

# Where are They Now?

By Margaret Berglund

A monthly feature on **Nexus Alumni**: Erin Johnson, Cornell University PhD Student

**G**rowing up, EXPRESS Alumni Erin Johnson thought she wanted to be a marine biologist, but since she can't swim and doesn't like boats she decided against it. When she was in college she thought she wanted to be a nurse, but after doing some nursing internships decided against that too.

But don't get the wrong idea. Johnson is not a quitter.

Currently working on a PhD in Neurobiology and Behavior at Cornell University, she already has a master's degree and in Biological Sciences from the University of Brighton in England, and an undergraduate degree in Biological Sciences from MU. She also spent two years teaching English in Japan and a stint doing clinical research too. That's a lot of traveling from her hometown of Kansas City, Missouri.

Johnson advises other students to follow what they love to do.

"Do what makes you happy. If you do what you think others want you

to do, you may not be happy in the end," Johnson said from New York in a phone interview.

She advocates taking time off after finishing your undergraduate degree.



Johnson dissects a brain in a class on the biology of aging.

"If you don't know what you want to do that's fine. Twenty-two is still young," Johnson said. "Get out in the world and see what is available."

"I've always had a strong desire to be in research but it was the internships and things along the way that directed me to this PhD," Johnson

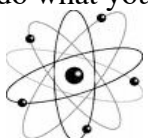
said about finding her way to Cornell.

Continuing her exploration of the world, Johnson spent this summer taking two classes at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. Located on Cape Cod, the facility provides professional development and research opportunities for scientists in all stages of their careers.

The Summer Program in Neuroscience Ethics and Survival Skills (other wise known as SPINES) focused on career development. Johnson participated in sessions on ethics, finding funding, giving presentations, applying for postdoctoral positions and tips on starting as a faculty member.

Her second class was on the molecular biology of aging. She had a lot of lab time in this class often working late into the night. The class covered issues regarding the role that genetics play in how one ages. The lab work yielded some interesting results. The professors are working on a publishing the

(continued on page 4)



## The EXPRESS Peer Mentors

These five students are available in room LSC 150b to assist EXPRESS students during the hours listed below



### *Desiré Buckely*

**Hometown:** Columbia  
**Major:** Biology, Spanish  
**Mentor:** Dr. Lorsen  
**Research Area:** Spinal Muscular Atrophy  
**Office Hours:** M,F 3-5 pm



### *Destiny Costley*

**Hometown:** San Antonio, TX  
**Major:** Biology  
**Mentor:** Dr. Ravosa  
**Research Area:** Physiology  
**Office Hours:** M 2-4pm  
T 12-2 pm



### *Vanessa Evoh*

**Hometown:** Humble, Texas  
**Major:** Biology with a minor in Philosophy  
**Mentor:** Dr. Cowan  
**Research Area:** Ophthalmology and Psychology  
**Office Hours:** M,T 1-3 pm



### *David Kirby*

**Hometown:** Columbia  
**Major:** Biochemistry  
**Mentor:** Dr. Folk  
**Research Area:** Crop Engineering  
**Office Hours:** M,T 3-5 pm



### *Catera Wilder*

**Hometown:** Lee's Summit  
**Major:** Biological Engineering  
**Mentor:** Dr. Grant  
**Research Area:** Tissue Engineering  
**Office Hours:** M,W 10-12

The EXPRESS Peer Mentors act as liaisons between students and the Program Coordinator Brian Booton and also as role models and mentors for freshman and sophomore students.

Peer Mentors schedule individual appointments with students on a regular basis to make sure that the students are getting the most from their lab experiences, to share resources, and for informal advising.

Peer Mentors also assist in planning and developing workshops and activities, communicating with students, and helping with the general operation of the EXPRESS program.

## EXPRESS Update:

The Exposure to Research for Science Students (EXPRESS) has a lot of new underclassmen so far this year and has begun Wednesday meetings.

At the September 2nd Express meeting, two faculty members spoke with the students about research at MU. **Dr. Heidi Appel** (Plant Sciences) discussed why plant research is important and the responsibilities students might expect in plant science labs (hands-on research, using the latest technologies, the possibility of fieldwork, and eventual presentation of results).

