Greetings From The Fellowship

Dear Alumni, Fellows and Friends of the Yale Mellon and Bouchet Fellowships Program:

We're excited to launch this annual Mellon and Bouchet Alumni and Friends Newsletter to keep you all informed of the recent happenings within our fellowship community. Things have evolved quite a bit over the years within our fellowship and we’re excited about the various ways by which we’re strengthening our program and better preparing our fellows for the graduate school experience. For some of you recent graduates, it’s been great to stay in touch and receive periodic updates from you all. For those within our alumni community who been out for a while, you may be surprised to read about some of our new developments. Did you know...

-We have an in house GRE class that takes place over the course of a semester to prepare our juniors for the GRE, provide one-on-one tutoring to strengthen weak areas and to work closely to meet target scores for your discipline area.

-Our meetings include writing sessions (writing the personal statement workshop, writing prompts, and general "write-ins" where fellows work on writing projects)

-Mixers with Graduate Mentors, former Mellons on campus, alumni and other mentors
- Research meetings (such as Beinecke orientation, general discussions about "What is research/forming a research question", science specific meetings for our fellows, and workshops with the Human Subjects Committee)

- Writing & Presentation symposium with Brown University (fellows present papers with peer discussants and fellows facilitate dialogue about conducting research within their discipline)

- Most recently, we had our first overnight conference at Bowdoin (the northeast area Mellon institutions gathered at Bowdoin for a weekend conference)

- Yale Mellon and Bouchet conferences featuring alumni guests, faculty presenters and participation from graduate students

We hope you'll get a bit jealous and curious enough to pay us a visit on campus for an alumni Meet and Greet event, a panel discussion, a talk for our fellows or an informal dinner. Let us know what interests you and how we can get you more involved in our fellowship programs. Drop us a line before you head into New Haven and we'll try to collaborate on something with you!

Warm wishes,
Saveena Dhall, Assistant Dean and Director, Mellon and Bouchet Undergraduate Research Fellowships Program
Our fall term began with a fellowship dinner where we focused on reconnecting, sharing summer stories and enjoying building relationships over a meal and conversation. Following presentations, fellows engaged in further discussions via questions and suggestions. In early October, we joined other northeast area Mellon institutions at Bowdoin for the Northeast Conference. This conference was unique—not only was this an overnight conference, it was in Maine! We secured a minibus and went off on a l-o-n-g ride up to Maine where we had plenty of time to bond, watch movies and just get to know one another as a fellowship. The conference itself was really great as it provided resources about graduate school as well as opportunities for our students to connect to other fellows who are conducting research in fields that compliment our own work.

