I hope this edition of the Graduate School Newsletter finds all of you making great plans for the summer. It is hard for me to believe that the 2009-2010 year has concluded. It has been a very good year for us in the Graduate School. We had our 2nd annual Research Induction Ceremony, our 9th Annual Career Day, great GSA involvement and activities, we welcomed Dr. Dan Rahn as our new Chancellor who started in November, UAMS received a highly sought after NIH CTSA award, we received our first IMSD training grant to support graduate student diversity, our total enrollment increased 8% over last year, and we recognized a record number faculty and student achievements throughout the year. I was also very proud of the support from faculty, students, and respective families that we had at our three major end-of-the-year-events. The spring awards reception highlighted many student accomplishments including a national award to Dr. Gautam Gandhi for a neuroscience paper of the year, as well as 13 Faculty Mentor Awards. The Commencement Brunch at Embassy Suites had very close to 300 attendees. This event is a celebration of not only our graduates but their families and our faculty as well, plus this year we recognized Dr. Dan Prantner and Dr. Katharine Whitney as our inaugural Dean’s Distinguished Scholars. And the culminating event was our 2010 Commencement. This year, the Graduate School awarded 27 Ph.D. degrees, including our first Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Biomedical Sciences, and 38 M.S. degrees. We also awarded our first 9 Graduate Certificates in Clinical and Translational Sciences.

We have a lot of accomplishments to celebrate and a lot to be thankful for. As I look back on the past year, it becomes evident that two things make this all possible and they are outstanding, dedicated and committed students and faculty who are tireless at making the Graduate School as successful as it can be. It is really quite humbling when you think about it, and I am extremely grateful to each and every one of you for your efforts. I hope everyone has a great summer and you get to spend time with family and friends. Thank you all for a great year.

Robert E. McGehee, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate School

Letter from Dean McGehee
Already interested in science, the cancer-related deaths of two family members ultimately pointed UAMS graduate student Avis Simms toward work in cancer research.

“My aunt died of pancreatic cancer while I was in high school and my grandmother died of leukemia when I was an undergraduate in college,” Simms said. “I think that gave me more of a desire to work in cancer research.”

A doctoral candidate in the UAMS Graduate School’s Interdisciplinary Biomedical Sciences program, Simms received a fellowship in breast cancer research sponsored by the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute. The fellowship covers her tuition and includes a stipend as she works toward her doctorate and conducts research into proteins related to breast cancer in the lab of Thomas J. Kelly Jr., Ph.D.

She earned the fellowship through her academic work, along with passing the doctoral qualifying exam.

A Mississippi native, Simms said the flexibility of the interdisciplinary biomedical sciences program attracted her to UAMS. As part of the program, students spend eight to 10 weeks in three different labs, exposing them to different types of research. In addition, students choose specialized training in areas such as cancer biology, cell biology or interdisciplinary neuroscience.

“The program provides different avenues of research for students to pursue and the setup of the program allowed me to explore options before zeroing in on the type of research I wanted to be involved in during my doctoral work,” Simms said.

There, Simms is studying the role a protein known as a fibroblast activation protein plays during breast cancer growth. The researchers are trying to determine if the protein helps promote growth of cancer through the circulatory system by helping the cancer cells evade the body’s immune system.

Simms already sees a possible career in academia. She also would like to have her own lab where she could investigate her own ideas about the mechanisms that promote aggressive breast cancer.

The cancer biology track Simms chose allowed her to experience different types of labs from immunology to pathology. Based on that, she decided to pursue her doctorate in Kelly’s pathology lab.

UAMS graduate student Avis Simms
Kali Chatham, a UAMS graduate student, is working toward a degree in genetic counseling she hopes to channel into a desire to help those less fortunate – much as she’s done with a project to collect running shoes for people in central America.

A regular runner, it was during a 2009 trip to rural El Salvador where Chatham got the idea for a shoe drive. Her host mother wanted to run with her but did not have good running shoes. Chatham loaned her an extra pair and off they went. An 8-year-old boy she knew from the neighborhood even joined in eventually, running barefoot.

She teamed with fellow genetic counseling student Lindsey Erman to start a drive “Soles for Salud” (salud is Spanish for health) to collect “gently used” running shoes. The effort has brought in more than 40 pairs of shoes by late February. Collection points are available on the UAMS campus, Pulaski Academy and at the University of Arkansas for Little Rock School of Law. They also created a Soles for Salud Facebook page.

“I run about seven or eight miles a day and realize that I often take for granted the shoes on my feet and the iPod on my arm,” Chatham said. “While in El Salvador, I formed meaningful relationships with my host family and other members of the community. Having been involved in community projects in the past, I saw this project not only as feasible but as necessary. Whether it’s for fitness or recreation, I think running is something we all can benefit from.”

