

# the **[CATALYST]**

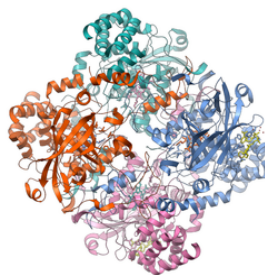
## [Inaugural Issue!]

Greetings, readers! With this inaugural issue of *the [CATALYST]*, we hope to provide a regular, easy-access means to both increase awareness of what's happening in the department of Biochemistry and foster a spirit of camaraderie and fun. We aim to publish on a monthly basis and are open to comments, suggestions, and reader story submissions (see page 6 for more information).

In this issue, you'll find out some fun facts you probably didn't know about one of our faculty members in our *10 Things* section, catch up with a department alumnus in *Where Are They Now?*, and get your monthly dose of

happenings around the department, to name a few! We hope you enjoy our first issue and look forward to many more!

Amanda Suchanek  
Editor



**Happy  
Birthday!**

**William Petros 9/7**  
**Satyabrata Sinha 9/29**



Did we miss someone? Please let us know via email  
asuchanek@hsc.wvu.edu

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## [Chair's Corner]



Photo by Heimo Riedel

There are two recent projects in the Department that I would like to highlight. You are reading the first, the inaugural edition of the *Catalyst*. Mike M's alumni newsletter served as the inspiration and conversations with Alexey and Amanda

(our editor) at the departmental retreat crystallized the project. Many thanks to these folks and congratulations to Amanda for bringing the project to fruition.

The second is the Department of Biochemistry historical timeline project, which can be viewed on the Department's web site (link on page 5). We built upon the history of Biochemistry in Medical Education at WVU, written by Dr. Reginald Krause (Chair from 1951-1976), to extend the timeline to the present. This

compilation has been well received and the successes of our faculty and alumni are diverse and noteworthy. I hope you will take a few minutes to stroll down memory lane or peruse some of the accomplishments of your predecessors. I also hope that the *Catalyst* becomes part of your regular reading routine to learn a little more about past and present members and to keep up with events in the Department.

-Mike



Kudos!



Have an announcement or news story? Submit it to [asuchanek@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:asuchanek@hsc.wvu.edu). Deadline for submissions will be the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month at 5pm.

"I was told (jokingly) after a few months that I asked too many questions."

## [News & Announcements]

### Congratulations to...

#### **Vishy Ramamurthy**

*Vishy was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure on July 1, 2012 **AND** had his NIH RO1 competitive renewal grant funded!*

#### **Steve Frisch**

*Steve was recently awarded a 2-year grant through the Department of Defense!*

#### **Holly Damron-Cyphert**

*Holly's first first-author publication was published in the June 1, 2012 issue of the Journal of Biological Chemistry! The paper is titled Activation of the Farnesoid X Receptor Induces Hepatic Expression and Secretion of Fibroblast Growth Factor 21. Holly is finishing her last semester as a graduate student in the Hillgartner lab.*

#### **Maria Voronkova**

*Maria's research poster was selected to be highlighted during the "Cancer" Scientific Session at the Fourth Biennial National IDEa Symposium of Biomedical Research Excellence (NISBRE) on June 27 in Washington, D.C.! The title of Maria's poster is Gene Expression Profiling in Cells Undergoing EMT and MET Identifies Multiple Transcription Factors Involved in the EMT Transcriptional Reprogramming. Maria is in Alexey Ivanov's lab.*

## [From the Editor]

Since this is the first issue of our newsletter, I think it's only fair that everyone knows who the woman behind the curtain is, so here goes! I am a fourth-year graduate student working toward a Ph.D in Lisa Salati's lab.

I was born and raised about 30 miles southeast of Seattle in a town called Maple Valley. I didn't wander far after high school and ended up with a BS in biology from the University of Washington in 2006. I started working in Wes Van Voorhis' (clue to my future??) lab during my sophomore year originally as a dishwasher. I was told (jokingly) after a few months that I 'asked too many questions' and was given a project of my own studying the molecular biology of syphilis—which was always really fun to tell people on the bus!

After graduation, I was convinced I wanted to do bench work for the rest of my life, so I went on to work as a research technician at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. I spent three awesome years there, but I guess you could say I had that 'quarter-life crisis' that John Mayer was singing about and decided I wanted to go back to school.

So in the summer of 2009 I packed up my two cats and got on a plane bound for Morgantown, and the rest is a work in progress.

