

## Featured Alumnus: Jessi Mester



Jessica (Jessi) Mester graduated from the UMGCP in 2005 and has since achieved great success. Her first job after leaving the University of Michigan was at OU Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City where she saw pediatric, cancer and adult genetics patients. Jessi feels that this was a great first job and found the most rewarding aspect to be the opportunity to help so many families in an underserved part of the country.

In 2008, Jessi relocated to her current position at the Cleveland Clinic where her various roles include research coordinator, clinical genetic counselor, and primary supervisor for the Case Western Genetic Counseling Program's cancer genetics rotation. Jessi has found her niche coordinating the PTEN Clinic, which provides team-based care for families with PTEN Hamartoma Tumor Syndrome, also known as Cowden syndrome. In addition to coordinating weeklong clinical visits for these families, Jessi is also heavily involved in *PTEN* research. Her current projects include exploring the molecular basis of the *PTEN* phenotype, investigating the role of germline *PTEN* mutations in a sub-population of breast cancer patients,

and examining the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of individuals with a *PTEN* mutation. Jessi was surprised by how much she enjoys doing research and has found publishing to be a great experience and opportunity to share what she is learning with the rest of the world.

Jessi looks back over her years at the University of Michigan with great fondness and a host of fun memories, both inside and outside of the classroom (including the yellow rain boots, which remain in the student office today). She is very impressed with the level of support and guidance provided by everyone associated with the program, and many of these people have remained valuable resources and mentors throughout her career. Jessi encourages new graduates to be adventurous and take risks when considering job opportunities, and to strongly consider taking the time and energy to get their student research published soon after graduation. More than anything, she thinks it is important to remember that new graduates will continue to learn and grow and that "your first job doesn't have to be your last job!" The UMGCP looks forward to sharing in the continued achievements of alumni such as Jessi and is excited to see what the future holds for current students and new graduates.

## Celebrating Our Award Winning Basic Science Faculty

Our core curriculum takes full advantage of our affiliation with a basic science department. In addition to exemplary training in counseling skills, our students receive second to none training in the foundations of genetics and have multiple opportunities to learn from and work with faculty involved in cutting edge research in genetics and genomic medicine.



Department of Human Genetics Faculty

**Sally Camper**, Professor and Chair of the Department of Human Genetics, was elected as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Fellows are recognized for "scientifically or socially distinguished efforts to advance science or its applications."

**Jeffrey Kidd**, Assistant Professor, was named one of Forbes '30 Under 30' in Science. Dr. Kidd uses DNA sequencing to understand the forces that shape evolution in human beings and animals.

**Jun Li**, Assistant Professor, received the 2011 IMHRO Johnson & Johnson Rising Star Translational Research Award for "Genomic Analysis of Bipolar Disorder: Identification of Drug Targets via Exome Sequencing."

**Sundeep Kalantry**, Assistant Professor, was awarded a Basil O'Connor Starter Scholar Research Award from the March of Dimes for his proposal to study epigenetic contributions to human birth defects. Dr. Kalantry was also named a 2011 recipient of Ellison Medical Foundation's New Scholar Award in Aging and a 2011 National Institutes of Health New Innovator Award.

**Donna Martin**, Associate Professor, was awarded the Donita B. Sullivan, M.D. Research Professor of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases. Dr. Martin studies developmental disorders of the nervous system.

**Miriam Meisler** was awarded the Myron Levine Distinguished University Professorship of Human Genetics. Dr. Meisler studies neurological disease mutations in genes encoding human voltage-gated channels and phosphoinositide metabolism.

Several Genetic Counseling Program Clinical Faculty Members and Alumni received awards in the fall, as detailed in our Fall 2011 Newsletter. Awardees include **Wendy R. Uhlmann**, **Shanna Gustafson**, **Amy Curry Sturm**, **Jessi Mester**, and **Jill Stopfer**.

# SAVE THE DATES!!!

Monday April 23, 2012

AGCPD Universal Admissions Offer Date

Friday April 27, 2012

Graduation UMGCP

Wednesday May 2, 2012

Thomas D. Gelehrter M.D. Lecture  
in Medical Genetics

Speaker: Kay Davies

Thursday May 10, 2012

Center for Bioethics and Social Sciences in  
Medicine Research Colloquium

Friday June 8, 2012

Joint UM/Wayne State Genetic Counselors

Supervisors Workshop, Detroit, MI

Wednesday, August 29, 2012

Fall Orientation for incoming students begins

Tuesday, September 4, 2012

Fall classes start

September 28-30, 2012

Department of Human Genetics Retreat  
Gull Lake, MI

For more information about any of  
these events, contact Monica Marvin at  
monicama@umich.edu

## Comings & Goings at the UMGCP

Katy Keegan, MD now serves as the Medical Director of the Genetic Counseling Program, following the departure of Elizabeth Petty, MD.