Last fall, we hosted a dinner and panel with Mitch Kundel, Office of the Dean of Science Education, Nikhar Gaikwad, graduate student in Political Science and Joy Rankin, graduate student in History of Science and Medicine to speak to our fellows about the Graduate School Admissions Process. The science fellows found the conversation with Mitch Kundel extremely helpful and as a result, took up Mitch’s invitation to meet again and held two subsequent roundtable discussions with him during the past academic year. Mitch has continued to work with our scientists to make sure they are plugged in and feel adequately supported. To ensure that all of our fellows have invested faculty mentors and a clear sense of expectations per semester, each fellow completes a semester plan with their mentor that outlines their research question, what work has been done in their field on their chosen topic and a month by month plan for the term so that our fellows and their mentors can set clear guidelines that are easier to follow and allow for greater and consistent progress.
Our fellowship gatherings have included:
- A discussion on mentoring with guests Prof Ingrid Nembhard, joint appointment in the School of Public Health and the School of Management and Jenny Lambe, a third year doctoral student in History where we talked candidly about negotiating mentoring relationships with faculty mentors, navigating department politics, relationships among doctoral student cohorts and different types of mentoring (academic, emotional and intellectual nurturing).
- Presentation and writing workshop with Karin Gosselink of the Yale Writing Center to speak about the personal statement, share tips on how to write a strong essay and what types of information/experiences to include within this statement. We then, asked our fellows to partake in a writing session in order to create a draft personal statement so they could begin to revise it and add to it over their time within our fellowship.
- We began our GRE preparation course for the juniors three years ago with instructor Jeremy Blanchard, MPH’11 and now, we are pleased to report that former fellow, Ivy Onyeador ’11 is currently teaching our GRE class. Ivy is at Yale this year as a Woodbridge Fellow working in the Chaplain’s Office. It is wonderful to have former fellows play a role within the fellowship!
- We’ve hosted mixers with graduate mentors, former Mellons on campus and alumni with cuisine from Bentara’s and Thali Too.
- Every semester, we offer opportunities for fellows to bond in an informal manner via tickets to the Yale Rep, movie outings and other Mellon and Bouchet social gatherings.
Two years ago, we piloted an in-house paper presentations symposium with Yale Mellon and Bouchet fellows where our fellows circulated drafts of papers they were working on in order to obtain feedback from peers. Last spring, we partnered with the Brown University Mellon Fellows to host a Writing and Presentation Symposium. Two Brown Mellon Fellows and three Yale Bouchet and Mellon Fellows presented papers which were circulated in advance of the symposium to the fellows at both institutions. We also asked four students from the two schools to serve as respondents to the presenters. Additionally, we used writing samples from within the humanities, social science and sciences to moderate discussions about writing within those fields. These discussions were moderated by Yale Mellon and Bouchet Fellows. This symposium was very intellectually engaging and prompted useful intellectual exchange between the Yale and Brown University Fellows.

Every year, our fellows participate in the Graduate School’s Bouchet Conference and this past year, several fellows were invited to join panels and present posters. Each spring, when our new cohort of fellows are chosen, we meet as a group to discuss the fellowship, review expectations and sign a fellowship contract. This past spring, Professor Pitti, our Program Chair, hosted the new fellows for a luncheon at Mory’s to both welcome them and review their role and expectations within the fellowship. We also hosted a series of workshops and meetings for our new fellows to prepare them for their first summer of independent research.

Our senior presentations and end of year dinner took place in late April. This is a time to celebrate our seniors, rejoice in their accomplishments and send them off to their post-Yale journey. Fellows, faculty mentors, Dean Miller, Yale College deans, Heaton Robertson, sponsor of our Bouchet Robertson Fellows, and other guests joined us for the senior presentations and our end of year dinner and presentation of Mellon and Bouchet Fellowship completion certificates and medals that are worn at Baccalaureatte and Commencement.
Congratulations 2011 Fellows!

Kevin Beckford’s research entails looking at African American political attachments to East Africa throughout the 20th century. Through this project, he hoped to gain greater insight about the African and African American connections which are so often distorted and thought to be purely African American and West African. His earlier research focused on exchange programs and their political implications within the contexts of both the East African experience and the African American experience. His summer 2009 internship at the Ugandan Parliament gave him access to quality archives and libraries. He also conducted interviews and surveys, traveled to numerous American archives such as the Schomburg Center for African American Studies in Harlem, and read articles and books recommended by his mentor. During the 2010 summer, Kevin spent time in Tanzania and Kenya enrolled in two different academic programs researching the interconnections of East African and African American political and cultural identities. His research focused on the hip hop movement in East Africa and its relationship to American hip hop as well as the use of hip hop to promote grass roots community dialogue and empowerment within the East African context. During this stay, Kevin interviewed over thirty individuals including youth, hip hop artists/community organizers, and notable community figures/music artists in the region. Kevin’s senior essay research shed light on the transnational identity of Africans Americans and East Africans and ways to improve relations and understanding.

