BBS Symposium 2020

Career Diversity & Opportunities Panel Participants

Christopher Blackwood, PhD

Chris obtained his Bachelor of Science in Biology from Clark Atlanta University (CAU). At CAU, he was award the MARC fellowship, and worked under the supervision of Dr. Sean Kimbro in the department of Biological Sciences. There he studied and maintained an estrogen receptor-alpha knockout mouse colony, which was used to study the effects of estrogen in cancer. He then received a NIH fellowship and worked with Dr. Susan Sullivan at the National Institutes of Health. In his studies, he discovered novel taste cell receptors, Gpr113 and Trcg1, which are critical G-proteins couple receptors involved taste perception. Chris went on to receive his Ph.D. in Neurosciences from Cornell University under Dr. David Lin. His dissertation was entitled "The Role of Jagged1 in the Subventricular Zone during Late Embryonic Development."

Erin Chu, DVM, PhD

Erin spent her pre-vet school days bouncing around Poughkeepsie, NY, Beijing, China, and SIngapore, before returning to Cornell for a degree in Biological Sciences. She stayed on to earn two more, entering the Combined DVM/ PhD program in 2010. Erin earned her PhD in the lab of Dr. Paul Soloway studying a mechanism at the intersection of long noncoding RNA and DNA methylation in the embryonic mouse male germline. While also practicing at HQHV wellness and spay/neuter clinics, she began consulting for Embark Veterinary, becoming their Senior Veterinary Geneticist after receiving her PhD in 2017. She recently started at Amazon Web Services as their Life Sciences lead for Open Data, hoping to challenge herself in the greater tech field and in time bring back her learnings to the companion animal space.
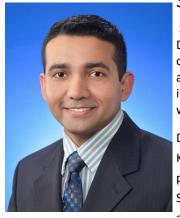
Tom Denes, PhD

Tom is an assistant professor of molecular food microbiology in the Department of Food Science at The University of Tennessee. His research focuses on the interactions between bacteriophages and bacterial food-borne pathogens. As a co-director for the TN Integrated Food Safety Center of Excellence, he is involved in efforts to improve the implementation of whole genome sequencing approaches to foodborne pathogen outbreak detection. Dr. Denes received his B.S. from The Evergreen State College in 2009 and his Ph.D. in Comparative Biomedical Sciences from Cornell University in 2016.

Nick Ledesma, DVM, PhD

Dr. Nick Ledesma is an alumnus of the Combined DVM-PhD Program at CUCVM ('13, '16), and is now the Head of the Serology Section at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. During his graduate work with Dr. Laura Harrington as his advisor, Nick developed and implemented laboratory and field methods to analyze contributing factors of vector-borne disease ecology using dog heartworm as a model. His experience in epidemiology, public health, and mosquito-borne disease was put into practice in his subsequent position at the California Department of Public Health, Vector-Borne Disease Section (CDPH-VBDS). As Vector Control Specialist in the CDPH Zika control program, Nick oversaw the laboratory group conducting surveillance of pesticide resistance genes in the invasive *Aedes aegypti* and *Ae. albopictus* populations throughout the state, and he also joined the CDPH-VBDS team in conducting surveillance for plague, hantavirus, and tick-borne diseases in wild-caught rodents and vectors. In 2018, after over a year in CDPH, Nick moved to Ames, IA to join the Serology Section of NVSL as their Veterinary Medical Officer.

Sunish Mohanan, BVSc, MS, PhD, Diplomate ACVP.

Sunish is an experienced industry leader and a toxicologic pathologist currently serving as the Director, Pathology, Non-Clinical Safety at GlaxoSmithKline, Collegeville, PA, where he focuses on both discovery/toxicologic pathology and biomarker research to support immuno-oncology and epigenetics programs. He also serves as a mentor for junior scientists and pathologists in industry. Previously, he was a Toxicologic Pathologist at Eli Lilly and Company, Indianapolis, IN, where he gained recognition for his work in toxicologic pathology and tissue biomarkers.

Dr. Mohanan received his veterinary medical degree from the College of Veterinary Medicine in Kerala, India. He gained diverse research experience in the US working in molecular biology/pathology projects at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine before joining the diagnostic and comparative pathology residency program at Wake Forest School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC. Dr. Mohanan became a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Pathologists in 2010. In the same year, he joined the Cornell University Comparative Biomedical Sciences Ph.D. program. At Cornell, he worked on understanding the role of PAD enzymes and histone citrullination in cancer progression. He applied his pathology skills to collaborate with multiple cancer biology and bioengineering labs at Cornell. Sunish is author or co-author of more than 20 peer-reviewed scientific publications and book chapters, with more in the works.

Sunish has served as the Chair for Society of Toxicologic Pathology (STP) Education Committee, STP Modular Course Subcommittee and as a member of the STP Career Development and Outreach (CDOC), Fundraising, and Membership Committees. He also served as the Vice President for Comparative and Veterinary Specialty Section for Society of Toxicology (SOT). For all that he has accomplished in his early career and for his dedicated service to the Society, STP has recently honored Sunish Mohanan as the 2020 Distinguished Early Career Awardee.

Rajni Singh, PhD

Rajni is a New Jersey native and graduated from Rutgers University with a B.S. in Animal Science. She then joined Cornell University as a Molecular and Integrative Physiology graduate student, also in the Department of Animal Science. Her dissertation research used animal models to understand the genetic basis of Type 2 Diabetes. She then went on to do a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, where her research focused on the central nervous system regulation of metabolism. She joined the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine, Division of Surveillance as an ORISE Fellow in 2014, and became a Consumer Safety Officer in 2015. Her work is centered on reviewing data on marketed animal drugs to ensure their continued safety and effectiveness.