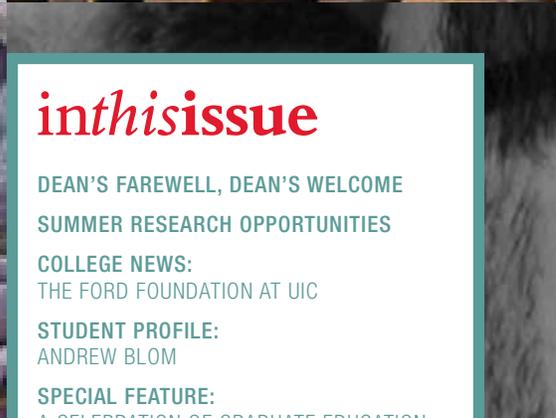
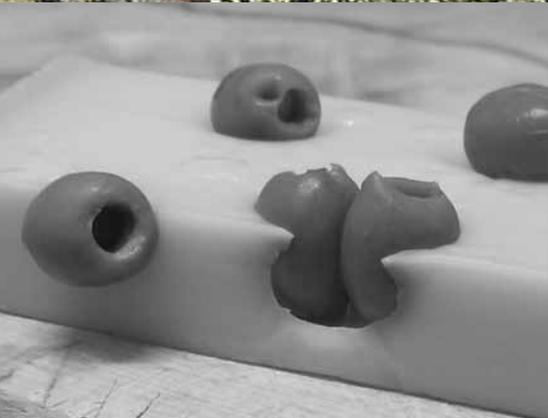
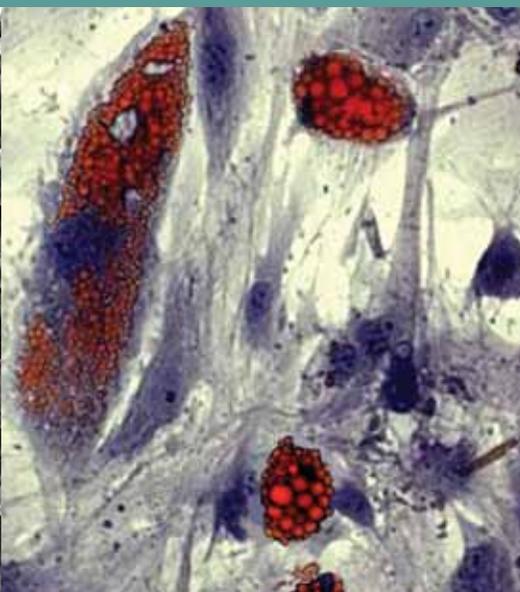
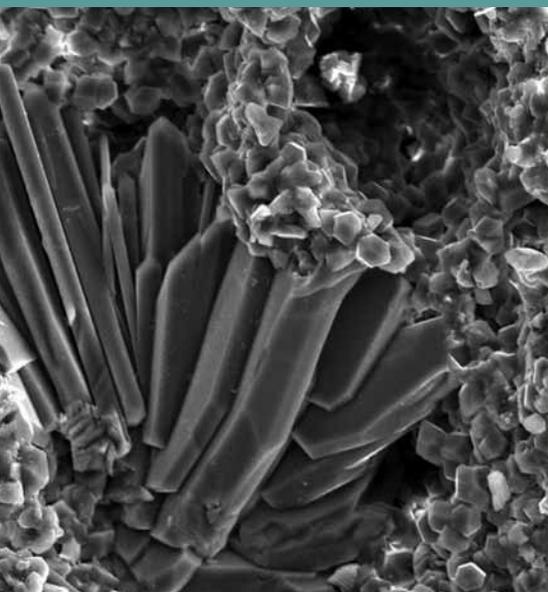


FALL 2009

# gradmatters

NEWSLETTER FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF THE UIC GRADUATE COLLEGE



**UIC** GRADUATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

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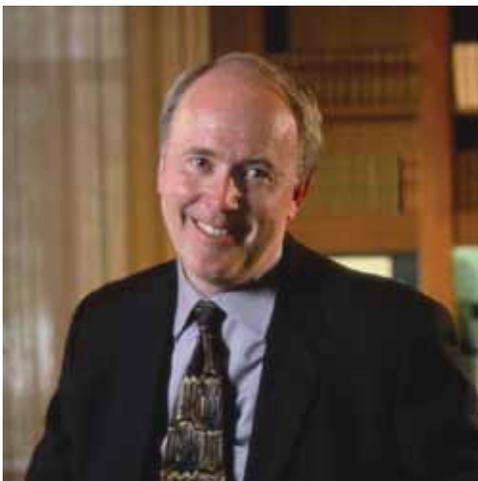
2009 GRADUATE MENTORING AWARDS

## DEAN'S FAREWELL:

After 10 years of service, I am stepping down as Graduate College Dean and Vice Provost for Graduate and Continuing Studies to expand my duties as Associate Chancellor and renew my research.