Adrea Hernandez’s research investigates the movement and exchange of people, systems, and ideas within the prison industrial complex. More specifically, she examines the policies and conditions that have caused the United States to lead the world in incarceration rates and disenfranchisement by building upon that influence from the British Colonial Diaspora. After reviewing literature addressing the former British Empire, the American prison system, and penology in general during last summer, Adrea spent the summer of 2010 interning at the Justice Policy Institute where she worked on a host of publications exploring problematic issues relevant to incarceration. She conducted literature reviews, compiled and analyzed data from government statistics and drafted portions of various Institute reports. The summer experience was immensely helpful for Adrea in thinking about her own approach to her senior essay research where she will look at the phenomenon of mass incarceration in New Haven, Connecticut and the relationship of the incarcerated to inequality, reentry and re-enfranchisement or involvement in the criminal justice system in hopes to offer insights for determining the impact of structural intervention without cultural intervention reinforcement.
Congratulations 2011 Fellows!

David Mesham’s research in psychology focuses on the spectacular cognitive abilities and biases present in the human mind. He spent the past year working in Yale’s comparative cognition laboratory studying the cognitive capacities of capuchin monkeys. Through the study of these primate relatives, David’s senior project explored the question of when in our evolutionary history certain cognitive traits arose, as well as to understand how unique human cognition truly is. For the next two years, David will be living in Houston, TX and working with middle school students at a teacher in the Teach for America program.

Liza Lopez worked with Professor Alyssa Mt. Pleasant to research American Indian education, with an emphasis on the turn of the 19th century. For the final part of her project, she wrote her thesis on Richard Henry Pratt and the Carlisle Boarding School’s Outing System. She received a teaching fellowship from Princeton-in-Asia and will spend the next year teaching English to young students in Nan, Thailand.

Van Trinh Quoc Nguyen was mentored by Rene Almeling (Sociology) and Erik Harms (Anthropology). Her health disparities research focused on the role of cultural competency in promoting cancer screenings in the Asian American community. As part of her Bouchet project, she interned with the Vietnamese Community Health Initiative through the Indochina Sino-American Community Center, as well as B Free CEED at the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health, where she worked on hepatitis B/liver cancer projects. Last summer, she conducted interviews with physicians, non-profit managers, and other health professionals about their experiences with breast and cervical cancer awareness campaigns. Her research culminated in her senior thesis for the intensive Sociology major entitled “Spirit of Collaboration”: Cultural Competency and Cancer Prevention in Little Saigon. She plans to gain further experience in public health before returning to school.
Congratulations 2011 Fellows!

**Urpi Pariona**’s research centers on concepts of democracy and indigenous peoples, especially in Peru. Majoring in political science, Urpi completed a final senior project entitled Social Movements and Democracy: the Case of Bagua, Peru. As a Mellon Fellow Urpi worked with Elizabeth Wood and Enrique Mayer, and is grateful for their support and mentorship. While a Mellon Fellow Urpi also received the The Council of Latin American Studies Fellowship and the Richter Summer Fellowship to help complete her research. After graduation Urpi plans to pursue policy work in Washington D.C. with the organization Interfaith Workers Justice.

**Ivy Onyeador** majored in Psychology and her advisor was John Dovidio. Over the summer she was preparing for the GRE’s and in August she started working in the Chaplain’s Office through the Woodbridge Fellowship. She will also be a Saybrook Fellow. This fall she will be applying to PhD programs in Social Psychology. Her senior thesis explored perceptions of individuals in a heterosexual domestic violence situation and how concern and ratings of masculinity differed depending on the race and gender of the individual involved. She was particularly interested in the way concern and masculinity shifted for black women because of their multiple subordinate identities within race and gender and increased concern for any victim of interracial domestic violence.
Congratulations 2011 Fellows!

