

PhysioLINK

June 29, 2023

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This issue is all about celebrations – Graduations! Honors! Recruitments! Retirements! Awards! Research advances! University rankings! We are so proud of our faculty, trainees and staff, and am delighted to share all the good news with you.

This will be the last PhysioLINK of the academic term. A reminder that the University is closed tomorrow and July 3rd for the Canada Day long weekend ([University Holiday Schedule](#)). I hope everyone has an amazing summer and takes the time to re-charge. Thank you everyone for your many contributions over this past academic year!

Scott P. Heximer, PhD

Ernest B. and Leonard B. Smith Chair,
Department of Physiology
Temerty Faculty of Medicine

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR FACULTY

Temerty Faculty of Medicine Celebrates Success in Teaching Awards!

Congratulations to **Professor Michelle French** on being awarded the **Sustained Excellence and Innovation in Life Sciences Teaching Award** from the Faculty of Medicine; and **Professor Denise Belsham** for the **University of Toronto President's Teaching Award**. Both of these "Great Women in Physiology" were celebrated at a Temerty Faculty of Medicine Reception on June 21, 2023 at Hart House.



Unlocking Another Piece of the Puzzle: Novel Approach Maps Signaling Pathways Underlying Heart Failure



A team led by Cristine Reitz, Uros Kuzmanov, and **Prof. Anthony Gramolini** have developed a [new approach to better understand the complex signaling mechanisms underlying heart failure](#).

A recent publication in the ***Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*** (PNAS) offers valuable insights into the phosphorylation-driven regulation of protein networks in heart failure patients. While heart failure affects millions worldwide, the underlying signaling pathways have remained largely unexplored – until now.

Drs. Michelle French and Helen Miliotis honoured at the American Physiology Summit for Education Research



Congratulations to **Drs. Michelle French** and **Helen Miliotis** whose work was honoured at the American Physiology Summit as an Abstract of Distinction, among the top 10 posters in the Teaching category.

The Summit took place in Long Beach, California at the end of April with over 3000 attendees. The conference was unique in that it brought together physiology and education researchers. "It was nice to have everyone under the same umbrella who's interested in physiology as a whole," Dr. Miliotis said. [Read all about Michelle and Helen representing education research at the conference.](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON RECRUITMENTS

We are excited to announce the appointments of **Dr. Kacey Prentice** and **Dr. Tara MacDonald** as the successful candidates in the Metabolic Diseases/Diabetes Search. We were in a fortunate position to make a dual hire at the rank of Assistant Professor, tenure stream. Kacey will be joining us on September 1st, 2023 and Tara on January 1st, 2024. Both Kacey and Tara will hold the Banting and Best Insulin Discovery Professorship over the first five years of their appointment. A warm welcome to both of these amazing ladies!



Dr. Kacey Prentice

Kacey is originally from Oshawa, Ontario. She first came to the University of Toronto, Woodsworth College in 2006 and obtained her BSc with a specialization in developmental biology in 2010. She then joined the lab of Dr. Michael Wheeler in the Department of Physiology for her PhD, which she completed in 2015. Her doctoral work focused primarily on circulating factors influencing beta cell function in the context of gestational and type 2 diabetes. For her postdoctoral work she joined the lab of Dr. Gokhan Hotamisligil in the Department of Molecular Metabolism at Harvard to expand her understanding of interorgan communication in diabetes pathogenesis. Her work focused

on an adipo-pancreatic axis that is dysregulated in the context of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Using genetic and antibody-mediated therapeutic targeting strategies, they identified a novel protein hormone complex called Fabkin, which could be targeted to preserve beta cell mass and function, improving diabetic outcomes in mice. Kacey's lab in the Department of Physiology will continue to explore this axis of interorgan communication, and factors influencing beta cell dysfunction in early stages of diabetes pathogenesis, with hopes of directing the development of biomarkers and targeted therapeutics for early intervention and disease prevention. Outside of the lab she enjoys traveling, thrift shopping, spending time with friends and her 11 year old pug, Pepper, and she loves to do arts and crafts, including painting.