After leading the Graduate College for a decade, I think this is the moment to make the transition. I will devote more time as Associate Chancellor to building the annual Richard J. Daley Urban Forum and developing other external partnerships. In this role, I will focus on increasing UIC's involvement in and commitment to the future of cities.

Being dean and vice provost has been a privilege and a joy. I'm especially proud of the real gains we have made in the diversity of the Graduate College and how the strength and quality of the programs have improved.



Graduate education at UIC is strong in all key dimensions: in our students, in our faculty, and in our programs. And the Graduate College is blessed with a wonderful, dedicated staff that continues its fine work. As UIC's national and international recognition grows, I am confident we will continue to be a model of innovation and creativity at the highest levels of knowledge.

Clark Hulse  
Associate Chancellor  
Professor of English and Art History

## DEAN'S WELCOME:



*Dr. Henri Gillet is serving as Interim Dean of the Graduate College while the Provost leads a search for a permanent dean. Gillet is a Professor in the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science at UIC where he served as head from 1986 to 1991. He came to UIC in 1984 from Princeton University after receiving his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1978.*

*Gillet is a pure mathematician whose research focuses on algebraic and arithmetic geometry. An internationally recognized scholar, he has authored over 60 publications and is an active and respected member of the university community.*

It is a privilege to be taking over as Interim Dean of the Graduate College and to be working with colleagues who are so dedicated to UIC graduate students.

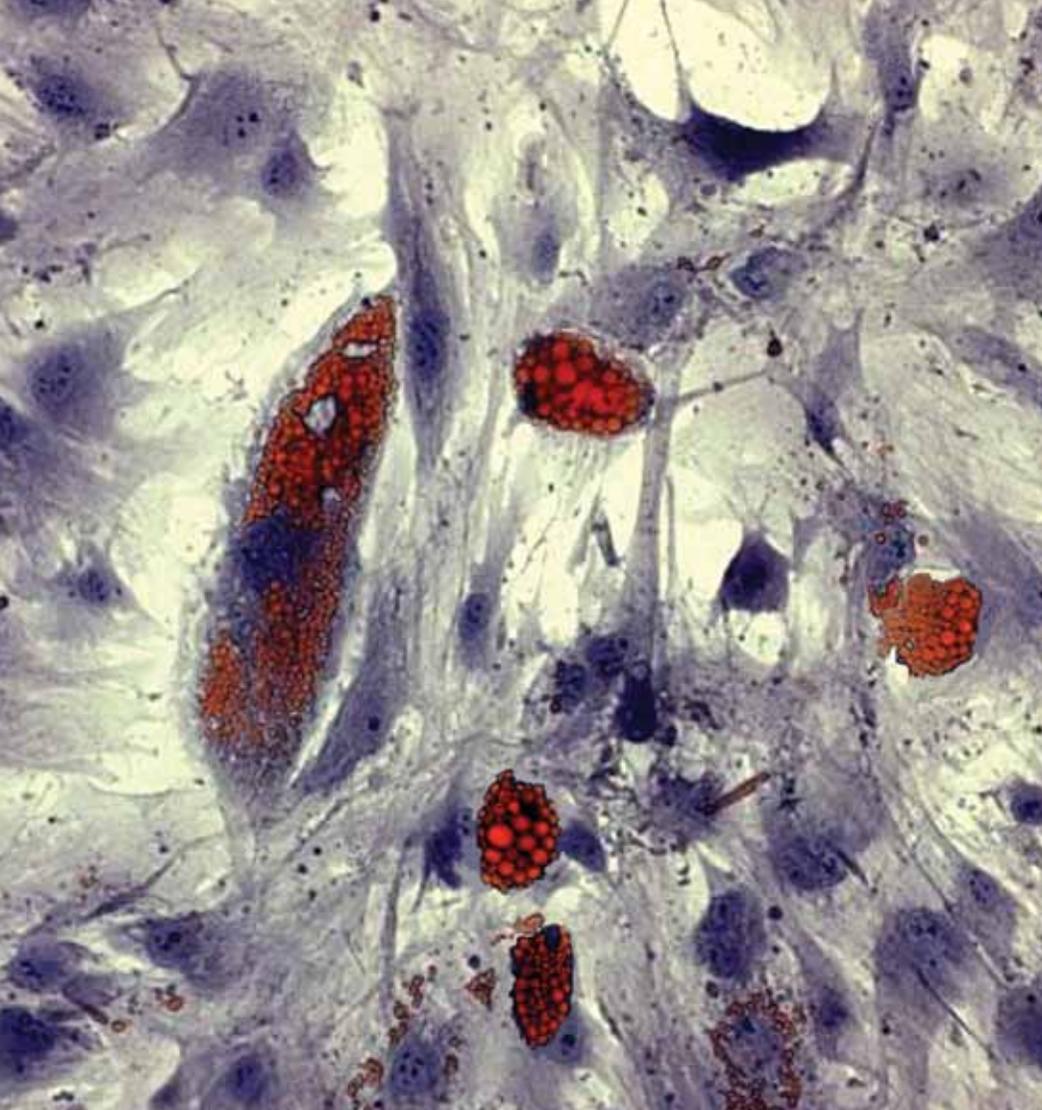
I am taking over a college which made great strides in the decade during which Clark Hulse was Dean. Enrollment increased by more than 1,000 students and the number of students from underrepresented groups rose by 23.5 percent. During this time external funding for graduate students increased and new recognition programs were created, such as the Graduate Faculty Mentoring Awards, the annual Image of Research competition and the Provost's Research Awards.