Kayla Vinson’s research interests are centered upon the experiences of minority youth, particularly African American and Hispanic, in secondary education. Her goal is to understand the systematic differences, both structural and experiential, that result in fewer members of these populations successfully navigating high school and enrolling in college. In the summer of 2009, Kayla worked with the Urban Education Institute (UEI) at the University of Chicago. UEI supports recently reconstituted schools on the South Side of Chicago, and Kayla’s role was to help conduct qualitative research to increase the Institute’s understanding of their impact on the schools with which they work. Her primary project was to conduct a program evaluation of the Institute’s Summer Accelerated Math Camp for high school students. During this past summer, Kayla was enrolled in the MURAP Program at UNC-Chapel Hill working with Professor Karolyn Tyson in Sociology on her summer project for the Mellon Mays Program.

Quingan Zhou graduated in May 2011 with a B.A. in Humanities, concentrating in Intellectual History. This past year, she worked with Professor Paulina Ochoa on her final research project, which focused on the methodology of studying the history of ideas. Specifically, she explored the role and problem of definitions within an intellectual history project. During the summer immediately after graduation, she will be studying in Korea under the State Department on a Critical Language Scholarship. In August 2011, she will start her position as a Program Associate at the Prostate Cancer Foundation.
2012 Profiles

Aala Abdelgadir is interested in the contemporary ideological, political and legal debates surrounding integration, immigration and identity in contemporary France as it applies to the Muslim population. At this stage of her research, advised by Professors Ellen Lust, she is working to simultaneously understand representations of French Muslims in public discourse as well as how this discourse affects how Muslim individuals identify with and relate to Islam. Over the summer she was in Paris working on the first part of her research and assembling the representation narrative of Islam and Muslims in public discourse. She hopes to further explore the relationship between the public narrative on Islam and identity construction and participation of Muslims.

Chidi Akusobi is a rising senior in Saybrook College majoring in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. He works in the laboratory of Dr. Paul Turner conducting bacteriophage evolution research which he presented at the American Society for Microbiology 2011 General Meeting. Chidi is a recent recipient of the UNCF-Merck Science Scholarship and this summer is interning at Merck Co. Inc. Chidi plans to develop his research into a year long senior thesis and hopes to incorporate the pharmacological principles he’s learned from his internship.

Jonhatan Aragon is a rising senior Mellon Mays Fellow in Davenport College. An American Studies major, he is working with both Professor Christopher Wildeman in the Sociology department and Professor Alicia Schmidt-Camacho in the American Studies department. With the help of the Mellon Mays Fellowship and the Richter Fellowship, this summer Jonhatan will narrow his research to documenting the lived experiences of detained, both current and former, Latino/a immigrants. In order to successfully continue interviews with research participants throughout the school year, he will focus on Latino communities in the New England area, including but not limited to Massachusetts and Connecticut. Following an intermediate summer study abroad experience in Prague, Czech Republic, he will conduct interviews with research participants and their families to eventually construct a thesis identifying and analyzing the effects of detainment on family life and structure in the Latino community. Jonhatan intends to use his findings in graduate school to develop a comprehensive study comparing the effects of detainment on Latino communities with the phenomenon of mass incarceration in the African American community.
2012 Profiles

Sandra Caballero research charts the political and socio-environmental movements in Indigenous communities throughout Latin America. She intends to examine the development and growth of social organizations that promote proactive and coordinated forms of political and social dialogue and activism in traditionally marginalized regions. Furthermore, through her study of indigeneity, her research proposes that multi-scale processes of environmental management, rural development, and expansion of local economies create greater avenues for political discourse and socio-environmental prosperity in indigenous communities. This summer, Sandra studied modern Nahua language and culture with Mixtec students from La Huesteca-Veracruzana, Mexico. Her study of modern Nahuatl will aid her in her hands-on research of development projects in continuously globalizing indigenous communities.

LaTisha Campbell is a rising senior Mellon Mays fellow in Ezra Stiles College. She is working with Professor Christopher Wildeman in the Sociology Department on a project on the connections between schools and prisons for urban youth of color. This summer she will be doing field work in New Haven, focusing on the educational experiences of incarcerated youth, and then participating in the Summer Research Opportunity Program at Northwestern University for eight weeks. Next year, she will continue this research and produce a senior essay in her majors, sociology and African American studies.