The Pediatric Genetics Program welcomed Bridget O'Connor, MS and Mark Hannibal, MD, PhD. Bridget is a 2011 graduate of the Wayne State Genetic Counseling Program and Dr. Hannibal is a pediatric geneticist who came to us from Seattle Children's Hospital.

The Cancer Genetics Clinic welcomed Shanna Gustafson, MS, CGC and Elena Stoffel, MD, who came from Beaumont Cancer Genetics and Dana Farber Cancer Institute, respectively. Dr. Stoffel now serves at the Director of the UM Cancer Genetics Program. These additions follow the departures of Stephen Gruber and Jessica Long.

The Cardiovascular Genetics Program welcomed Patricia Arscott, MS, CGC. Patty is a 2008 graduate of the Michigan Genetic Counseling Program and most recently worked at the Cleveland Clinic.

## Supplemental Activities: Icing on the Cake

UMGCP students have a strong tradition of involvement in outreach and other supplemental activities. Such activities serve to not only strengthen the students' repertoire of skills and knowledge, but are also important opportunities to build alliances, raise visibility, and give back to the community.

Our students teach in a variety of settings. Brittany, Katya, and Jillian traveled to Bowling Green University where they gave workshops as part of the Women in Science, Engineering, and Technology Day. Heidi taught high school students at the Wolverine Health Explorers Camp. Andrie shared insights about genetic counseling at the Tappan Middle School "Career Extravaganza" and contributed to a talk to UM Dental Students, "Sinking Your Teeth Into It: Genetic Evaluation of Patients with Hereditary Conditions Involving Dental Abnormalities." Multiple students have also participated in our UMGCP Open House and in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. Finally, Jillian partnered with the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Lynch Syndrome Screening Network to identify relevant educational resources and to develop an informational website.

Other outreach activities have focused on working with our local support groups. Michelle E, Michele B, Erin, and Jillian have partnered with the local Down Syndrome Support Team and provide childcare for families during their monthly meetings. Michelle E and Katya provided similar support to families meeting related to diagnoses of disorders of sex development. Michelle K and Brittany participated in local meetings for families affected by hereditary breast and ovarian cancer syndrome. This summer Michelle E, together with UMGCP faculty members Bev Yashar and Kim Amburgey, will be volunteering at the Michigan Muscular Dystrophy Association weeklong camp in Lexington, MI.

We are proud of the significant contributions UMGCP students are making to our community and applaud their generosity and passion!

## Research Activities: UMGCP CLASS of 2012

Our research program is driven by the interests of the individual student and takes advantage of the wide variety of genetics initiatives on the University of Michigan campus and within the state of Michigan. Through the month of April, members of the Class of 2012 are finalizing their data analyses, presenting their data to our faculty and students, and preparing manuscripts.



Michelle Kluge, Jill Tietjen, Brittany Batte, Heidi Dreyfuss, Katya Brossart, and Andrie Klass.

**Brittany Batte** collaborated with the University of Michigan Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy (HCM) Clinic and the Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Association to explore the impact of illness perceptions and coping on family communication with at-risk relatives in patients with HCM. The results of her research study are important in identifying critical factors in the decision to share genetic information with family members.

**Katya Brossart** performed secondary analysis of data collected by a previous UMGCP student (Brittney Murray). Katya's research explores predictors of disability in the largest analysis of individuals with hypermobility type Ehlers-Danlos syndrome to date, with a sample of close to 400 individuals. The results will provide insight into the effect of factors including pain and depression on the quality of life in this understudied patient population.

**Heidi Dreyfuss** explored gender differences in the communication of genetic test results to family members among families with BRCA mutations. The results of this multi-site study, which includes participants from the University of Michigan and the Beaumont Health Systems, will inform efforts to improve the provision of genetic counseling to both male and female patients.

**Andrie Klass** performed a systematic review of the literature measuring physician competence in genomics. The goal of the study is to inform the development of strategies to optimize the incorporation of genomics into primary care. This evidence-based analysis of the literature grows out of Andrie's interest in novel ways of providing genetic-based care.

**Michelle Kluge** investigated the interest in genetic testing for Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD), in both an affected population and an age-matched control population recruited from the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center. She examined participants' quality of life, family history, beliefs about risk factors, and how each of these aspects impacted a participant's interest in genetic susceptibility testing. The results of her research study are important in understanding how to effectively counsel older individuals about genetic susceptibility testing for common complex diseases.

**Jillian Tietjen** utilized data collected as part of the Genetic Explanations for Diabetes Study to explore the relationship between religiosity, control over diabetes risk, and genetic explanations for diabetes. Her research also looks at how these beliefs are related to perceptions of preventive health behaviors (diet and exercise). Her results are important in understanding how broader individual frameworks can shape health attitudes, and may provide insight into how to develop health education messages.