The drive to help others through Soles for Salud is not unlike the drive that led her to genetic counseling. When she was a college freshman, Chatham’s mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“I realized how little my family members knew about cancer, genetics and health care,” Chatham said. “It became increasingly evident that my family needed an informed member to ask the necessary questions that would allow us to actively participate in the management of my mother’s breast cancer. I wanted to be this person.”

UAMS has one of only 31 graduate programs in genetic counseling in the United States. Since it was closest to her parents’ home in Kansas City, she applied to UAMS and is now working toward her master’s degree.

“Through genetic counseling, I hope to be able to empathize with these families and serve as an advocate during such an important time in their lives,” she said.

Beyond her family, Chatham eventually hopes to use her knowledge and career to help those in developing countries, including El Salvador.

“I was a Spanish major while an undergraduate and had the opportunity to fall in love with the language, the culture and the rich history that characterizes many Hispanic populations,” she said. “Through my experiences in El Salvador and Mexico I truly became conscious to the challenges and disparities so many in those countries face.

It is much easier to realize what you have – running shoes, access to adequate health care like genetic counseling – when you spend time with people who don’t have these things.”

“Through genetic counseling, I hope to be able to empathize with these families and serve as an advocate during such an important time in their lives,” she said.

Beyond her family, Chatham eventually hopes to use her knowledge and career to help those in developing countries, including El Salvador.

“Through genetic counseling, I hope to be able to empathize with these families and serve as an advocate during such an important time in their lives,” she said.

Beyond her family, Chatham eventually hopes to use her knowledge and career to help those in developing countries, including El Salvador.

“I was a Spanish major while an undergraduate and had the opportunity to fall in love with the language, the culture and the rich history that characterizes many Hispanic populations,” she said.

“Through my experiences in El Salvador and Mexico I truly became conscious to the challenges and disparities so many in those countries face.

It is much easier to realize what you have – running shoes, access to adequate health care like genetic counseling – when you spend time with people who don’t have these things.”
UAMS Graduate School Brunch 2010

2009-2010 Graduates

To view additional pictures, visit the UAMS Graduate School on Facebook
Dear Faculty and Students,

This is the last Graduate Student Association update I will write as the President, and it has been my honor and absolute pleasure to serve in this position for two years. I am incredibly grateful to Dean McGehee, the amazing Graduate School staff, and all of our supporters and collaborators over the years! The GSA has organized many faculty-student mixers and stress-relief activities that were incredibly successful events including a Fall 2009 Welcome Back Picnic at Lake Ouachita, Paintball Wars in the Winter 2010, the Spring 2010 Canoe Trip to the Buffalo River, multiple movie nights over the past two years, and the ever-popular Doughnut Wednesdays! As always, please feel free to contact any of the officers with your concerns and comments.

The 2010-2011 GSA officers are as follows:

- President: Kevin Kim
- Vice President: Chad Cragle
- Secretary: Raman Gouda
- Treasurer: Jennifer Watts
- Web Site Coordinator: Adam Brown
- Recycling Coordinator: Steven Smith
- Communication Arts Coordinator: Laura Broederdorf
- ASG Representative: Omar Rahal
- ASG Representative: Letha McGarity

I would like to thank all the students who served with me, congratulate those about to serve and/or still serving, and encourage any student to consider joining the GSA. Thank you so much and enjoy your summer!!!

Signing off,
Kimberly A. Reynolds

---

To view a complete list of graduate student awards received 2009-10, visit [http://www.uams.edu/gradschool/awards/](http://www.uams.edu/gradschool/awards/).
Graduate School Staff

Robert E. McGehee, Jr., Ph.D.-Dean
rem@uams.edu
501-603-1998

Jackie McRoberts,-Assistant Dean,
Graduate Studies
JEMcroberts@uams.edu
501-686-5456

Kristen Sterba, Ph.D.-Assistant Dean,
Graduate Student Recruiting and Retention
kmsterba@uams.edu
501-526-7396

Pattie Hamilton-Registrar
pmhamilton@uams.edu
501-686-5455

Pam McCullough-Director of Admissions
PSMccullough@uams.edu
501-686-5454

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences
Graduate School

4301 W. Markham Slot 601
Little Rock, AR 72205
Phone: 501-686-5454
E-mail: graduateschoolUAMS@uams.edu

www.uams.edu/gradschool

Summer 2010 Important Dates

- July 21-August 4, 2010: Registration for Fall Semester 2010-11
- July 23, 2010: Last day of Summer Session
- July 23, 2010: Last day to submit thesis and dissertation to library
- August 6, 2010: Degrees awarded
- August 11, 2010: Orientation for new incoming students
- August 11, 2010: Registration for new incoming students