Okay, so now that you all know me a little better, I volunteered to get this newsletter going after chatting with Alexey Ivanov and our fearless leader Mike at the department retreat back in June.



**Photo by Holly Damron-Cyphert**

I'm really looking forward to working on the coming issues and I welcome any suggestions, comments, thoughts, and constructive criticisms to make this newsletter something special. I really hope that you all enjoy what we have so far! Cheers!

-Amanda

## the[Spotlight]

10 Things you didn't know about Alexey Ivanov !

The Basics:

Title: Research Assistant Professor

Lab/Office: 2830

**1. What was your very first job?**

*I guess my very first job, for which I was paid, was a guide in my home town's state forest and a small wooden sculpture museum there. I was 14 then. When I was 16 I worked for two summer months on a factory as a turner. First full-time job – postdoc.*

**2. Weirdest food you've ever eaten?**

*Old fashioned stainless steel razor blade. I bet I could do it and won. You just break it into small pieces and swallow ☺. OK, it is not food. Chicken stomachs, pig ear and crocodile meat.*

**3. If you had to do it all over again, what would you study in school?**

*Higher math, physics and statistics.*

**4. Favorite junk food?**

*Fast food – Big Mac, sweets – ice cream or crème brûlée.*

**5. Biggest pet peeve?**

*My kids eating junk food. Not sci-fi superhero movies, TV, ads & telemarketers. Cable and cell phone monopolies etc.*

**6. 5 things you couldn't live without?**

*If light/sun, air, food, sleep and sex are provided, then people, books, science, humor and funding.*

**7. Hands-down favorite movie?**

*Shrek. Solaris.*

**8. Least favorite thing to do in the lab?**

*Writing in the lab book.*

**9. Most embarrassing moment?**

*It is based on cultural differences in rituals performed when leaving a party. In the US – hugging, in Russia – kissing on the cheek. End of my daughter's birthday party. Her friends' mothers (Americans) trying to hug me and I (Russian) trying to kiss them on the cheek. Use your imagination or re-enact – very embarrassing.*

**10. Ever tried to spell your name in amino acid structures?**

*Not really. A L E X(any aa) E Y*





## [Alumni Spotlight]

### Where are they now?

**Alison Kohan, PhD**  
Post-doctoral Fellow  
University of Cincinnati

#### WVU Graduate Advisor:

Lisa Salati

#### Graduation Year:

August 2009

#### What have you been up to since you left WVU?

I've been working as a post-doc for Patrick Tso at the Metabolic Disease Institute at UC. My project focuses on the gut apolipoprotein A-IV and its role as anti-diabetic factor. In terms of my career, I've been extremely fortunate to work with a tremendously supportive mentor. I received my own NIH post-doctoral fellowship in 2011, so that has helped too. The Lipid Group here at UC is so supportive and collaborative. What is really great is that most of the scientists around here are really excited about each others projects, so it's quite easy to get advice, learn new techniques, or plan that "perfect" experiment that requires some special equipment or expertise. I've been able to be really productive during these last 3 years, which is fun.

Since we moved from Morgantown, we've missed Mountaineer sports! But we've kept busy with our toddler (pictures enclosed, since I wouldn't be a good mom if I didn't try to show her off a little).

#### What do you enjoy most about your current position, field of study, or your current life endeavors?

Being a post-doc is great. You are able to be quite independent, but you don't have to worry all the time about grant money. It's kind of



**Ali and her mentor, Dr. Patrick Tso, at the 2012 ISSFAL conference in Vancouver.**

like being a senior in high school—your parents keep telling you to enjoy it, because the responsibility is coming!

I spend a lot of time writing and reading, and the rest I spend in the lab. Generally, I'm interested in how the gut functions in an endocrine manner to regulate whole-body energy homeostasis. I think an under-appreciated mechanism for this type of regulation is the chylomicron particle, and its ability to deliver endocrine factors to adipose tissue, liver, and to plasma lipoproteins like HDL. In the future, I'd like to look at the interaction between chylomicrons and vascular inflammation, especially how this relates to cardiovascular health (which I hope to turn into a career development award early next year).

