2019, a year of accomplishments, graduations, publications, some setbacks and of course a lot of fun. Life of a graduate student is never boring, full of surprises and a lot of hard work. Late nights in the lab and the stories of failed experiments and unexpected yet fascinating results are all too common. Please enjoy glimpses of the year gone by though this newsletter, as a chronicle of selected events.

In a special Graduate Student Selected Seminar on Thursday, Oct. 24, the PPS Department and Office of Graduate Programs welcomed Dr. Howard A. Rockman of Duke Health to campus. Graduate student seminar invitee seen here with the whole PPS gang. It’s a tradition of our department to have the students nominate and host a speaker in the PPS seminar series.

Graduation ceremony is the most important event in a graduate student’s life. The feeling to be hooded and awarded the doctorate by your adviser in front of family and friends is a feeling too sweet to describe. New graduates Asma el-Malik, Fatin Atrooz, Sameer and Suchi Raghunathan beaming with pride at the graduation ceremony.

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Razia Mohammad - Life of a graduate student is full of frustrations, sometimes confusion and often unwanted surprises. When weird western blots and crazy data challenge my patience, I reach out to the artist in me. In my world of art, I channel my stress into painting landscape and florals. It surely helps me relax but also pushes me to explore the creativity in me. I find focus and precision and above all a great deal of pleasure. So, explore the ways to manage stress and discover the hidden talents in you. Pick up a brush and give it a go!!

Hanif Qasim - Journey through graduate school, expressed through my art. Captions (left to right): 1) A balancing act to win a war within. 2) An interesting mix of emotions and passion. 3) Appreciating beauty and enjoying a peaceful moment while hearing the rain drops fall. 4) Abstract of a beach in my PPS cubicle wall. 5) Galaxy in her eyes, the universe in her mind and a fire in her heart. 6) Understanding moods of those who struggle with bipolar disorder and depression.
Passion For Art- “While I do not paint myself but my passion for art is deep. I have a wide range of interests in visual art, from impressionism painting, fashion design to expressionism art. For me, the well-known art museums and galleries are must-visit places in New York City. Please see and enjoy pictures taken during my thanksgiving vacation in NYC, enjoying the moment with Andy Warhol’s representative work and Monet’s Water Lily at Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).” - Peter Gabriel, PPS graduate student.

Photography- Capturing beauty through a photographic lens and sharing with others is a powerful form of art. Some examples of beauty captured through the lens in Croatia, Finland and Virgin Islands, is shown below (shared by Hanan Qasim, Camila Kochi, and Fatin Atrooz).
PPS Chefs— Food is a big part of PPS culture. We love to feed, we love to eat and we love to share. PPS’s flair for cuisine is evident in every pot luck and in every social event which takes place in school or at people’s houses. Our Department has students and post-docs from China, India, New Zealand, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, Pakistan, Taiwan, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Canada and the US. This interesting mix of cultures is evident from our Thanksgiving table of 2019. Catch a glimpse of the amazing international cuisine including Chinese dumplings, to Baklawa to samosa, biryani and more. There always is plenty for our Vegans too. Looking forward to seeing you all at our Thanksgiving 2020 luncheon.

Kalyani Kulkarni celebrated the Indian festival of lights in her new house with husband Aniket (left). Congratulations Kalyani. Do let us know when you plan to invite us for your house warming party.

Naureen’s Ramadan spread is so appetizing that we can’t wait for another year. She has promised to replicate the menu during spring break. One of PPS’s best chefs. Can’t wait for spring break to eat all the yummy delights.
PPS loves to celebrate- Birthdays, graduations or just about anything, we need an excuse to celebrate. Fatin, Razia, Nicole and Hanan celebrate Camila Kochi’s seminar presentation (left), Patrick enjoys all the attention on his surprise Birthday party arranged by Hanan and Elise. Seen enjoying Korean cuisine at a local Korean restaurant (right). The gang is seen below enjoying picnic during spring break outside our gorgeous building. By the way we love our new building, it’s not just the state-of-the art facilities inside the building but it is the location surrounded by trees and bayou, which is a relaxing sight to behold. The view of Houston skyline from our lab windows is gorgeous. Elise, Hanan, Ela enjoy an afternoon of pizza with our wonderful core manager Moody, and our to-go person Melissa, who brought her beautiful daughters to the picnic. Dr. Hussain showed up with his big smile. Wasn’t Dr. Salim there? Duh….she was the one who took all the pictures! Melissa working hard at recruitment (below). Drs. Kumar, Hussain and Zhang showed up at the PPS booth at the graduate fair. A big shout out to Melissa who keeps our record straight and always has the best advice with a big smile. We appreciate everything you do for us. We would be so lost without you! Graduate school is a lot of work but the people and the environment make the journey a memorable one. Students doing program shopping, you need to be at PPS. You will love being here. We are a lovely bunch😊
Camila Kochi- Discovering my Japanese roots. Part of being a researcher is being able to present your work at conferences around the world. This year, I was invited to present my research work at BIT’s 10th Annual World Congress of NeuroTalk-2019 held in the city of Osaka, Japan. NeuroTalk provides a platform for scientists and physicians from all over the world to come together and share their research. My presentation was well received by the audience and potential collaborations were suggested. Apart from meeting experts in the field, outside the conference I used our free time to explore the beautiful city of Osaka. We were adventurous in trying some local foods and interacted with the friendly local people. Overall, the trip fulfilled not only a professional goal of successfully presenting in a world-renowned conference, but also a personal goal of learning more about Japan, since my father’s family is originally from Japan.