Linda Chang is a senior Bouchet Fellow in Ezra Stiles College. She is interested in investigating the conceptual structure of humans and non-human primates through a developmental and evolutionary perspective. This summer she is in New Haven working in the Comparative Cognition Laboratory with Professor Laurie Santos and in the Mind and Development Laboratory with Professor Paul Bloom. In the Comparative Cognition laboratory she is examining the economic principle of illusion of control with capuchin monkeys. In the Mind and Development Laboratory she is working on several studies with graduate students Jen Barnes and Lily Guillot pertaining to the cognitive science of fiction, the ‘paradox of horror’. and the ‘paradox of tragedy.’
2012 Profiles

**Eric Delgado** is currently working in Dr. Ralph DiLeone’s lab at the Yale School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry. The DiLeone lab focuses on understanding the molecular and neuronal circuits that are responsible for controlling reward-related behavior. Eric's project focuses on the role that cross-talk between the immune and nervous systems may have on the regulation of these behaviors, in the context of high fat diet and obesity. In particular, Eric is interested in the role microRNAs may have in regulating the interactions taking place between peripheral and nervous system inflammatory responses after chronic high fat diet.

**Steven Don Garza** will gain the status of senior Mellon Fellow as of next year. He lives off-campus, but belongs to Timothy Dwight College. He has been investigating Mexican Poetry and Studies of Translation with Professor Paulo Moreira since the summer of 2010, when he traveled to Mexico City DF. During the following summer and throughout the academic year he will continue his work at Yale University, and eventually develop his findings into his Senior Essay.

**Stephen Kim** is rising senior Mellon fellow in Berkeley College working with Professor John Rogers in the English department. He is double-majoring in Philosophy and English. This summer he is doing research on Milton's *Paradise Regained* in preparation for his senior essay in English. Specifically, he is looking at the epistemology of Christ and Satan within the context of this thorny yet unbelievably rich (and unfortunately somewhat neglected) Miltonic epic. Though his research will not be taking him to any faraway places this summer, Stephen is (perhaps a little too) excited to spend it buckling down and reading about Milton. In his spare time, Stephen enjoys wondering, pondering, observing campus squirrels, and behaving ridiculously with his friends.
2012 Profiles

Vy Tran is a rising senior Bouchet fellow in Timothy Dwight College working with Professor Marc Brackett in the psychology department. This summer, with the help of Mellon-Bouchet, the Southeast Asia Department, and the Fields Advanced Language program, she will conduct research on social and emotional learning (SEL) in primary schools in Vietnam, primarily focusing on educators’ perspectives and comparisons of SEL methodology. In addition to being excited for the research, she can't wait to devour steaming hot bowls of pho $1.00. Every day.

Anusha Raja is a rising senior Mellon fellow in Saybrook College. She is currently a Molecular, Cellular, Developmental Biology major with a special interest in medical anthropology and public health. This summer, Anusha will conduct an ethnographic case study in a primary health center in a rural village in Karantaka, India to understand the knowledge and perceptions of non-specialist health workers in treating mentally ill patients. For her senior year Mellon report, she will combine this case study with a systematic literature review of qualitative research conducted on this topic around India. She is looking forward to also traveling to Chennai, Goa, and Bombay to visit family during her stay in India.
Welcome 2013 Cohort!

**Catherine Dinh** is a rising junior Bouchet Fellow in Pierson College working with Prof. Stefanie Markovits in the English Department. Her project is interdisciplinary, involving both Psychology and English Literature, which she plans to major in. She is interested in how reading novels, including those of Jane Austen, compares to actual processing of our social world. This summer, she will will learn how to research in these disciplines at the University of Chicago's MMUF Summer Research Training Program.

