

# UAB DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY NEWSLETTER

## FACULTY FOCUS

**WE WANT TO  
HEAR FROM  
YOU!**

Going forward, we plan to release newsletters on a more frequent basis so that we can keep our readers up to date with what's going on in the department. If you have suggestions for a story or would like someone in particular to be featured in a future issue, please contact us at [biology@uab.edu](mailto:biology@uab.edu).



### Dr. Liou Sun

Dr. Liou Sun joined UAB's Biology Department in January 2016 as an Assistant Professor. Dr. Sun came to us via Southern Illinois University (SIU), where he was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Internal Medicine. He earned his medical degree from Southeast University Medical School in Nanjing, China (1999) and his Ph.D. degree at SIU Carbondale (2005). He then went on to a postdoctoral fellowship in Pediatrics at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 2006. From 2006-2012, Dr. Sun worked at the University of Michigan as a research fellow (2006-2010) and then as a research faculty member at the University of Michigan Geriatric Center (2010-2012) before transferring to SIU.



Dr. Sun is the Principal Investigator on 3 active grants, including an NIH career development grant totaling over \$700,000. The major goal of this award is to facilitate career development in basic aging biology and metabolic diseases. This research has global importance as aging is now the #1 threat to human health internationally. Dr. Sun has a particular interest in understanding how early-life events can affect later life health. Other aspects of his research focus on genetic and dietary interventions to enhance and extend health and longevity. His research to date emphasizes both hormonal and nutritional influences on longevity and aging. We are excited to have recruited Dr. Sun to UAB, and we look forward to watching his career develop. His important and timely research should make him an active collaborator with research groups in the Biology Department and across campus.

## Dr. Charles Amsler Awarded Ireland Prize

Dr. Charles Amsler has been named the 2016 winner of the Caroline P. and Charles W. Ireland Prize for Scholarly Distinction. Charles W. and Caroline P. Ireland established the award in 1984 to recognize outstanding faculty members and visiting lecturers who have achieved excellence. Since coming to UAB in 1994, Dr. Amsler has focused much of his research on the chemical ecology of organisms in Antarctic marine communities. Most of Dr. Amsler's work involves chemical interactions between organisms or ways in which organisms perceive, respond to, or otherwise interact with their chemical environments. Dr. Amsler has recently expanded this work into understanding the impacts of ocean acidification caused by climate change on marine organisms.



Dr. Amsler and his wife Margaret, along with colleagues and graduate students from the Department of Biology, regularly travel to Palmer Station, one of three U.S. permanent research facilities in Antarctica maintained by the National Science Foundation. There, Dr. Amsler is able to examine the ecological changes to macroalgae and other marine species in the warming waters of the polar region. As a leader of the UAB in Antarctica program, Dr. Amsler has helped elevate the profile of marine biology here at UAB, and make important advancements in a field that has had a broad scientific impact. Through this program, UAB has been able to reach a broad national and global audience, as well as important local audiences such as Alabama high school students and educators. In 2007, the U.S. Board of Geographic Names designated "Amsler Island" in Antarctica. In early 2015, the journal "Phycologia" announced that the algae species from Antarctica previously known as *Delesseria lancifolia*, will now be called *Paraglossum amsleri* (Delesseriaceae, Rhodophyta) in Dr. Amsler's honor. We are so proud to have Dr. Amsler as a colleague. Please join us in congratulating him on this achievement!



(Pictured at top: Dean Robert Palazzo and Dr. Amsler; Pictured at bottom-left: Dean Palazzo, Mrs. Caroline Ireland and Dr. Amsler; Pictured at bottom-right: Dr. Amsler and his wife, Margaret Amsler)

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

### Dr. Daniel Bishop



Daniel Bishop, Ph.D. (1998), has had a circuitous route to where he is today – proud owner with his wife, Dr. Karla Bishop, of a thriving endodontics and microsurgery practice near Dallas, Texas. Dan put himself through undergraduate studies at the University of South Alabama, where despite having to hold down a job the entire time, he managed to graduate in 6 years with no debt. He flirted with graduate school in Tuscaloosa before settling in at UAB to do a Master’s degree in marine biology studying sea urchin digestion and reproduction. He then went on to a

Ph.D. in Dr. Steve Watts’ lab investigating the development of the digestive system and digestive biochemistry in tilapia. Dr. Watts remembers Dan for his great sense of humor and leadership. Thanks largely to Dan’s influence, his graduate school cohort was a particularly cohesive group -- many of whom remain fast friends today. After UAB, Dan went on to an NIH fellowship studying the effects of alcohol on the development and expression of hox genes in the hindbrain of the zebrafish and then a faculty position at Baylor College of Dentistry in Dallas before deciding that dentistry, not academia, was his passion. Dan credits his experience as a T.A. – one of our finest T.A.’s ever, according to Dr. Watts -- in both the Anatomy and Physiology laboratories and lecture as perfect preparation for Dental School. He credits Dr. Watts for teaching him self-confidence and critical thinking skills, things that have been instrumental in his success. Earlier this year, Dan returned the favor by endowing the Stephen A. Watts Research Support Fund. (Pictured left to right: Dr. Steve Austad, Dean Robert Palazzo, Dr. Dan Bishop, and Dr. Steve Watts at the Fall 2015 CAS Scholarship Luncheon.)

## RECENTLY AWARDED GRANTS

### Dr. Nicole Riddle

Source: NSF Career Grant

Title: “CAREER: HP1 protein functions in gene regulation and chromatin structure”

Funding Amount: \$1,150,000

Duration: 5 years

### Dr. Shahid Mukhtar

Source: NSF Integrative Organismal Systems Grant

Title: “A systems biology-aided investigation of pathogen-mediated manipulation of host cell metabolism”

Funding Amount: \$800,000

Duration: 3 years

## STUDENT CORNER

The Department of Biology Spring 2016 Awards Ceremony was held on April 11, 2016. We are so proud of all of our students who were recognized!

Department of Biology Outstanding Student Awards were presented to Olivia Delmas (Undergraduate), Kayla Lewis (Masters), and Rishabh Kala (Doctorate). Pictured below, left to right.



The College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Awards were presented to Jessica Lopez (Masters) and Cecilia Brothers (Doctoral). Pictured below, left to right.



*Dr. Steven Austad*  
Editor-in-Chief  
Distinguished Professor &  
Department Chair

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*Morgan Burke*  
Editor & Contributor  
Program Coordinator II