**Dr. Michael Garcia** (Biological Sciences) explained the various research projects in neurosciences in the Bond Life Sciences Center, Lefevre Hall, Schweitzer Hall, and in the Medical School.

# UMEB Summer Yields new Lessons

**MU**ndergraduate Jason Edwards spent his summer UMEB research internship in Milwaukee, WI with the UW-Extension Office on Milwaukee River Basin Partnership. Edwards is a Soil, Environmental and Atmospheric Sciences Major, and Charlie Nilon is his faculty mentor.



Working with eight municipalities in the Menomonee River Watershed, he focused his research on storm-water management and education. He examined the goals of each municipality and then surveyed the city storm-water management teams to see how or if they were meeting their original goals.

Edwards had learned some unexpected lessons this summer.

“Spanish! There were a lot of people with diverse backgrounds at UW-Extension. I was able to increase

my Spanish vocabulary as well as make life long friends. I learned that it is very important to expand my horizons beyond my own country,” Edwards wrote about the summer experience.

His advice for other students is to take risks and think about the long-term.

“Do not be afraid to travel outside your comfort zone. If a great opportunity presents itself then you must take advantage of it because these

opportunities are limited. Also, the exotic internships look good on a resume or cv,” Edwards wrote.

His most important lesson to pass on to fellow students is to do what you enjoy.

“Do something that YOU want to do, something that you will want to pursue in the future. Enjoy yourself and have fun with what you are doing.” Edwards wrote.

## Piled Higher and Deeper by Jorge Cham

[www.phdcomics.com](http://www.phdcomics.com)



[WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM](http://www.phdcomics.com)

## Website of the Month

<http://www.rootsnbluesnbbq.com/>

The Roots n' Blues n' BBQ Festival is coming to Columbia for the third time this September 25th & 26th. The festival brought the town to life last year with downtown stages and spectacular music.

# Graduate Student Corner

**NSF 2010 Graduate Research Fellowship Program Competition** is now open for 2010 graduate fellowships from the National Science Foundation. The GRFP provides three years of significant financial support for graduate study leading to a research-based master's or doctoral degree in the sciences, technology, mathematics, and engineering. Interdisciplinary study is possible. The \$30,000 fellowships are intended for students who will begin graduate study in 2010 or have just started a graduate degree program. Read more about the GRFP eligibility requirements at <http://grad-school.missouri.edu/NSF-GRFP>.

(continued from page 1)

results and Johnson will be listed as a co-author if the work is published.

Johnson found networking to be one of the greatest benefits of the classes.

“It was really nice meeting other grad students from all over the country. Building those networks in life, you never know when you are going to need them,” Johnson said.

**For more info check out: [www.mbl.edu/](http://www.mbl.edu/) and [www.nbb.cornell.edu/](http://www.nbb.cornell.edu/)**

## What is the NEXUS newsletter anyway?



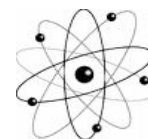
Our purpose is to create a network for minority undergraduate students, graduate students, post-bac students, post-docs and faculty in the life sciences on this campus. We believe that purposefully creating a network and community will have several benefits: (1) younger students can benefit from older scientists through networking and role modeling; (2) older scientists can have the satisfaction of helping those younger through the pipeline, all members can benefit from mutual support; (3) the community can work together to host speakers of common interest; (4) information on programs, grants and other opportunities can be effectively shared; and (5) the university can take pride in the ongoing campus efforts to diversify the biomedical/life sciences research workforce from the undergraduate to faculty level.

Nexus (nex-us n)

1. a connection associating two or more people or things
2. a group or series of connected individuals or things
3. the center or focus of something
4. a specialized area of the cellular membrane that helps cells to communicate or adhere

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The Office of Undergraduate Research, located at 150 Bond Life Sciences Center, composes and designs the newsletter. If you would like to contribute something to the newsletter (award announcement, science joke, story, etc.), contact graduate assistant Maggie Berglund 882-4818 or [mmbthf@mail.missouri.edu](mailto:mmbthf@mail.missouri.edu)



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