Dr. Tara MacDonald

Tara grew up in Ontario and pursued graduate training in the Department of Human Health and Nutrition at the University of Guelph. She completed a coursework MSc degree in Dr. Coral Murrant's lab, and a co-supervised PhD with Drs. David Dyck and David Wright. Her thesis focused on identifying how cytokines and hormones regulate key metabolic pathways in skeletal muscle and adipose tissue during exercise and metabolic disease. She did her initial postdoc training in Dr. Sarah Lessard's lab at Joslin Diabetes Center/Harvard Medical School in 2016, and used complementary cell, rodent and human models to discover how hyperglycemia promotes (mal)adaptive molecular, tissue and whole-body responses to aerobic exercise. With an everlasting interest in hyperglycemia and stress biology, she has been working in Dr. Peng Yi's lab since 2021 to uncover how pancreatic β cell stress and metabolism interact during the progression to diabetes. She has enjoyed supervising, mentoring and teaching others in the lab along the way. Her group will focus on decoding the many putative and unknown links between hyperglycemia, cell stress and diabetes across a range of tissues including pancreatic β cells and skeletal muscle. Outside of the lab Tara likes to run on trails, learn Italian (slowly), ride her bike, go camping, find new breweries, and pet neighbourhood dogs.

June 2023 CONVOCATION LIST



Very many congratulations to all of our trainees below on completion of their graduate degrees. We are incredibly proud of your achievements and wish you the very best as you embark on your chosen career paths!

Lastname	Firstname	Program	Supervisor
Bongolan	Tonya	PhD	Rogers I
Chin	Kyle	MSc	Hare G / Mazer D
Ellner Yerushalmi	Danna	MSc	Matthews S
Eng	Margaret (Liz)	PhD	Matthews S
Fatehi	Amatullah	MSc	Rogers I
Ghazisaeidi	Shahrzad	PhD	Salter M
Khodaei	Shahin	PhD	Orser B
Kim	Kyunga (Sally)	PhD	Juriscova A
Koek	Laura	PhD	Collingridge G
Kolaj	Adelaida	PhD	Miller F
Lundbye	Camilla	PhD	Collingridge G
Mcllwraith	Emma	PhD	Belsham D
Merovitch	Neil	PhD	Lefebvre J
Mughis	Hafsah	MSc	Matthews S
Nadeem	Amna	MSc	Lye S / Shynlova O
Piro	Anthony	MSc	Wheeler M
Price	Kaitlyn	PhD	Barr C
Providokhin	Ksenia	MSc	Min J
Stojanovski	Sonja	PhD	Wheeler A
Turki	Razan	PhD	Kuebler W
Venkatesan	Sridevi	PhD	Lambe E
Welton	Jessica	MSc	Cox B

SPOTLIGHT ON PHYSIOLOGY TRAINEES



Congratulations to **Neil Merovitch** who recently graduated with a PhD from Physiology. Neil sat down with Julia Soudat to [share his experience as an advocate, doctoral student and living with a disability](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON PHYSIOLOGY MHSc TRAINEES

Two exceptional students selected for MHSc Award

Congratulations to Shandon Ashitei and Kevin Lee!



Shandon Ashitei



Kevin Lee

Each year, the Department of Physiology issues the MHSc in Medical Physiology Award to honour the accomplishments of a student in the program who has achieved excellence not only in PSL4010Y (Mentored Literature Review in Physiology) but also across their entire MHSc program (excluding the practicum). The award supports the costs of publishing their mentored literature review in an appropriate journal.

This year the competition was so close that the MHSc Advisory Committee (who assesses the applications) gave the award to two deserving students, Shandon Ashitei and Kevin Lee. [Read on for details on their winning papers and join us in congratulating both of these exceptional students.](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON BELSHAM LAB MEMBERS

It's been a *hypothal-amazing* spring for the graduate students in the Belsham Lab. After six straight Fridays of research days, congratulations to each on their successes!

Kevin He – PhD student won the Outstanding Abstract Award at the Endocrine Society ENDO2023 meeting in Chicago in June. He also was awarded a CGS-D this spring.