MALTO Gang- The Med-Chem group attended annual MALTO meeting at Tennesse. Kevin, Patrick, Yan, Elise, Sandy, Howen, Samantha, Youngki, are seen enjoying food and science with Dr. Joydip Das, a Medchem faculty.

Nothing like being home. PPS graduate student Kalyani Kulkarni with her best buddies on her recent visit to India (right). Lots of catching up to do. The trip always feels short and the desire to be back all the more greater. Can’t wait for the next winter break.
Travel Buddies- Travelling is a great way of learning and also an excellent form of relaxation and PPS students love to travel. Hanan and Elise spent Thanksgiving break with Elise’s family at Columbus, Ohio (left).

We got some dare devils too! Elise Waldron-Young, PPS graduate student travelled to Costa Rica for some adventure and brought back pictures of breathtaking views.

The next trip the adventurous duo took was to British Virgin Islands. Seen here swinging away all their worries by the sea shore (bottom left). Also seen is Hanan in Rome (center) during summer break and New Orleans during spring break (bottom right). Hanan can model too! Alternative career??

PPS post-docs Naureen Fatima, Zeba Farooqui and Asif Zaman enjoy their Thanksgiving at Ruby Falls and Rock Mountain. A long and exhaustive hike, but totally worth it with picturesque views and amazing landscape.
Adios Dr. E- The 2019 scientific writing class said good bye to an outstanding teacher, mentor and PPS Chair Dr. Eikenburg as he announced his retirement (right). We welcomed new **PPS Chair Dr. Ashok Kumar** who recently joined our team. Dr. Kumar brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and research expertise. He works in the area of skeletal muscle physiology and pathophysiology. Several new initiatives have begun at PPS under his leadership. Ashok loves to play cricket and volleyball and enjoys making new friends. Travelling, fine dining and fitness routines are his favorite things to do. We are excited to have him. Welcome aboard Dr. Kumar!

*Ela is engaged!* On May 21, 2019 I texted Michael after getting to school and receiving the news that I had passed my qualifiers! Little did I know, that he was waiting for this day to come - when I wouldn’t have any more classes or exams ever again!!! He immediately responded to my text, ‘congratulations, let’s go out and celebrate tonight, wear something nice’. He was acting strange and I felt as if he was up to something and then after a nice dinner, Michael proposed. I am so fortunate to have Michael by my side, and can’t wait to see what the future holds!
‘H-Gene’

A principal investigator at a major American University, Dr. Innovate, submitted an R01 application to National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). The application addressed a significant gap in knowledge in the traumatic stress field. The proposal included a novel hypothesis, supported by strong preliminary data, a robust research strategy, and an outstanding research team. The application was not funded and the critique in the summary statement indicated that the proposal lacks “innovation”. Disheartened, yet committed, Dr. Innovate started working towards revising the application to make it more “innovative”. During this time, at a major scientific conference, Dr. Innovate met a friend from another institution whose grant was funded through the same study section where Dr. Innovate’s outstanding application was rejected. In a candid moment, Dr. Innovate’s friend confided, “Listen, the only way to get your grant funded is to have your friends review your grant and give you glowing reviews—and of course, it is always a bonus if you are friends with the program officer.” Dr. Innovate took this valuable advice and went to attend a stimulating session on cloning. During the session, Dr. Innovate met another friend whose grant was not funded but offered the following advice, “Listen, you do the best science, sooner or later, your work will speak for itself”. These two back-to-back interactions got Dr. Innovate to think, what makes us less or more honest in science? Why are some of us die-hard honest, some casually honest and some, never honest? Is honesty environment-based? Is there a geo-political connection with honesty? Is honesty mood-based? Is honesty based on our socio-economic status? Is there a biological determinant which decides the basis or the extent of our honesty? Is there a genetic link to honesty? Well, if there is, Dr. Innovate decided to find the honesty (H) gene and then clone the darn thing..... The title of Dr. Innovate’s future application ‘Identification of Honesty Gene: Mechanistic Insights From a Clinically Relevant Model’.

Disclaimer- This is a story prepared by yours truly Samina Salim. Any resemblances to anyone dead or alive is purely coincidental. Readers are welcome to draw their own conclusions. BTW, the title of proposed research is copyrighted material.

HAPPY NEW YEAR Y’ALL-----WORK HARD-------PLAY HARD-------BE WELL-------DO GOOD WORK