As interim dean, I will continue to develop these initiatives and focus on further strengthening the diversity of our graduate student population. The Graduate College is especially committed to creating a more supportive campus environment for underrepresented students and increasing the conferral of doctoral degrees in a broader range of academic disciplines.

Another central goal of the Graduate College at this time is to increase external support for graduate students at UIC. Last year UIC graduate students won more than \$1.8 million in external fellowship funds. We seek to expand upon these successes with additional support for individual student research projects as well as programmatic support within the college and university community.

As I look forward to facing the challenges that lie ahead, I am proud to share with you in this newsletter some of the achievements by our students and faculty. We welcome the opportunity to reconnect with our friends and alumni, and wish you all the best in the new year.

Henri Gillet  
Interim Dean  
Professor of Mathematics



**LEFT: Fat! In the Right Places!** by Vandana Keskar (Biopharmaceutical Sciences): "The focus of my dissertation research has been to develop a highly macroporous tissue engineering scaffold that would enable stem cell viability and differentiation. The stem cells used in my project are human mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs), a type of adult stem cells.

One of the many tests that are carried out to confirm the isolation of a stem cell population from whole human bone marrow, is to test the multipotency of the cells. Multipotency is the ability of MSCs to be differentiated to adipocytes (fat), chondrocytes (cartilage) and osteoblasts (bone). Shown in the image are the MSCs cultivated on tissue culture plates that have been induced to adipocytes, which is detected by the presence of fat or lipid vacuoles. The lipid vacuoles have been stained with a lipophilic dye, Sudan III, which stains lipids red/deep orange. Harris hematoxylin solution was used to counterstain the cells purple. Brightfield images were taken on the Olympus IX70 Inverted Microscope in our lab." Photo: Vandana Keskar

## SPECIAL FEATURE

ON THE COVER: 2009 Image of Research competition finalists and winners.

# A CELEBRATION OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

The opening reception for the second annual Image of Research exhibit provided an occasion to celebrate graduate education at UIC. On April 16, 2009, graduate students, faculty and staff attended an awards ceremony at the Richard J. Daley Library to honor Image of Research winners, as well as recipients of the Graduate Mentoring Award and Outstanding Dissertation Award.

Faculty members recognized as exceptional mentors to graduate students were Mary Ashley, Ecology and Evolution/Landscape Ecology and Anthropogenic Process (LEAP); Wonhwa Cho, Chemistry; and Chris Messenger, English. The Graduate College established the Mentoring Awards in 2006 to recognize excellence and innovation in all aspects of graduate mentoring. Winners are chosen from nominations by students and colleagues.