**Jazzmin Estebane** is a rising Junior Mellon Mays fellow working with Professor Kathryn Dudley in the Anthropology Department. She is a Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies major interested in identity formation and the intersection of ethnicity, sexuality and disability in Latino HIV/AIDS organizing and advocacy. This summer she will travel to Los Angeles to work with the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives and work with Bienestar, a leading Latino HIV/AIDS advocacy organization.

**Sunny Jones** is a molecular, cellular and developmental biology major and rising junior Bouchet Fellow in Branford College. She currently works with James Rothman in the Cell Biology Department at the Yale Medical School. She is interested in understanding the mechanisms of SNAREs, proteins that fuel the trafficking of vesicles through the Golgi Apparatus of the cell. This summer she will be at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California conducting research on a separate side project.
Welcome 2013 Cohort!

**Lawrence Lim** is a rising junior Mellon Mays Fellow in Ezra Stiles College majoring in American Studies and conducting research under the guidance of Professor Geetanjali Singh Chanda in the Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department. He is interested in applications of Marxist critical theory and Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy to K-12 education as loci for identity construction. Specifically, his research investigates charter school models with strong ideological bents to examine how certain ideologies/pedagogies embedded in charters may negatively or positively impact the ability of students of historically disadvantaged backgrounds to examine their cultural contexts. Lawrence will travel to Washington, DC this summer to conduct research as well as intern in an office under Chancellor Kaya Henderson of DC Public Schools.

**Ryan Mendías** is a Mellon Mays Fellow and junior Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies major in Branford College. Ryan is working with Jafari S. Allen in the Anthropology and WGSS departments to explore questions of masculinity, sex work, and performance. This summer, he’s conducting ethnographic research on male dancers in gay nightclubs in New York City, where he hopes to gain a better understanding of the gendered and labor dynamics at play in a queer sexual economy.

**José-Alberto Navarro** is a rising junior Bouchet Fellow in Berkeley College majoring in Global Affairs working with Dr. Carol Carpenter at the School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences. He is interested in the economic and anthropological intersections of sustainable development, especially as it relates to food and fuel production and consumption. This summer he will be working at CalPoly Pomona’s Center for Regenerative Studies and continuing his research in New Haven at Yale and with The Phoenix Press (owner of Connecticut’s largest wind turbine project).
Welcome 2013 Cohort!

**Elizabeth Rule** is a rising-junior in Pierson College and is majoring in American Studies. Professor Ned Blackhawk is advising her research on the ways in which American Indian tribal museums represent tribal sovereignty. This summer Elizabeth will travel around the United States visiting tribal museums to conduct preliminary research.

**Natalia Thompson** is a rising junior Bouchet Fellow in Davenport College working with Prof. Alicia Schmidt Camacho. A Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies major, Natalia’s research focuses on grassroots LGBTQ activism in Latin America. She will conduct ethnographic research this summer in Mexico City, focusing on organizing among queer young women.

**Isabel Santos-Gonzalez** Isabel Santos-Gonzalez, a Bouchet Fellow, is a rising junior in Silliman College. She is an American Studies major and is working with Professor Stephen Pitti in the American Studies/History departments. Her research for the summer of 2013 focuses on Chicano literature from the mid-twentieth century to the present. She is drawing from novels, short stories, and graphic novels from Sandra Cisneros, Arturo Islas, and Los Bros Hernandez (among other authors) to piece together a comprehensive picture of the Chicano experience in the United States and analyze representations of gender, family, and ethnicity in the Chicano community.
Mentor Profile: Laurie Santos

