

DLS Spotlight

Division of Life Sciences

Letter from the Dean

Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of the Division of Life Sciences Newsletter. We are excited to highlight some of the recent achievements and developments that attest to our continued strength and vitality across the spectrum of Life Sciences. We extend heartfelt appreciation to both current and past faculty, students, and staff for their steadfast dedication to the overall DLS mission which is to foster outstanding research, teaching, and training across the breadth of Life Sciences. We are privileged to celebrate the people of DLS and their contributions and commitment to excellence.

Don't forget to check out the special announcement at the end of the newsletter!

Lori R. Covey
SAS Dean of Life Sciences

Departmental Highlights

Biological Sciences: Four Olympus microscopes have been generously donated to support Girl Scout Ava Stable's Microscope and Telescope program at the Western Pocono Community Library in Brodheadsville. This marks the library's first-ever microscope and telescope lending program. For more details about the initiative, [click here](#).

Cell Biology and Neuroscience (CBN): We are pleased to announce the promotion of CBN faculty member Wei Dai from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor with Tenure. Dr. Wei Dai's research is centered on the structural biology of neurodegenerative diseases, employing cryo-electron tomography. [Click here](#) to read more.

Genetics: In a significant stride toward personalized treatments for Tourette's disorder, researchers at Rutgers University-New Brunswick have successfully bred mice that display behaviors and brain abnormalities similar to those observed in humans with the condition. To read more about this breakthrough, [click here](#).

Health Professionals Office (HPO): Dr. Steven Stylianos, a world-renowned pediatric surgeon and proud Rutgers graduate, serves as the Surgeon-in-Chief of New York-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital. He led the teams that successfully separated conjoined twins in 1993, 1995, and 2000. Despite his demanding schedule, he dedicates time each week to mentor undergraduates in the life sciences. [Read more here](#).

Kinesiology & Health (DKH): Joy Elasmr, a 2024 Exercise Science graduate, joined the TODAY show to celebrate her graduation from host Dylan Dreyer's alma mater Rutgers University, and shared some exercise science and physical therapy tips in a mini version of "Fact vs. Myth." [Click here](#) to watch.

Molecular Biology and Biochemistry (MBB): Stephen Ratner, a former honors student in MBB, is the lead author of a new paper from the Barber Lab, published in *Current Protocols*. Since joining the lab in the Fall of 2020, Stephen optimized a novel injury model using a shaker for whole-body trauma in flies and tested circadian clock gene expression, contributing significantly to the lab's research. His research is highlighted [here](#).

Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences (ODASIS): Rutgers alumna and ODASIS graduate Lynn M. O'Connor is the NYPD's first Black female surgeon. Dr. O'Connor, a noted colorectal surgeon and cancer specialist, aims to use her new role to promote early colorectal screenings and emphasize the importance of diversity in medicine, highlighting the need for representation and preventative healthcare. Read more about this outstanding alumna and her groundbreaking work [here](#).

Additional Division Highlights

Cell Biology and Neuroscience: Dr. Manon Bohic, a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Victoria Abraira's lab has been honored with the prestigious Simons Foundation Bridge to Independence (BTI) Award. Funded by the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI), this award recognizes outstanding contributions to the field of autism spectrum disorders. The SFARI BTI Award program supports innovative and high-quality research across various topics, including genetics, molecular mechanisms, neural circuits and systems, and clinical science.

Genetics: Maureen Barr, Distinguished Professor of Genetics, and Christopher Rongo, Professor of Genetics and member of the Waksman Institute of Microbiology, were named as Fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). This prestigious recognition honors their exceptional contributions to the field of genetics and their dedication to scientific advancement. [Click here](#) to read more.

Kinesiology and Health: Aishwarya Sabharwal, a junior majoring in Exercise Science in the Department of Kinesiology and Health, has teamed up with her classmates to run GigFiFit programs for kids, teens, and adults with Down syndrome. The program aims to enhance movement skills, strength, and fitness. Read more about this initiative [here](#).

News From Dr. Annika Barber's Lab

Molecular Biosciences PhD student Seanna Kelly has been awarded a three-year pre-doctoral fellowship from the New Jersey Commission on Brain Injury Research.

CBN undergraduate Akanksha Mathivanan will receive the 2024 Mimi Goldman Positive Achievement Award from the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey. This award recognizes her accomplishments as a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) survivor and highlights her research in Dr. Barber's lab, as well as her educational outreach to high schools about TBI risks from youth sports. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Honoring Division of Life Sciences Retirees

The following DLS faculty have recently retired from Rutgers. They have all had a significant impact on their disciplines at large and on the building of a Life Sciences community within Rutgers. Although they will be missed by all, we wish them only the best as they move into a new phase of their lives.