Outstanding Dissertation Award winners for 2009 were Mathias Nilges, English; Aurora Shehu, Physiology and Biophysics; Mahadevabharath Somayaji, Chemical Engineering; Andrew Wyatt, Anthropology; and Jian Zhou, Economics. This annual award is given to the most outstanding dissertation in each of the four Graduate Program areas: Fine Arts and Humanities; Life Sciences; Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences and Behavioral and Social Sciences. Every year, departments nominate one graduating student with the terminal graduate degree of their program, and winners are chosen from this pool of nominees by the Graduate College Awards Committee.

The Image of Research is an annual interdisciplinary exhibit competition to showcase the breadth and diversity of research at UIC. Each year, students enrolled in a graduate or profes-

sional degree program at UIC are invited to submit an image with aesthetic appeal created by the student, along with a brief précis of how the image relates to the student's overall research. A multidisciplinary jury reviews the submissions and awards prizes.

Winners for the 2008–2009 competition were:

First Place: Vandana Keskar, Biopharmaceutical Sciences

Second Place: Banan Al-Ansari, Graphic Design

Third Place: Oscar Quintana, Civil and Materials Engineering

Honorable Mentions: Julio Obelleiro, Art and Design; Matthew Piscitelli, Anthropology; and Eimy Rivas Plata, Biological Sciences.

*Continued on back page*

## SUMMER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

Dr. Marisha Humphries is an assistant professor in the College of Education at UIC. As an undergraduate, she participated in the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), which she credits as “cementing my commitment to obtain my Ph.D.”

Dr. Humphries described SROP as “a wonderful experience where I was able to apply my research knowledge by participating in an actual research project from data collection to analysis to presentation.”

SROP was established in 1986 by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation to introduce domestic underrepresented sophomores and juniors to academic research experiences. UIC launched its SROP at this time with six undergraduate students, and the program has continued to expand over the last two decades.

In 2009, 45 students each received an award of \$3,500 to work with faculty at UIC. Their experience included nine and a half weeks of intensive instruction in research development, preparation for the demands of graduate study and assistance in applying for admissions and financial support.

Students gained valuable skills from working with UIC faculty members on specific research projects and presenting their work at a SROP conference when the summer program concluded. SROP participants also received intensive GRE preparation at no cost as well as graduate research instruction from senior level doctoral students through discipline-specific workshops.

To learn more about helping SROP at UIC ensure successful futures for talented underrepresented students or for information about applying to SROP, please email [giveGC@uic.edu](mailto:giveGC@uic.edu) or call 312-413-2540.



*Talented undergraduates came to UIC for SROP in 2009 from various schools throughout the country.*

## GRADUATE COLLEGE NEWS

# THE FORD FOUNDATION AT UIC

## TWO GRADUATE STUDENTS WIN FORD GRANTS FOR THEIR RESEARCH

The Ford Foundation provides funding to students from all over the world to pursue individual research related to Ford’s mission: the advance of human welfare. Two UIC graduate students—one from Ghana, one from Chicago—have each won a highly competitive Ford fellowship.

Wisdom Mprah, from Ghana, is currently working on his dissertation in Disability Studies about public health and the deaf in Ghana. As he explained, “sexual and reproductive health is a major public health issue in Ghana because of the high incidence of HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and maternal morbidity and mortality rates. Public education is one major activity through which people are being influenced to adopt positive sexual and reproductive health behavior. However, major sources of information on sexual and reproductive health are inaccessible [to the deaf in Ghana] because there are very few sign language interpreters, TVs are not captioned, and [most] deaf people can’t access information from print materials because of high illiteracy rates.” Mprah is in Ghana this year collecting data for his dissertation, which he hopes to complete next year.

Mprah’s research has been funded for four years by the Ford International Fellows Program (IFP). The IFP chooses individuals both for their commitment to social justice in their home countries and for coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as a community lacking access to education.