Laurie Santos is an associate professor of psychology at Yale University and the director of Yale University’s Comparative Cognition Laboratory. Laurie received her B.A. in Psychology and Biology from Harvard University and her PhD in Psychology from Harvard. Her research explores the evolutionary origins of human cognition by studying the cognitive capacities present in non-human primates. She has investigated a number of topics in comparative cognition, including primates’ understanding of others’ minds, the origins of irrational decision-making, and the evolution of prosocial behavior. Laurie’s scientific research has been featured in The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Economist, Forbes, The New Yorker, New Scientist, Smithsonian, and Discover. She has also won numerous awards, both for her scientific achievements and for her teaching and mentorship. She is the recipient of Harvard University’s George W. Goethals Award for Teaching Excellence, Yale University’s Arthur Greer Memorial Prize for Outstanding Junior Faculty, and the Stanton Prize from the Society for Philosophy and Psychology for outstanding contributions to interdisciplinary research. She was recently voted one of Popular Science Magazine’s ‘Brilliant 10’ Young Minds.
What is the funniest experience you’ve had with a monkey?

Hmm. There are lots of funny experiences, so it’s hard to narrow down. Usually they involve being outsmarted by a monkey in ways that are just embarrassing. This happens a lot at my field site, which is a Puerto Rican island known as Cayo Santiago. Cayo is home to about 1000 rhesus monkeys, which means that there are a lot of monkeys there and we end up interacting pretty closely. This also means there are lots of opportunities for the monkeys to mess with us. Usually this happens when a crafty monkey decides to steal some really important part of our experimental stimuli. I’ve had lots of things stolen over the years: cardboard screens, plastic lizards, speaker cords, tasty eggplants, and so forth. Just last week one of our plastic orange was ripped off (and by a kindly looking old-lady monkey too. Always the ones you don’t suspect). It’s all pretty embarrassing.

Of all of the research that you’ve done, in your opinion, what is the single most interesting finding thus far?

Again, this is a tricky one, as I think lots of our findings are pretty exciting. The one I’m most excited about right now is our recent finding that monkeys seem to differ from humans in the way they think about other minds. Humans are very good at thinking about what others are thinking, and we employ lots of machinery to make sense of what others perceive, know, intend, and belief. We’ve long known that monkeys share at least some of this machinery. But one of our recent study has just discovered that monkeys have some limits in the way they think about others: although they understand what others see and know, they seem unable to think about others beliefs. This is a really exciting finding, as its one of the first spots where we’ve seen real differences in the way that humans and monkeys think about the world.

How did you know you wanted to be a professor? Was it one experience/encounter that sparked this interest?

I never really sat down and decided that I wanted to be a professor. I started off thinking that I wanted to be a lawyer, but when I got to college I ended up getting involved in research and really loving it. By my senior year, I really wanted to go to graduate school, but I'm not sure I thought carefully about the step that would come after that.

How do find a balance between being a professor and having a life?

This one is especially tricky, because I’m not sure I’m all that good at the work-life balance thing. Honestly, I kinda work all the time. But that’s a good thing-- I really like what I do, so for me it’s okay that I spend a lot of my time doing it. I’m also lucky that I feel like my job allows me to do lots of things for work that other people consider "vacation". Just last week, I got to travel with my husband to the Caribbean for our fieldwork. And when we’re not chasing after monkeys, we have lots time to enjoy a pina colada or two over chats about science. For me, this is the perfect balance, but it’s true that it’s not for everyone.
If you could give your undergraduate-self advice now about graduate school, what would it be and why?

Take more math classes. I really wish I did a lot more of that as a college student--more calculus, stats, and hard economics classes. It's hard to learn it now, so I wish I had sucked it up back then to learn more.

You teach a class on sex, evolution and human nature, more popularly known as 'Sexy Psych.' What makes psychology and science so sexy?

Science is best way we have to understand the mysteries of the natural world, which is sort of what I think makes it sexy. There are SO many wonders out there for us to figure out, and many of them involve understanding how we as humans tick. Learning more about how we as a species work is a fabulous quest. And it's so much fun. So...to me that's sexy. (But, to be fair the students probably think the class is "sexy" because I end up talking a lot about penises, mating strategies, orgasms and that sort of thing. So I probably have to add that caveat too for full disclosure.)
Keeping Up With Alumni: Joanne Ho, Yale Bouchet Fellow, 2009, PhD Candidate Harvard Medical School

What did you work on for your Mellon Mays or Bouchet research project? How did this relate to your major or extracurricular interests?

