NEW DIRECTOR: Dr. GRIFFITH PARKS
By: Sarah B. Gitto

Over the last few years BSBS has been on the hunt for a new director. Over tireless interviews, presentations, meetings, and dinners we finally found just the leader we were looking for: Dr. Griffith Parks. Dr. Parks came to us from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina where he was chair of the microbiology/immunology department. Coming from Wake Forest, where he had a large established lab of 13 personnel, and ending up at UCF with no one was almost like starting over. He fortunately hired one lab technician, Namita Varudkar from Dr. Steven Ebert’s lab, who was acquainted enough to show him the ropes. Dr. Parks has expanded his lab since joining UCS with master’s students Candace Newcome and Kritika Kadarinath and hopes to expand his lab further with new Ph.D. students that are currently rotating in his lab, undergraduate research assistants, and post-docs.

Coming from a small private university with just under 8,000 students enrolled, to the second largest University in the country with over 60,000 students can be very daunting and overwhelming, but Dr. Parks is seizing the new bustling environment as an opportunity. Undergraduate students have always been an important asset to mentoring in his lab. He hopes that with the large undergraduate student body BSBS can continue to utilize undergraduate research and mentoring to benefit training throughout the department as well as training future graduate mentors.

As quoted by Dr. Parks, “The only thing that is constant is change….UCF has amazing possibilities.” Some of the new traditions Dr. Parks would like to implement for enhancement of BSBS and the graduate program will have profound emphasis on the ability to convey science to others. Chalk talks within interest groups can be utilized by everyone to convey science, to learn about the projects that are going on in our own research community, and to receive feedback and ideas to explore new research avenues. Students and post-docs will have more opportunities to practice formal presentation skills in seminars, and talks will be given from different disciplines besides basic science research so students can explore alternative career opportunities. The BSGSA leadership team who met with Dr. Parks last month cannot wait to participate in the “3-minute Thesis” competition. All of these ideas are just the tip of the iceberg, and I personally cannot wait to see what fresh and exciting ideas await. I am sure I can speak for all of BSBS when I say we are truly excited to have you, Dr. Parks, as our new director!
Sweat and Science Collide in 1st Annual BSBS Kickball Tourney

By: Stephani Klingeman Plati
Photos By: Veethika Pandey

Two teams. One waterlogged clay diamond. One red bouncy rubber ball. On Saturday, September 27, the 1st Annual BSBS Faculty vs. Student Kickball Tournament was held at Chisholm Park in St. Cloud. The weather was sweet and the moss hung from the trees in that picnic-perfect way.

With more than a hundred of BSBS’ finest in attendance, Dr. Park’s welcome picnic-tourney was off to an appetizing start. Awaiting the arrival of Chef David Frosch’s bodacious BBQ spread, social hour under the pavilion was a blend of side dish nibbling, children’s laughter, and conversation chatter. Who said you can’t eat dessert before the main course?

Once the contenders’ bellies were filled, the referee, Aladdin Riad, blew the whistle and the teams took to the pitch. With such an international group, the rules of the game could be heard in steady repetition. Looking fierce in their red uniforms, the students were ready to kick some faculty rump; little did they know what awaited them in the slippery outfield.

Fast forward to clay-covered knees, soaked shoes and shorts, and 5 points later, the faculty held a hefty lead. Convinced that a comeback was imminent, the students remained determined to duke it out. Providing a glimmer of hope, PhD student Philip Adams put the red team on the board, but they were no match for Dr. Alex Cole’s reliable pitching and Dr. Steve King’s MVP-worthy kickball skills.

It was the top of the ninth and the students seemed to be turning things around by scoring 4 points—the most scored in an inning for the Big Reds—but with the addition of the faculty’s Jewett’s and Rohde’s boys (their secret weapon), the students were no match. The BSBS faculty triumphantly ended the battle with a final score of 15-7. In a portrayal of true sportsmanship, the two teams lined up to shake hands and exchange congratulatory words.