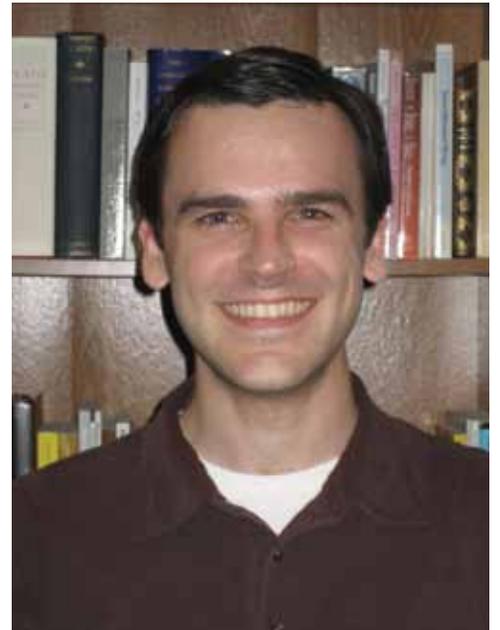
Another UIC graduate student, Akilah Watkins-Butler, won a Ford Diversity Pre-doctoral

Fellowship for her research in sociology. Starting this fall, the fellowship will provide her three years of funding while she pursues her research in African-American marriage patterns. She explained, “I’m really interested to find out why African-American marriage rates have been declining, especially over the last 70 years, and what that decline has meant for communities. I want to find out how [residents] perceive their community changing and what they perceive as the effect that marriage has on it.”

Watkins-Butler is originally from Brooklyn, New York, and has done a great deal of community-based work for at-risk children. Ford Foundation Diversity Fellowships are offered at three levels: 60 pre-doctoral grants, 35 dissertation grants, and 20 postdoctoral grants are given per year. The Diversity Fellowship program seeks individuals who demonstrate a commitment to using diversity for the educational enrichment of all students.

Mprah and Watkins-Butler are two of over a hundred graduate students at UIC with external funding for 2009–2010. Agencies such as the American Heart Association, the American Association of University Women, the National Institutes of Health, the Fulbright Program, and the National Science Foundation, among others, provide funding to students in the Graduate College. Over the 2008–2009 year, students like these brought in over \$1.8 million in external funds to pursue their individual research projects.

## STUDENT PROFILE



Andrew Blom received a University Fellowship from the UIC Graduate College to support his doctoral research in philosophy. Photo: Norah Weblom

# “JUSTICE WITH HUMANITY”

## ANDREW BLOM: A UNIVERSITY FELLOW

The University Fellowship is an award given by the Graduate College at UIC to aid in the recruitment and retention of outstanding graduate students. Andrew Blom, a former University Fellow who recently received his Ph.D. in philosophy from UIC, exemplifies the outstanding students selected by the Graduate Awards Committee for this fellowship.

Blom grew up in a small town of Central Massachusetts where he worked for an engineering firm during high school. This experience encouraged him to pursue a degree in engineering, although he was aware that his interests were not limited to this field and he chose to attend a liberal arts college in order to keep his options open. During his undergraduate years, Blom quickly discovered a deeper interest in philosophy than in engineering. In 2001 he graduated from the University of Rochester with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and political science.

By his senior year Blom knew he wanted to continue with graduate education and pursue philosophy further. While considering universities to attend, the UIC program was recommended to him by a former professor as one that would suit his interest in ethics and political philosophy. “The more that I learned about the UIC program, the more that I felt it was going to be the best place for fully exploring different philosophical approaches” he explained.

UIC turned out to be a good match for Blom’s educational goals. He finished his Master of Arts in philosophy in July 2005 and went on to pursue a doctorate. His dissertation work, “Justice With Humanity,” is based on Hugo Grotius,

*We must, Grotius cautions, supplement our desire for justice with an attitude of humanitarian concern—based on the virtue of moral ‘love’—in order to think in ethically responsible terms about war.*

a historical 17th Century political theorist and highly influential individual in the development of modern international law and relations. One stem of Grotius’ theories argues for International Humanitarianism, which states that for humanitarian reasons nations ought to refrain from entering into a justified war, even if they have the right to do so. Through this historical lens, Blom examined the 2001 land invasion of Afghanistan led by the United States and connected Grotius to modern warfare and contemporary theorists.

Blom’s research was possible because of the various honors, fellowships and monetary

awards he received, including the two times he was selected as a University Fellow by the Graduate College. Besides these internal fellowships, Blom also received the Charlotte Newcombe Dissertation Fellowship sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. This award is given to exceptional doctoral students writing dissertations in the areas of religion, ethics, values, or moral codes with the hope that students can contribute to a better world by influencing human resources and public policy through academic scholarship. The Newcombe Dissertation Fellowships are highly competitive and only 25 to 30 are awarded nationally each year.

