

ASPET SURF - Summer Undergraduate Research Fellows

Our SURF program kicked off May 16th and runs 10 weeks through the summer. This program is designed to introduce undergraduate students to pharmacology research by utilizing mentored research experiences to heighten student interest in careers in research or related health care disciplines. Students will spend about 40 hours a week in the lab and then also participate in a weekly seminar series. We spoke with Dr. Susan Barman, Director of the SURF program, to get her thoughts on the program and its impact on the department.



Susan Barman

Can you summarize what the SURF program is?

The SURF program is funded by ASPET (American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics) with help from Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine & Veterinary Medicine, and the Graduate School. The goal of the SURF program is to provide undergraduates with a first-time research experience in the exciting areas of pharmacology and toxicology. We target students after their first or second year in college (“rising sophomores” or “rising juniors”), as their career goals are not yet firmly established. By providing an early exposure to research, we aim to 1) introduce the students to the fields of Pharmacology & Toxicology, 2) excite them about research in these or related biomedical fields, and 3) provide a “springboard” for more extensive research experiences.

Tell us how you got involved in the SURF program?

I first served as the Coordinator of SURF in 1999 and was invited to write a story about our program for ASPET’s newsletter (Barman SM. SURFing at Michigan State University...with an international flair. Pharmacologist 41: 114, 1999). In Summer 2021, I was invited to assume this role again. My career-long passion to mentor the next generation of research scientists makes this a great fit for my interests.

How does the SURF program help the department? How does it help the participants?

The Department benefits by getting a reputation that we inspire the next generation of pharmacologists and toxicologists. Our faculty are able to make further progress on their research projects by recruiting these young, energetic students to our labs. Students benefit from being trained by high quality researchers. The Wednesday “seminar” program exposes them to a wide range of professional skills such as scientific writing, preparing abstracts, use of animals in research, and career opportunities in academia, industry, and government.

How did Covid-19 impact our SURF Program?

Due to COVID-19, we were unable to bring students into research laboratories in Summer 2020. Luckily, we were able to bring students originally selected as 2020 SURF fellows into our laboratories in 2021. We were grateful that our funding sources allowed us to use funds targeted for 2020 in summer 2021 to bring in a larger than average cohort of eager undergraduates.

What is your favorite aspect of working on with the SURF program?

I really enjoy meeting with SURF students at Wednesday afternoon seminars. Although I no longer have a research laboratory to help train the students in research techniques, I enjoy helping them gain professional skills in scientific writing at the Wednesday sessions. I also enjoy pairing students with faculty to help make the program a valuable experience for the students as well as to help faculty make progress in their research by having more hands on deck during the summer.

ASPET SURF - Meet Our Students

Our SURF program provides funding for eight fellows. For this month’s newsletter, we want to introduce you to half of our SURF students and then in next month’s issue we will share the other half of our SURF students.

(Brandon Hall) What made you want to join the SURF program here at MSU PharmTox?

The SURF Pharm Tox program attracted me because it seemed like a great experience to understand how research in the toxicology department works.



Brandon Hall

What’s one of your hobbies?

One of my hobbies is triathlon.

What’s your major?

My major is biochemistry.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I don't have quite a vivid vision of where I'll be five years from now, but I see myself being a part of a team that does lab work in the pharmaceutical area.

If you weren't into science, what would you want to study?

I'd study mathematics if I weren't into science.

(Tam Vo Do Gia) What made you want to join the SURF program here at MSU PharmTox?

I have always wanted to pursue a medical path, but I don't want to be a doctor. Hence, the path I'm looking at is medical research, and I applied to a variety of labs. When I got accepted to the Horibata Lab, my mentor, Dr. Sachi Horibata, suggested to me to apply for this program. After reading about the program, I know that beside working in lab, we also get a chance to learn more about Pharmacology and Toxicology, which is not my major. I feel that this is a great opportunity for me to learn more about myself whether this path is fit for me. To be honest, is it not great being trained at what I'm interested in and getting money at the same time?



Tam Vo Do Gia

What's one of your hobbies?