David Axelrod- Professor David Axelrod, PhD retired from the Department of Genetics this past summer, after 54 years of research, teaching, and service to Rutgers. Dr. Axelrod is a founding member of the Department of Genetics, a respected teacher of many SAS undergraduate courses, an instructor for multiple courses for the Molecular Biosciences graduate program, a member of the Human Genetics Institute, the Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the Rutgers Institute of Quantitative Biomedicine, and the Rutgers Center for Discrete Mathematics and Theoretical Computer Science (DIMACS). His long-standing research interests are in the area of quantitative methods in cancer genetics.

Linda Brzustowicz- Distinguished Professor Linda Brzustowicz MD retires from the Department of Genetics after 30 years at Rutgers. Dr. Brzustowicz served as department chair for 8 years and was instrumental in creating the Rutgers Master's degree in Genetic Counseling. She is a highly respected computational geneticist and a consummate teacher having taught courses in human genetics to both undergraduate majors, graduate students, and medical students, as well as mentored many students and postdocs in her lab. Her research focused on molecular and statistical genetics of schizophrenia, autism, and specific language impairment.

Amrik Sahota- Research Professor, Amrik Sahota, Ph.D., retires from the Department of Genetics after 26 years at Rutgers. Dr. Sahota is a founding member of the department with research focused on the genetics of kidney stone disease, including the development of methods to prevent cystine stone formation. He is an elected Fellow of the National Academy of Clinical Biochemistry (NACB), is board-certified in Clinical Molecular Genetics by the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics and in Molecular Diagnostics by the American Board of Clinical Chemistry and is licensed as a clinical laboratory director in New Jersey, New York, and California. Dr. Sahota mentored over 100 undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, residents, and fellows.

Myron Finkelstein- Teaching instructor, Myron (Mike) Finkelstein, a faculty member in the Department of Kinesiology and Health and the Director of the Global Sports Business (GSB) graduate program in the department, retires from Rutgers after more than 20 years of service. Professor Finkelstein provided leadership to the GSB program and taught undergraduate classes in the Department since 2004.

In Memoriam: Honoring Faculty and their enduring legacies on our DLS community

We pay tribute to the DLS faculty members who made significant contributions and long-lasting impacts on our Life Sciences community. Their dedication and passion for research, teaching, and leadership have shaped the lives of hundreds of students and brought true excellence and recognition to Life Sciences at Rutgers. They will be sorely missed by all but their legacies of service to Rutgers and steadfast commitment to their disciplines will always be remembered.

[Professor Mark Plummer](#)

Professor Mark Plummer, a member of the CBN faculty, died in August following a long illness. He was a renowned electrophysiologist who made seminal contributions to our understanding of neural electrical signaling and its impact on memory retention. He was respected by both the students and his colleagues alike for his teaching and research and considered one of the most effective and creative teachers in the Department. Professor Plummer was instrumental in developing and supporting CBN as a member of the departmental leadership team and was respected across Rutgers as an innovator who fostered collaboration and connection across the different neuroscience landscapes.

[Professor Emeritus John Bird](#)

John Bird, a distinguished member of the Rutgers community, was a fierce advocate of advancing life sciences at Rutgers. He was the Director of the Bureau of Biological Research and a noted muscle physiologist. His innovative research and early commitment to recruiting underrepresented faculty left an indelible impact on the academic Life Sciences community at Rutgers.

[Professor Emeritus David A. Feigley](#)

Dr. David Feigley joined Rutgers in 1977 as a Sports Psychologist. His expertise included coaching athletes in high-risk sports such as gymnastics and tower diving, as well as combating psychological burnout. A national leader in coaching education, Dr. Feigley earned his Ph.D. in Psychobiology from Rutgers University. He was chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Health (formerly the Department of Exercise Science and Sport Studies) from 1995 to 2012, and he was instrumental in hiring many of the current faculty in this discipline. His warmth and supportive nature will be remembered by the many students, faculty, and staff that he touched throughout his time at Rutgers.

[Professor Robert Joseph Kuchler](#)

Robert Joseph Kuchler was a revered educator at Rutgers, known for his dedication to his students and his pioneering work in the field of virology. He retired from Rutgers in 1993 after an illustrious 30-year career in DLS. His contributions to the scientific community and his nurturing guidance to students will be fondly remembered by both faculty and former students.

[Professor Lee Simon](#)

Lee Simon, a retired Rutgers microbiologist, and loving father, passed away at the age of 84. He was a member of the Waksman Institute from 1976 until his retirement in 2010. His work focused on the interaction of bacteriophage and bacteria and was an expert electron microscopist.

Special Announcement

Join us for a special reception hosted by the Division of Life Sciences. Be one of the first 100 to sign up for an opportunity to engage with current faculty, students, and alumni to hear about current projects being undertaken in DLS. We are planning to host an event that includes the following:

- * Wine and cheese reception
- * Short talks by current DLS faculty
- * Poster session presented by current DLS students

Date: Friday, October 18th, 2024
Time: 5:00-7:00 pm

Location: Life Sciences Building Atrium

[Register Now!](#)

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