process starts in February, just after recruitment week when I send out requests to all BCDB faculty to submit questions for the exam. Faculty submit questions covering their areas of expertise (research and / or teaching). Once a critical mass of candidate questions have been received, I convene a meeting of the exam committee (comprised of BCDB faculty including several executive committee members) to sort through the candidate questions and ensure that an appropriate range of topics is covered in a balanced way that fairly reflects coursework and other program prerequisites. I harass and cajole my colleagues for appropriate questions and I always worry about whether we will end up with the right combination of topics. Candidate questions are critiqued and discussed by the committee and often revised for content and clarity. Several rounds of review and discussion (sometimes very lively) take place before the penultimate version of the exam is produced. At that point, the exam is reviewed by the program’s student representatives for an additional level of quality control and, if appropriate, additional final revisions are made. Students must answer 10 questions from a field of 12 and must score an average of 7.0 points to pass each question.

Grading is done by the question’s author and a second BCDB faculty member who also has expertise in the topic area. Faculty graders usually evaluate one or two questions and are required to communicate with their grading partners to ensure that there is some level of agreement on the quality of the answer they are evaluating. The involved faculty approach the entire process quite seriously and work diligently to produce a fair and reasonable exam. The majority of our students usually do well on the exam which makes my job a little easier and more rewarding! Of course, adequate preparation is the key to success on the qual exam. Remember what Abraham Lincoln said: "Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

Congrats to BCMB Training Grant Trainees

I am pleased to announce this year’s trainees chosen for support by the BCDB/BCMB NIH-funded training grant. As you all know, support by the training grant is an honor and given to those trainees in BCDB who are performing well academically and are making excellent progress on their thesis work. This year, the trainees chosen for support, and their mentors, are: Daniel Barron (Moberg lab), Nick Bauer (Doetsch/Corbett labs), Benjamin Nanes (Kowalczyk lab), Pearl Ryder (Faundez lab), Sara Stahley (Kowalczyk lab), Kevin Van Bortle (Corces lab), and Kathryn Williams (Bassell lab). You should expect to hear from them in the near future as they prepare for this year’s annual BCDB Symposium as well as get our Friday JC off and running. Please join me in extending them our sincere congratulations.

Barry Shur, Ph.D.
Meet the First-Years

Megan Allen  
*University of Georgia – BS ’10*  
My fun fact is that I idolize Alton Brown (chef from food network).  
Hooray for fun facts!

Shea Cadwell  
*Georgia State U – BS ’06*  
I was born in Anchorage, Alaska. I recently went back and I climbed Flattop Mountain.

Ben Nanes (MD/PHD)  
*Washington U (St. Louis) – AB ’08*  
Fun fact: I once slept through a hurricane with the windows in my room left open.

Laura Newman  
*Indiana U Bloomington – BS ’09*  
I guess something interesting about me that people have been asking about would be that the bag I carry around is a Dungeons & Dragons reference. It has extradimensional space to fit all my stuff and is used by wizards (which I usually play in D&D).

Emily Kuiper  
*Pennsylvania State U – BS ’10*  
My fun fact: I’m left handed.

Dawn Barnes  
*University of Arizona – BS ’05*  
My interests are broad and include dance, rock climbing, the arts and New England sports teams. I have lived in MA, NM, IA, MD, and AZ and look forward to calling GA "home."

Jadiel Wasson  
*University of Georgia – BS ’09*  
I would say that an interesting fact about me is that I practice Tae Kwon Do.
Inside the DSAC

Mike East

The Division Student Advisory Council (DSAC) is comprised of eight graduate students that represent each of the eight programs in the GDBBS. Our primary purpose is to address the concerns of the students within our respective programs and voice those concerns to the program director and the director of the division, Keith Wilkinson. While some aspects of university life are outside of our control, such as parking fees, we have had considerable success in influencing both division and graduate school policy. So if you have any suggestions or concerns about Emory's policies, I represent an official channel and voice for those concerns for BCDB.

On the lighter side, DSAC also functions as a planning committee for division events. Each year we organize several mixers with plenty of free food and alcoholic drinks exclusively for the students within the GDBBS. I hope you have and will join us for these events as they are some of the few university sponsored social events that cater directly to the sciences without contamination from graduate students in the humanities and social “sciences.”

Each year we also sponsor the GDBBS student research symposium. This event offers an avenue for students to report their scientific research to graduate students and faculty from other programs in either a poster or talk format.

I have served as your DSAC representative for over a year and look forward to representing the BCDB program in this capacity in the year to come. If you have any suggestions or concerns about graduate school life or policy please feel free to contact me at meast@emory.edu or stop by my lab in RRC G218 to discuss them with me. I’m happy to serve as your representative and I look forward to hearing from you.

Meet the First-Years (cont’d)

Marc Schureck
University of Florida – BS ’10
I enjoy playing baseball. My junior year high school baseball team had 7 of the 9 starters drafted.

Danny Barron (MD/PHD)
UC San Diego – BS ’06
I like board games, soccer, and zombies. :) And I used to do WWII reenacting.

Wenji Su
Hong Kong U of Sci/Tech – BS ’10
I really love pet birds, especially parrots. My record was owning 8 birds at the same time! (4 African Fischer’s lovebirds, 2 parakeets, 2 java finches).

Now I have a cute cockatiel.

Jen Rha (MD/PhD)
U Pennsylvania – BA ’07
I’m allergic to mangoes--until my mouth closes shut, but I still eat them sparingly. :)
The Lagging Edge

**You’re trying to predict the behavior of a complicated system? Just model it as a simple object, and then add some secondary terms to account for complications I just thought of.**

**Easy, right?**

So, why does *your field* need a whole journal, anyway?

![xkcd comic](image)

**Liberal-Arts Majors May Be Annoying Sometimes, But There’s Nothing More Obnoxious Than a Physicist First Encountering a New Subject.**

**Overheard at the Retreat**

| A: To blob is to bond! | 1. Wylie Nichols |
| B: Shake and Bake | 2. Emily Kuiper |
| C: The glow sticks reminded me of mating fireflies. | 3. Paul Doetsch |
| D: This is a bad DAPI stain | 4. Mike Koval |
| E: AHHHHHHHHHHHH!!! | 5. Win Sale |

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**Around Town**

⇒ Taste of Atlanta, October 23rd-24th at TechSquare in Midtown. [www.tasteofatlanta.com](http://www.tasteofatlanta.com)

⇒ Atlanta Greek Festival, September 30th-October 3rd at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral right here in Decatur! [www.atlantagreekfestival.org](http://www.atlantagreekfestival.org)

⇒ Little 5 Points Halloween festival and parade, Saturday October 16th. [www.l5phalloween.com](http://www.l5phalloween.com)

⇒ Dali: The Late Work: Through Jan 9, 2011, @ High Museum of Art

Not satisfied yet?? Check out: [www.atlanta.net/visitors/calendar/events.html](http://www.atlanta.net/visitors/calendar/events.html)