If I say one of my hobbies is working in lab, does it feel like I'm a nerd? I just enjoy doing things that people feel are difficult, because there is a sense of satisfaction at the end. Outside lab, culinary tourism is something I've always wanted to try.

What's your major?

My major is in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

In 5 years, I aim to be a good scientist, mentor, mentee, and maybe working on an approach to prevent chemo-resistance in cancer.

If you weren't into science, what would you want to study?

If I am not into science, I would want to be a hotel critic or travel critic.

(Taylor Rabanus) What made you want to join the SURF program here at MSU PharmTox?

I wanted to join the SURF program to become a better scientist and see what it was like to work in a lab setting.

What's one of your hobbies?

A hobby of mine is paddle boarding or kayaking with my dog.

What's your major?

My major is Molecular Genetics and Genomics.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

In five years, I hope to have graduated with a masters in Genetic Counseling.

If you weren't into science, what would you want to study?

If I wasn't into science, I would want to study social work.

(Megan Shuck) What made you want to join the SURF program here at MSU PharmTox?

I wanted to go deeper with the project I had been working on during the past school year.

What's one of your hobbies?

I like to listen to music and sing.

What's your major?

I'm a Chemistry Major.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I'm not sure where I see myself in 5 years.

If you weren't into science, what would you want to study?

If I wasn't studying physical science, I would want to study Psychology.



Taylor Rabanus



Megan Shuck

Our 2022 SURF Students



From Left to Right: Megan Shuck, Brandon Hall, Will Tragge, Evan Johnston, Ally Lewis, Taylor Rabanus, Tam Vo Do Gia. (Andrew Decker not shown)

New Faculty Member - Dr. Hosam Elbaz

Tell us a little bit about your background:

I was born in Ames, Iowa. At the age of 3, my family moved to Cairo, Egypt. Once 18, I started my studies in Pharmacology at Misr International University. I graduated with a professional degree in pharmacy in the year 2005, and immediately after I joined their staff as a teaching assistant in pharmaceutical sciences. In 2007, I moved to Morgantown in West Virginia to start my graduate education in pharmacology at West Virginia University. I graduated with a PhD in Pharmaceutical and Pharmacological Sciences in 2011. In 2012, I moved to Detroit to start a fellowship at Wayne State University School of Medicine. In 2014, I moved to Ann Arbor for a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Michigan Medical School. In 2017, I joined the pharmacy team at Rite Aid & CVS, and now here I am today.



Hosam Elbaz

What made you want to come to Michigan State University?

MSU is an excellent place to work with a supportive work environment. I've found the people at MSU to be very friendly and I'm excited to teach pharmacology to medical students.

If you weren't a pharmacologist, what would you be today?

I would still be a scientist in a different field, or a scholar/researcher, or even a health care practitioner.

What is your favorite hobby outside of work?

I've always been interested in Russian culture and would love to visit Moscow to see historical sites and cultural monuments.

New Grant:

Soluble Epoxide Hydrolase Inhibitors To Treat Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). **Kin Sing Stephen Lee**. Michigan Economic Development Corporation. \$40,000.

Upcoming Events:

Alumni Event (Aug 25-27)

As a reminder, our annual alumni event is scheduled for the last weekend in August with the main day of activities on the 26th. We will also be presenting the Kenneth E. Moore Distinguished Alumnus Award to Dr. Andrew King. Dr. King graduated from our PhD program in 2008 and Dr. Greg Fink served as his PhD Mentor. In addition to Dr. King, our alumni group this year will consist of Dr. Leon Bruner (1985, Roth), Dr. James Bus (1975, Gibson), Dr. Nancy Kanagy (1992, Fink), Dr. Frederic Moulin (1998, Roth), and Dr. Erika Boerman (2010, Jackson). We will be emailing out more details over the next month and will provide an update in our next newsletter.

Department Picnic (Aug 27)

This year we've included the Department Picnic as part of our Alumni Event. Saturday, August 27 will be our Department picnic hosted at Hartrick Park in Okemos MI. Look for emails to go out confirming the time of day and also we will provide an update in our next monthly newsletter.