I characterized the expansion of the genetic code in archaea, in the laboratory of Dieter Söll at the Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry department. I was trained by a wonderful postdoc, Lynn Sherrer (now an editor at a scientific journal), in prokaryotic gene expression, oxygen-free cell culture, enzyme purification, and RNA biochemistry. She also taught me how to write well, make clear figures, and design good experiments. I published the results in three papers (in journals with impact factors of 9.8 and 7.8) and presented at international and U.S. conferences. During my undergraduate years, I never truly realized how intricate research was because Lynn and Professor Söll were excellent mentors. However, as a PhD student who has had the opportunity to train some younger scientists, I’ve realized that the training process is complicated and requires lots of patience!

What is your current position?

I am currently a PhD candidate at the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering at the Harvard Medical School, and work in the laboratory of Peng Yin.

What is your current research or project? Why do you find this project or subject intellectually exciting?

I am developing a tool for visualizing RNA inside living cells. Coming from the Yale MB&B department, I naturally find RNA structures intriguing. My current project makes me think differently about RNA: where I previously thought of RNA as highly evolved intricate structures with loops and cavities that performed complicated maneuvers inside cells, I can now also visualize it as silly putty that can be designed to behave in a prescribed manner. Working on engineering problems at the interface of RNA nanotechnology and synthetic biology with a biochemist’s perspective has shown me a different side of RNA.

How has the MMUF or Bouchet Fellowship influenced your academic or career goals so far?
The Bouchet fellowship gave me valuable insights to an academic career, and I am aware of the challenges (>100 candidates clamoring for a single position, and the uncertainty endemic to the tenure process) and pitfalls involved. However, I am optimistic that with knowledge comes preparation, and so long as I am mentally prepared to pursue an academic career, all I can do is to hope for the best and expect the worst (but secretly hope that the best will somehow come true).

Have you been able to interact with or mentor younger MMUF/Bouchet fellows or other students in your current position?

Definitely. I spoke on a panel for some Harvard MMUF/Bouchet undergraduate fellows (mostly humanities) in late 2009. I’m also much better equipped to give advice to science undergraduates, and I have been talking with minority undergraduates at my institute, to give them advice on college academics and graduate school.

Do you have any extracurricular activities that relate to your research or general academic interests?

I am part of a group that regularly showcases research to young students who visit my institute. I always have a station where I show samples and data to students from Boston area middle and high schools. I also taught Physics to elementary school children in a summer program.

Have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in your academic career so far? Do you have any advice on how to deal with these?

Deciding to go down the academic route requires coming to terms with the fact that one will be financially insecure between the ages of 23-32 (assuming a 5 year PhD and 4 year postdoc). I have been advised to simply operate with the knowledge that the pay will rise significantly at the next stage. The best solution is to continually remind yourself why you are in graduate school, and to focus on your eventual goal.

Do you have any advice for the current fellows?

Your undergraduate research will be very different from your graduate research. During your undergraduate career, focus on the process of learning and engage in research (MMUF/Bouchet organizes great workshops/seminars on how to conduct research). Try to go to a different school for graduate school, to learn how other academic systems and institutions operate. Intellectually challenge yourself as much as possible during your undergraduate career, say, by sampling diverse course offerings.

Is there anything else that you’d like to add?

Don’t sweat the small stuff! You’re already in great shape, doing what you do where you are. Also realize that intellect/dedication/motivation of an individual appears to increase exponentially as you near the the rightmost side of the normal distribution curve that plots the number of individuals against human effort. The curve never ends!
CONTACT US!

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