

# The Low-Down on Grad School

**Graduation on the horizon and considering graduate school? It's a big leap but one with big rewards. Hear these MU graduates report back from the other side.**

By John Hendel



**G**rad school: a degree, a lifestyle, an endurance test. Grad school means many different things to those who hear the words. Perhaps you're an undergraduate in your senior year or nearing it. Graduation is in sight, and that one question keeps pulling at you, both internally and from friends and relatives.

*What's next?*

Not uncommonly do many minds turn to the possibility of graduate education. The benefits are plentiful, as six recent MU EXPRESS alumni reveal in discussions about their various graduate programs.

Brianne Black, for instance, is enrolled in her second year in a Ph.D program at the University of Iowa College of Nursing, where as one of the nation's 14 John A. Hartford

Scholars, she receives a full tuition waiver as well as a \$50,000 stipend for each of the first two years, paid out monthly. At Cornell University, Erin Johnson receives a stipend of \$24,000 a year with health insurance and tuition paid for during her Ph.D program in the neurobiology and behavior department, and Corinne Alinea Fairchild at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities receives \$24,500 a year plus tuition.

"I received an NSF fellowship earlier this year which provides a stipend of \$30,000 per year," says Ashley Acevedo, a second-year Ph.D student in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of California-San Francisco, where the standard stipend for UCSF students is \$26,500 per year. "Tuition and health insurance (as well as a few other things) are included in

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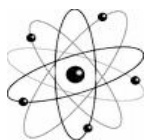


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Ph.D Comic:  
In need of a laugh? Check out the comic on page 3!

your stipend. So essentially, you make something like \$45-50,000 a year and all of your costs are taken out of that money. But, you are only taxed the \$26,500."

The graduate students speak of many other benefits that come along with the financial incentives. Graduate status gives them more authority, they say, and more respect among those in the field, professors, associates and students. They also have the opportunity to learn so much more and on their own terms, what one student called "some

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## Congratulations to those who attended this year's ABRCMS Conference in Orlando, Florida, Nov. 5-8!

### Undergrads

Joe Adiasor	Danielle Huff
Jennifer Stetler	Krystal Purnell
Osa Okunbor	Kenneth Bennett
Desire' Buckley	Jessica Berry
Ashley Groves	Whitney Phillips

### Grads

Candace Carroll	Rebecca Burkhalter
Natalie Downer	Simone Temporal
Thomasas Jernigan	Angela Whatley
Anthea Aikins	

### Faculty/Staff

Brian Booton	Dr. Michael Garcia
Dr. Mark Hannink	Dr. Sam Waters
Dr. David Lee	

### Faculty & Staff

## Meet Tina Roberts

*In last month's newsletter, Dr. Blockus, our office's director, announced she would be spending the year in Washington D.C. to work at the Center for Advancing Science and Engineering Capacity at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Tina Roberts has worked at our office since October 1st, helping with LS UROP and summer science program activities in Dr. Blockus's absence.*



"I am the new Life Sciences Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (LS UROP) Coordinator in the UGR office. I come to this position after fifteen years as a Senior Research Specialist in Chris Hardin's lab where I have been working with undergraduate researchers a significant amount of the time. I have a BSAG in Biochemistry, a MS in Physiology, and I am currently pursuing a Ph.D in Science Education. I am interested in student retention in the sciences and hope to be able to make a difference while in this position. I am an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy and travel to the World Science Convention annually. I am around the office most days and would love for people to stop by and introduce themselves!"

## Recapping an Iceland Conference



By Miriam Galenas

**D**uring August 17th through the 22nd I attended the IAVCEI (International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior) General Assembly. This week long conference took place in the exotic location of Reykjavik Iceland. I was there to present my research about the viscosity and thermal diffusivity of mid-ocean ridge basalts. Each day was filled with an overwhelming number of talks that spanned everything from predicting volcanic eruptions to looking at ancient lava flows on Mars. It was instructive to see top scientists as well as graduate students presenting their talks, next year I feel confident I will be able to give a talk. Poster sessions were at the end of each day. In the middle of the week the conference sponsored day field trips to famous geologic sites around Reykjavik; I got see one of

the only places in the world to see a mid-ocean rift exposed on land. I presented on the last day of the poster sessions. This was kind of unfortunate since many people had left the conference at that point. It was still a very good experience. I had a blast talking to scientists who really could converse about my research. Everyone was really laid back and friendly; after the conference it was fun to explore the city with some graduate students I had met. This is not to say that I didn't get stumped by some of their questions. I was lucky that my advisor was there to answer the harder questions. I would not have been able to go without the generous support of the Office of Undergraduate Research, McNair Scholars Program, and the Department of Geological Sciences.



*Miriam Galenas is a senior majoring in Geological Sciences. She spent two years working in the EXPRESS program under Dr. Silvia Jurisson and for a year as a McNair Scholar with mentor Dr. Alan Whittington. Photos courtesy of Miriam Galenas.*

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intellectual freedom.” Another alumna, Aminata Coulibaly now at Miami University studying zoology, mentioned how great it is working on her own time table. Dante Smith, a grad student at MU’s own plant sciences program, says the trick is balancing class work and research.

“I do something new every day,” says Corinne, who is studying neural crest research in the second year of her developmental neurobiology doctoral program. “I am learning so much because I am learning outside of a lecture setting. It seems that what I have learned as an undergraduate is all starting to come together in the grand scheme of things, and I really like that.”

Yet grad school also comes with adjustment. Many of the MU alumni discovered there were significant differences between their lives as undergraduates in Missouri and as grad students. All students talked about the intense amount of reading they now do, particularly in the first year of many of their programs.

“The most difficult thing is not being able to have a life! Haha, I study all the time,” says Erin. “However, I do know that when my class schedule isn’t so hectic it’ll probably get better. That’s my silver lining.”

The other big challenge for many new graduate students is adapting to the new social landscape. For Brianne, the social atmosphere in her graduate nursing program was incredibly different. Not only were the other



grad students preoccupied with studying and finishing coursework, but most were far older. The average age of the University of Iowa students in her program was about 40; Brianne was 22 when she entered and will earn her degree at 27, so she sought out friends in other departments and through involvement with church and work.

At UCSF, Ashley says the group of fellow grad students is far from as diverse as her group of friends at MU. The other grad students possessed “very different interests and values,” which she found slightly overwhelming and contributed to some stress and anxiety as an outsider that first year. She eventually found her own self-described group of awesome friends and also remarked that most people don’t encounter as much difficulty--she’s just extremely affected by environment, she explains.

Aside from initial adjustments and heavy work, however, most grad students praised their experiences and encouraged undergraduates to pur-

sue higher education. Ashley advised undergraduates to start getting research experience during the summer at other universities and during the year at MU. Erin enthusiastically prefaces her advice: “Go for it!” The benefits after earning your graduate degree--such as better job prospects and increased education--make the extra work more than worth it, she believes. Corinne advises exploring grad school with open expectations and once there, to “just remember to go to the dog park or hike or visit friends...etc...or you will go crazy!”

“It will be a difficult and mind-exhausting process, but in the end it will all be worth it,” confirms Dante.



## Glance Over Past Newsletters (as well as *The Connection* Newsletter) Online

<http://undergradresearch.missouri.edu/news/monthly%20newsletter>

Visit our website at [undergradresearch.missouri.edu](http://undergradresearch.missouri.edu) to find our newsletter page. It features this year’s past issues of *Nexus* as well as *The Connection*, the general newsletter of the Office of Undergraduate Research. Check out November’s issue of *The Connection* to learn about Undergraduate Research Month, which took place in the month of October and was facilitated by the UGR Ambassadors.

## Nexus Graduate Association Event

**Meet the Mentors**

**MU Research**

Date: Thurs, Dec 4th 2008  
Place: Life Sciences Center 572  
Time: 5:30-7:30pm  
RSVP: munexusgrad@gmail.com  
Sponsored by:  
Nexus Graduate Association

**Highlights**

- Meet mentors from across disciplines
- Networking opportunities!
- Free appetizers!
- Free beer/wine!

*\*Event intended for graduate students and their mentors*

### NGA Election Results

**Public Relations:** Denzil Roberts & Renee Roberts  
**Social Events:** Marquis Patrick & Benisha Wiltz  
**Professional Events:** Simone Temporal  
**Secretary:** Lana Bruney  
**Moderator:** Rhonda Archie, Natalie Downer

## 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 John Hendel at JDHendel@gmail.com or 314-920-5880.