Calvin Lu – PhD student won a Best Abstract Award at both the Southern Ontario Reproductive Biology meeting, and at the FIP Research Day. He also was awarded a CGS-D this spring.

Cindy Zhang – PhD student won a Best Oral Presentation Award at the Southern Ontario Reproductive Biology meeting. She also was awarded a CGS-D this spring.



Ishnoor Singh – PhD student (co-supervised with M. Wheeler) won a Best Abstract Award at the CPIN Research Day.

SPOTLIGHT ON U of T

How lucky are we to work and study at U of T!

The University of Toronto has been ranked 21st among universities globally – and second among public universities in North America – in the latest QS World University Rankings.

U of T climbed 13 spots in the latest edition of the highly regarded annual ranking by U.K. analytics firm Quacquarelli Symonds, placing it first in Canada and 21st out of the 1499 universities included in this year's ranking.

"This latest ranking underscores the University of Toronto's world-leading scholarship, research and teaching excellence across a remarkably broad spectrum of disciplines," said U of T President **Meric Gertler**.

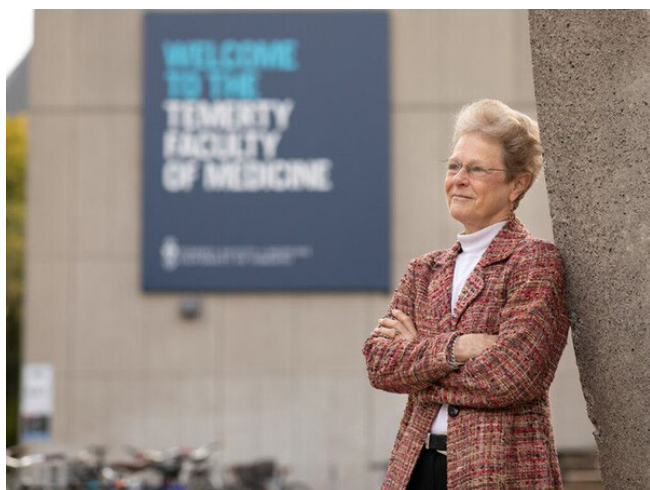
Keep Reading: U of T ranked 21st globally, second among North American public universities: QS World University Rankings | University of Toronto (utoronto.ca)

SPOTLIGHT ON RETIREMENTS

Thank you to everyone who came out to the Departmental Party last week to celebrate with **Dr. Patricia Brubaker** and **Jenny Katsoulakos** as well as our longstanding Physiology cross-appointee **Dr. Amira Klip** who transitions from Senior Scientist to Emeritus Scientist status at SickKids.

Our own **Julia Tausch** recently sat down with Pat and Jenny to hear about their time and memories with the Department.

Physiology honours Dr. Patricia Brubaker, the “Godmother of GLP-2,” who retires June 30th



Last Wednesday, June 22nd, Dr. Patricia Brubaker presented the final talk of her career to a packed audience of ardent fans. Everyone from former students to scientific colleagues, non-scientist friends, former department Chairs, and her beloved husband Steve piled into Room 2172 in the Medical Sciences building, and listened, rapt, as Dr. Brubaker shared the story of her life and career in a seminar entitled “Reflections on 45 years as a scientist.” [Keep reading](#)



Executive Assistant to the Chair, Jenny Katsoulakos, Retires After Thirty-Six Years

If you’ve walked down the administrative hallway of the Department of Physiology any time between 1987 and today, chances are you’ve heard the melodic laughter of Jenny Katsoulakos hailing from the Chair’s Office where she is Executive Assistant. All of us in the Department will have to work hard to honour her legacy and bring the same level of energy, enthusiasm, and palpable joy to the hallway now that she’s retired. We sat down with Jenny during her last month of work to reflect on how she got here, her greatest accomplishments, and what’s next. [Keep reading](#)

RETIREE CLASS OF 2023!



University's Retirement Reception held on May 16, 2023.



Do you have a news item for the next PhysioLINK?
Please contact the Chair's Office
Physiology.chair@utoronto.ca