#### What advice would you give to current or incoming graduate students here at WVU?

Write as much as you can. Dr. Minnear always told us to "write early, write often". That is great advice. I write more than I do anything else (which is the opposite of what you do as a grad student, where you

are doing bench work more than anything else). If you get used to writing, it'll come easier. Plus, you'll get more papers ☺

#### What advice do you have for students getting ready to graduate during these difficult economic times?

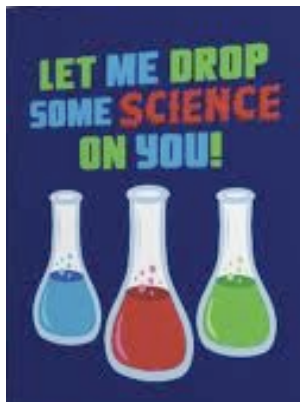
In my opinion, the best training you can get as a post-doc is from a mentor who writes successful grants. If your mentor can get a grant funded for years, they can probably teach you how to do it too. Plus, worst-case scenario, your job will be pretty secure for at least a few years in a lab with good support. Most post-docs I know are hoping to "ride out" the 7-12% funding lines at NIH until people either leave the field or retire. Hopefully it won't take 20 years or get worse before we're all ready to be faculty members!

"If your mentor can get a grant funded for years, they can probably teach you how to do it, too."



Ali's daughter,  
Sidney Pearl Kohan  
(she's 2 and a half  
now!!)





## [Science and Health News Highlights]



### **\*\* Science at the Olympics: Team Science \*\***

*The Olympics is a vast experiment in human performance, sport technology and global travel. Nature meets some of the scientists behind the scenes.*



### **\*\* Inactivity 'as deadly as smoking' \*\***

*A lack of exercise, contributing to diseases such as diabetes and cancer, is now causing as many deaths as smoking across the world, a study suggests.*



### **\*\* Lack of proof sport products work \*\***

*Consumers could be wasting their money on high-end trainers, sports drinks and protein shakes, according to a BBC investigation.*



### **\*\* Science Teachers Guilty of Releasing Invasive Species \*\***

*New research finds that one out of four science educators in the U.S. and Canada released lab animals into the wild after they were done using them in the classroom, introducing a surprising but potentially serious pathway for invasives to take hold in new locales.*



### **\*\* 'Moderate alcohol dementia risk' \*\***

*Drinking even "moderate" amounts of alcohol increases the risk of dementia, research suggests.*



### **\*\* Egg allergies 'treated with egg' \*\***

*Omelettes, meringues and pasta could one day be back on the menu for people with egg allergies after they are treated with the very food they are allergic to, say US researchers.*

**Have you seen the  
Biochemistry  
Timeline??  
Check it out on the  
Department website!**



## [Laugh of the Month]



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### Quote of the Month:

“The important thing in science is not so much to obtain new facts as to discover new ways of thinking about them.”

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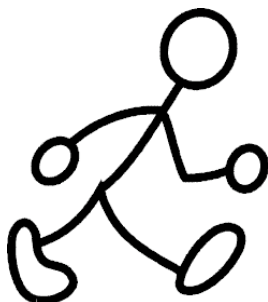
*William Lawrence Bragg*

## Upcoming Events September 2012

Date	Event	Time	Location
9/5	Farmer's Market	11am	Outside HSC Cafeteria
9/6	Research Forum <i>Ruppert Lab</i>	4pm	Erma Byrd 201
9/11	Faculty Meeting	12pm	3067 HSN
9/12	Farmer's Market	11am	Outside HSC Cafeteria
9/13	Research Forum <i>Sokolov Lab</i>	4pm	Erma Byrd 201
9/18	Seminar: <i>Yi Xing, PhD, University of Iowa</i>	12pm	3067 HSN
9/19	Farmer's Market	11am	Outside HSC Cafeteria
9/20	Research Forum <i>Schaller Lab</i>	4pm	Erma Byrd 201
9/22	First Day of Autumn		
9/26	Farmer's Market	11am	Outside HSC Cafeteria
9/26	Seminar: <i>Heide Ford, PhD, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Center</i>	12pm	3129 HSN
9/27	Research Forum <i>Pugacheva Lab</i>	4pm	Erma Byrd 201

### the[WRAP]

Everyone benefits from a little bit of exercise. Get up and get moving for at least 20 minutes a day! Visit the [WVH Wellness Program](http://www.wvu.edu/~wvvh/WellnessProgram) website and check out the walking routes around the HSC—both indoors and out!



**Have an announcement, idea, or story you would like featured in the[CATALYST]? Send them to Amanda at [asuchanek@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:asuchanek@hsc.wvu.edu)**  
Deadline for submissions will be the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month at 5pm.