DEAN’S WELCOME
NOTES FROM THE FIELD: BETHANY ELKINGTON IN LAOS
STUDENT PROFILE: ROSALBA HERNANDEZ
COLLEGE NEWS: 2010 ORIENTATION & AWARDS
Throughout my first year as Interim Dean of the Graduate College, I have been continually impressed by the students in our graduate programs, the faculty who mentor them, and, most especially, by the enthusiasm and dedication of the Graduate College staff (most of whom appear in the photo below).

Applications to graduate programs at UIC have gone up by 10% in each of the last two years. Our Fall 2010 enrollment of 7,925 graduate students is an 18% increase from 2006. These increases reflect both the growing importance of advanced degrees in today's knowledge-based economy and the increasing recognition of the quality of our programs and faculty.

Both the Shanghai-based Academic Ranking of World Universities and the London-based Times Higher Education Ranking place UIC among the top 200 universities in the world. The achievements of our students reflect these rankings: we have 24 international graduate students studying at UIC on Fulbright scholarships, and 19 of our graduate students received individual three-year NIH research awards in the past year. One of these students, Bethany Elkington, whom you can read about in this issue, also received a Fulbright to support her research in Laos. These are just a few examples of the many honors received by UIC graduate students.

The National Research Council has recently completed a study of PhD programs in the U.S., which confirms not only the excellence of UIC's programs but also the diversity of our graduate student population. The NRC study showed that most of the UIC programs rated highly for research activity were also in the top 25% of programs in their fields for the proportion of underrepresented minority and female students.

I can assure you that while the State of Illinois has severe financial problems, our programs at UIC remain strong, and we are committed to supporting our students. Naturally, we would love to have more funds available to provide graduate fellowships and to develop programs to support our current and future students. Even small donations can make a real difference. Please consider making a gift to the Graduate Fellowships Fund by emailing giveGC@uic.edu or visiting http://grad.uic.edu/giving.

I want to close by recognizing the contributions of Amy Levant to the Graduate College. Many of you have had contact with Amy, who, as Associate Dean for Administration, played a key role in making the College efficient and student-friendly. Amy left us in October to become the Interim Vice Provost for Academic and Enrollment Services. Her presence will be sorely missed, but we wish her the best in her new role.

On behalf of the Graduate College faculty and staff, I hope 2011 is a wonderful year for you and yours.

Henri Gillet
Interim Dean and Professor of Mathematics
The 2010 New Graduate Student Orientation was a major success. On August 18, nearly 400 incoming graduate students convened in the Illinois Room at Student Center East from 9:00am – 1:30pm.

The event included breakfast, lunch, in-depth presentations by a variety of speakers, campus tours, and a resource fair. Chancellor Paula Allen-Meares welcomed everyone on behalf of the university, and Mi Ja Kim, Professor in the College of Nursing and Director of the Academy of International Leadership Development at UIC, provided the key-note address. Other presentations included a panel from Student Services as well as a panel of current graduate students offering practical advice for navigating the university and making the most of one’s graduate studies.

Various organizations at UIC participated in the resource fair, such as the UIC Library, the Commuter Student Resource Center and the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO). Graduate College staff and volunteers from the Graduate Student Council (GSC) provided logistical support to ensure that the day went smoothly.

Deana Lewis, GSC President and PhD student in Educational Policy Studies, commented about the event, "For the third year in a row, the Graduate College’s dedicated staff provided graduate students at UIC with a wonderful introduction to the campus. The GSC is an ardent supporter of this great event, and each year we look forward to meeting and welcoming the incoming students."

The Graduate College considers the planning and hosting of the New Graduate Student Orientation to be one of our most important responsibilities. We are currently preparing for next year’s orientation. If you have any suggestions or want to volunteer for the event, please email Samantha Gagni at sgagni2@uic.edu.
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

FINDING ALTERNATIVE TUBERCULOSIS TREATMENTS FROM THE JUNGLES OF LAOS

By BETHANY ELKINGTON, PHD CANDIDATE, PHARMACOGNOSY

Although humans have turned to plants to treat their ailments for thousands of years, much of this knowledge is being lost with the rise of biomedicine and globalization. Western medicine has produced revolutionary records of healing people, but many modern pharmaceuticals are actually based on prior knowledge of medicinal plants. Translating traditional knowledge into biomedical terms is one way to demonstrate that it is still relevant, which will help to preserve the knowledge.

With support from my academic adviser, Doel Soejarto, my dissertation research led me to study traditional medicine in the People’s Democratic Republic of Laos, where knowledge of medicinal plants is still used and continues to be passed down from one generation to the next. I first traveled to Laos in the winter of 2006 for a brief two-month visit. Then in 2008, I was awarded a Fulbright U.S. Student Program grant to return to Laos for ten months and continue my study.

The Fulbright enabled me to conduct hands-on research about a tradition that is waning in much of the world, but is still living strong in this small, Southeast Asian country. My work in Laos has been to determine whether or not people are still using plants noted in old palm leaf manuscripts to treat tuberculosis (TB), a disease that dates back at least 3000 years in the region and continues to be a problem today. The Asian continent presently accounts for more than half of the TB cases around the globe, and marks of the disease have been left on the bones of its victims from as early as the Iron Age.

While in Laos, I looked through manuscripts ranging in age from 100-300 years old to find clues about which plants were used in the past. I also conducted interviews with contemporary healers to compare their treatments with those from the manuscripts. I was able to collect some traditional herbal treatments to explore further at UIC.

I am still processing the data collected in Laos. So far, no treatment used today has been exactly the same as ones noted in the old manuscripts. However, a lot of the same plants used over a century ago are still being utilized in different combinations. Some common plants that are coming up repeatedly are chili and ginger.

I have been fortunate enough to receive a NIH-sponsored National Research Service Award grant to continue with biochemistry studies of the plants I collected in Laos. I am currently working with UIC’s Institute for Tuberculosis Research to assess the safety and effectiveness of the herbal treatments commonly prescribed by traditional healers in Laos. The results of this research may have major health implications for the thousands of people who use these treatments.

The opportunity to do research abroad took me worlds away from familiar laboratories and classrooms at UIC to the jungles and traditional healers of Laos, giving me an invaluable opportunity to see the larger picture of my research.
Rosalba Hernandez is a PhD student in Community Health. She has received three fellowships while working on her graduate studies at UIC: the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, the Martin Luther King Fellowship and the Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowship.

Rosalba Hernandez is passionate about helping the Latino community, which, as she explained, “often experiences diverse health disparities.” Her career goals emerged from her family’s “Day of the Dead” altar to remember and honor loved ones who had passed away.

As a child, what struck Rosalba the most about her family’s altar was a photograph of a small boy surrounded by an offering of assorted candies. The photograph was of her uncle who had died as a child from an avoidable and treatable disease.

“I did not understand how a sick child could go untreated when so many medical advances were already in existence,” recalled Rosalba. The story about her uncle and the cultural tradition of honoring him every year sparked Rosalba’s interest in the healthcare field.

“But the odds were not in my favor when it came to entering the world of higher education,” explained Rosalba. “My parents never went to school and weren’t able to help when it came to school work; although my mother always tried to get me whatever assistance I needed.”

While an undergraduate at UIC, Rosalba was a member of the Honors College and the Medicina Scholars program (offered through the UIC College of Medicine’s Hispanic Center for Excellence) as well as a volunteer with the Graduate College’s UIC NBC 5/Telemundo Homework Hotline. After earning her Bachelor of Science degree in Biological Sciences in 2005, Rosalba was accepted to the UIC College of Medicine. However, she decided she was more interested in pursuing research as a catalyst for change rather than becoming a health practitioner.

“Once I determined medical school was not for me,” Rosalba said, “I met Francisco Piña, Recruitment Coordinator in the UIC Graduate College, who told me about the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and encouraged me to apply.”

SROP is an intense 10-week program offered by the UIC Graduate College to immerse students in a research experience and prepare them for graduate school. As a SROP participant, Rosalba worked directly with Dr. Laurie Ruggiero of the Community Health Sciences Department in the UIC School of Public Health.

“My SROP research focused on diabetes among Latino and African-American populations in the city of Chicago,” explained Rosalba. “We examined the feasibility of providing an evidence-based diabetes education curriculum in these communities. SROP provided me an inside look at the important job of researchers.”

Rosalba’s SROP experience led her to enroll in the UIC Community Health Master of Science program. She received financial support to complete this program; first by an Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, and then a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship. Both are UIC programs designed to increase the excellence and diversity of the graduate student body.

The DFI fellowship has allowed me to focus on my research without worrying about economic challenges.

After her third semester in the School of Public Health, Rosalba decided to pursue a PhD and she received a Diversifying Faculty in Illinois (DFI) Fellowship. DFI is a program intended to increase the number of underrepresented faculty and staff in Illinois institutions and governing boards of higher education. Recipients receive a tuition and fee waiver as well as a living stipend.

“The DFI has allowed me to focus on my research without worrying about economic challenges,” said Rosalba.

As a doctoral student, Rosalba works with Dr. Thomas Prohaska at the UIC Center for Research on Health and Aging, “looking at the association between depression and physical activities among older Latino adults.”

Since her second semester of graduate study, Rosalba has been involved with the UIC SROP as a Research Team Leader, where she mentors SROP students interested in an academic career in the health sciences. “SROP connected me to academic and support opportunities,” said Rosalba. “My experiences with the Graduate College have introduced me to people who are interested in increasing diversity at UIC and [their guidance] has helped solidify my passion for research and given me the support I need to accomplish my goals.”

To find out more about how you can help support graduate students at UIC or for information about applying to a fellowship program, please email giveGC@uic.edu, call 312-413-2540 or visit http://grad.uic.edu/giving.
OUTSTANDING THESIS AWARD

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

The annual Graduate College Outstanding Thesis Award is given to the most exceptional doctoral dissertation or master's thesis in each of the four graduate program divisions. The divisional categories are Behavioral and Social Sciences; Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences; Fine Arts and Humanities; and Life Sciences.

Every calendar year, each graduate program can nominate one graduating student who has completed the terminal graduate degree of that program. From these nominations, a faculty committee chooses the most outstanding dissertation or thesis for each disciplinary division. Winners receive a monetary award as well as a commemorative plaque.

Recipients of the 2010-2011 award are:

- Mark Golitko, Anthropology, Warfare and Alliance Building During the Belgian Early Neolithic, Late Sixth Millennium BC
- Weronika Walkosz, Physics, Atomic Scale Characterization and First-Principles Studies of Si3N4 Interfaces
- Catherine Burdick, Art History, Text and Image in Classic Maya Sculpture: A.D. 600-900
- Yuyu Song, Anatomy and Cell Biology, Stabilization of Neuronal Microtubules by Polyamines and Transglutaminase: Its Roles in Brain Function

THE IMAGE OF RESEARCH
SNAPSHOTS OF SCHOLARSHIP

From April 15 through May 2010, visitors to the Richard J. Daley Library enjoyed the third annual Image of Research exhibit. The Graduate College, in collaboration with the University Library, organizes this event each year to provide a snapshot of the diverse research that UIC graduate students are doing.

After reviewing over 80 entries, a multi-disciplinary jury selected first, second and third place winners along with three honorable mentions and twelve finalists.

Winners for the 2009–2010 competition were:

First Place: Sangyoon Lee, Computer Science
Second Place: Kristin Thomas, Biopharmaceutical Sciences
Third Place: Annie Campbell, Biomedical Visualization

Honorable Mentions: Maryam Shafiq, Bioengineering; Michael Siriani, Art and Design; and Jacqueline Van De Veire, Biological Sciences.

The winners and finalists were displayed in the Richard J. Daley Library and have become a permanent part of the University Archives. The winning entries were also on exhibit in the Library of Health Sciences and were featured on light pole banners around campus.

Please visit http://grad.uic.edu/image for more information about The Image of Research and to view all the winners and finalists from each year's competition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MANAGING EDITOR
Kristina Dziedzic Wright

CONTRIBUTORS
Bethany Elkington
Rosalba Hernandez
Lisa Knepshield
Francisco Piña
Yolanda Rodriguez

http://grad.uic.edu/giving