“The fellowships I received from both the Graduate College and the Wilson Foundation were extremely valuable in that I was able to dedicate that much more time to research,” said Blom who received his doctorate degree in May 2009.

Dr. Blom was offered and has accepted a tenure track position at Central Michigan University beginning this fall. As an assistant professor in philosophy he will be teaching undergraduate courses in political philosophy, feminist theory, and philosophy of civil rights. He is looking forward to getting to know a new student body and sharing his passion for philosophy with students at CMU.

To find out more about how you can help the Graduate College with its continuous efforts to make successful futures, like Andrew Blom’s, a reality for our fellows or for information about applying to a fellowship program, please email [giveGC@uic.edu](mailto:giveGC@uic.edu) or call 312-413-2540.

## CHRIS MESSENGER, AN EXCEPTIONAL GRADUATE MENTOR

### ANSWER TO A CALLING

Chris Messenger knew as far back as high school that he wanted to be a teacher. He recalls teachers of his own who showed an interest in his intellectual development and presented information in a way that made it seem vital, and says he remembers “imagining myself on the other side of the desk.”

According to Messenger’s students and colleagues, he has become the sort of memorable teacher who initially inspired him. Messenger, professor of English, was nominated and selected as one of three winners of the 2009 Graduate Mentoring Award. The Graduate College offers this annual award, which includes a cash prize, to recognize excellence and innovation in all aspects of graduate mentoring.

Since 2004, Messenger has directed or been a member of 27 PhD exam committees and directed or served on 22 PhD dissertation committees. He has also supervised or been a second reader of numerous MA thesis projects. Messenger works with students in fields ranging from creative writing, literature, critical theory and cultural studies. Mark Canuel, head of the English department, claimed “Messenger has probably done more than any single faculty member in our ranks to mentor MA and PhD students.”

Current and former students of Messenger refer to him as “a model” and speak of his scholarly rigor and integrity as well as the “care and attention to the work of his students.” Jennifer Rupert, who received her PhD in English at UIC with Messenger as her advisor, described him as “the sort of wide-ranging inquiring mind that

makes academic research a joy and the sort of charisma, humor, and love for his subject that transforms teaching from a job to a calling.”

Messenger considers himself “an old-fashioned humanist” and explains his pedagogy as “literature-based.” He tries to teach only the literary works that he himself is passionate about reading and discussing. His graduate seminars often incorporate both canonical literature and popular works while exploring the relationship between the two.

Messenger’s scholarship includes an impressive range of publications on nineteenth and twentieth century authors such as Hawthorne, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner as well as studies of the representations of American sports and Italian American culture. His most recent book, *The Godfather and American Culture: How the Corleones Became “Our Gang,”* is widely recognized for its interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies and has received accolades for cutting-edge scholarship.

As a graduate mentor, Messenger serves as an advocate for his students. He guides them not only in their specific dissertation and thesis topics but also takes an active interest in all facets of their graduate career from what courses they take and teach to what conferences they present at and where they submit their work for publication. In today’s increasingly precarious academic job market, Messenger is a source of encouragement, constructive criticism and ongoing support for his students.

A good mentor, according to Messenger, is “supple and capable of learning as much from

his mentee as he imparts.” His approach of mutual respect for his students has helped him cultivate their particular talents and interests, ultimately nurturing the growth of teachers like the ones he admired years ago as a student.



Former Graduate College Dean Clark Hulse (left) with Chris Messenger.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### SPECIAL FEATURE, CONT.

*A Celebration of Graduate Education, continued*

The first place winner, *Fat! In the Right Places!* features stem cell tissue in which lipid vacuoles have been dyed red and other tissue dyed purple with an overall effect reminiscent of stained glass. Keskar took the image on an inverted microscope while researching the differentiation of stem cells. “It can take days to get a good

image,” Keskar explained, “one that tells a story technically and is also aesthetically pleasing.”

“Who knew fat could be so beautiful?!” remarked Mary Case, head of the UIC Library, at the opening reception.

The Image of Research exhibit is on display every spring in the Richard J. Daley Library and in the Library of Health Sciences. A selection of images is also featured on banners around campus. The winners and finalists will remain a permanent part of the University Archive and can also be found online at <http://grad.uic.edu/image>.