PhD student, BSGSA secretary, and event planning committee officer Sarah Gitto orchestrated this successful event. Sarah’s intentions were to “encourage mentorship, plan a fun and relaxed networking event, and promote cohesiveness and collaboration.” It’s safe to say these expectations were met. Despite an aching student ego, the word around the BSBS halls is that the event was a huge hit and many look forward to the 2nd Annual Kickball tourney a year from now. Okay students, that gives you 365 days to prepare. Dr. King—any tips!?
Applications, acceptances, introductions, interviews, and first impressions are all phases of starting a new chapter in your life. For 39 new graduate students, this chapter just began. They look good on paper, they’re in, and they’re making moves. Now that they’re establishing their UCF roots, we wanted to know, “Why UCF?”.

An eight question survey was sent out to the new UCF-ers to gain insight into how they came about choosing UCF. We asked the students where they were from. While the majority of the new students are from the U.S. (both Floridian and out-of-state) 17% are international.

When asked what they were most and least looking forward to during their time here at UCF, the grads were unanimous in their excitement for their personal development as scientists, their research, and publishing. They were least enthusiastic about the typical- failed experiments, the time it will take them to complete their degree, and, one we are all familiar with, the dreaded Lake Nona commute.

With every wave of new scientists, the appeal of the various fields of research varies greatly. It seems that this year, the majority of the grad students’ interests lie in infectious diseases and neurodegenerative disorders. When they aren’t racking their brains over how to cure cancer, they enjoy the simple things such as painting, reading, “netflixing”, and hanging with friends. This group of students can be described as driven, dedicated, independent, patient, passionate and some are proud to face the day with a “Let’s try this” outlook. We expect great things from these new BSBS additions and we wish them success in their endeavors!

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**Kudos Korner**

**Congratulations to:**

- Dr. Michal Masternak for your **two** newly published research articles.
- Dr. Kenneth Teter, Dr. Dinender Singla, Dr. James Hickman, Dr. Antonis Zervos for your newly published research articles.
- Dr. Lisa Ritchey for your newly published first author paper with Dr. Ratna Chakrabarti.
- Dr. Saleh Naser, Dr. Mohtashem Samsam, and Dr. Raheleh Ahangari for your newly published review.
New Student Orientation
By: Aladdin Riad

Each year we welcome our new incoming graduate students at the Graduate Research Colloquium. The event was held August 14th and as per tradition, was hosted by the Student Affairs Committee (SAC), chaired by Dr. Shadab Siddiqi. SAC consists of a group of students, faculty, and staff who come together to make this annual tradition a reality. This event serves as the highlight of orientation week for our new graduate students. The SAC committee spent the early part of the day introducing the new 39 graduate students and giving them a tour of Lake Nona facility.

Next on the agenda was a meet and greet lunch followed by the poster session where over 44 current graduate students, undergraduate students, and post-docs presented their ongoing research. Each year SAC invites a distinguished scientist to give a research talk. Our speaker this year was Dr. Leland Chung from the Cancer Institute Cedar-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, California who spoke on “Recruitment and Reprograming of Bystander Cells in Cancer Metastasis”. Dr. Chung spoke about how his research made its way into outer space...literally.

This year was unique as it gave the department an opportunity to thank Dr. Richard Peppler for his service and present him with a plaque for stepping up and leading the department, which led into welcoming our new director Dr. Griffith Parks. Fellowships were then awarded to 14 students (2 masters and 12 PhD). These fellowships were presented to new incoming students, with awards ranging from partial stipend increases to full tuition payment. Overall the SAC did a great job, and the new students are full of energy and excited to be here!

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**Quote of the month:**

“You’re only given one little spark of madness, you mustn’t lose it.”  -Robin Williams

**Must-see viral video:**

"#Hashtag"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57dzaMaouXA

And for those of you who love Disney, this……

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0A_tZGrYw

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**Upcoming Orlando Events:**

- Food and Wine Festival at EPCOT—all of October
- Halloween Horror Nights – through Nov 1
  -- Orlando Magic Preseason opens Oct 17 vs Pistons
- 7th Annual Winter Springs Festival of the Arts Oct 18
- U Can Finish 5 miler @ UCF – Oct 19
- Orlando Film Festival – Oct 22-26
- College Park JazzFest –Oct 25
- Enrique Iglesias & Pitbull in concert –Oct 28
Appendix:


