

# CHEMICAL Compositions

Department of Chemistry Newsletter  
The University of Texas at Austin

Fall 2015

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[chemalum@cm.utexas.edu](mailto:chemalum@cm.utexas.edu)



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## Letter from the Chair

Greetings!

As my term as interim Department Chair ends, I reflect on the past year's achievements and look forward to the exciting times that lay ahead. I am thrilled to announce that the external search for a Department Chair was successful, and we will welcome [Professor Dave Thirumalai](#) to our department in January. Professor Thirumalai is currently a University Distinguished Professor and founding director of the biophysics program at the University of Maryland. In addition to assuming the responsibilities of Department Chair, he will be appointed as the Robert A. Welch Chair in Chemistry. Professor Thirumalai brings both strong leadership experience and a prestigious research program in the general area of computations and biophysics to Texas. Please look for his inaugural welcome letter in the Spring 2016 edition of Chemical

Compositions.

We had a very successful year for recruiting junior faculty last year, and I am pleased to announce that [Livia Eberlin](#) and [Carlos Baiz](#) have joined the Department as assistant professors. Each was the top candidate in their field, and they are exciting additions to our department. Meanwhile, the 2015 recruiting season is in full swing, and I look forward to meeting the next group of prospective, talented young faculty.

I'm sorry to say that [Keith Stevenson](#) left the University in August for the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology (Skoltech) in Russia. In addition to holding a faculty position, Stevenson has been named as Provost ad interim and also Director of the Skoltech Center for Electrochemical Energy Storage. Though we regret his departure, I wish him the best and congratulate him on his new opportunity.

Over the summer, Welch Hall '78 wing renovation funds



Prof. Stephen F. Martin  
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were approved by the Texas Legislature. With some of the largest classrooms on campus, Welch Hall serves students from across the University as well as houses many chemistry and biochemistry research labs and core facilities. The importance of state-of-art teaching and research labs, modern seminar rooms, and accessible collaborative space for the Department of Chemistry and all UT students emphasizes the significance of this important renovation. Work should begin in Fall 2016, following the completion of the '29 west wing renovations, in progress now. The [Welch Hall fundraising campaign](#) is currently underway to meet total funding needs.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Focus on Giving: Fun with Chemistry and Martin Professorship

### Fun with Chemistry

An outreach program appealing to all ages, Fun with Chemistry features scientific demonstrations and **Dr. Kate Biberdorf's** ability to get any audience enthusiastic about chemistry.

[Click here to support.](#)

### Stephen F. and Fay Evans Martin Endowed Professorship in Chemistry

Established in honor of **Professor Martin's** career, this professorship will be used to recruit and retain exceptional faculty in the Department of Chemistry.

[Click here to support.](#)

# Student and Alumni News

## Sarah Wong Attends SACNAS Summer Leadership Institute (SLI)



In July, **Sarah Wong** participated in a leadership program as a part of the Postdoctoral Fellow cohort at the [SACNAS Summer Leadership Institute \(SLI\)](#) led by the [Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science \(SACNAS\)](#) and [American Association for Advancement of Science \(AAAS\)](#). The institute is an intensive course featuring small group exercises, leadership development

planning, networking opportunities, and extensive community building among selected participants.

The institute, held in Washington DC, sought to train underrepresented minority STEM leaders to serve, strengthen, and unify communities at the local and national level. Participants learned tools to lead institutional transformation and help build a critical mass of STEM professionals and leaders from underrepresented communities. Since 2009, the SACNAS SLI has trained a cohort of 30 PhD-level scientists each year, making it the largest cohort of emerging STEM leaders of color in the country.

Dr. Wong is a post-doctoral fellow supported by a NIH-funded training program directed by [Dr. Jenny Brodbelt](#). The training program, [Collaborative Opportunities for Research Educators \(CORE\)](#), aims to train a diverse group of scientists to excel in research and teaching careers in academia. Dr. Wong joined the program in January 2015 and undertakes research in the laboratory of Dr. Kevin Dalby, Department of Medicinal Chemistry, College of Pharmacy.

## Alumni News

**Taylor B. Jones (Ph.D., 1975)** passed away on June 6, 2015. Dr. Jones was a professor at The Master's College in Santa Clarita, California for 29 years and served as chair for both the Science Department and the Mathematics Department. <http://www.masters.edu/the-life-and-legacy-of-dr-taylor-b-jones-1948-2015/>

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Alumni: Submit your news to [chemalum@cm.utexas.edu](mailto:chemalum@cm.utexas.edu) and your updates will be printed in the next newsletter. Please include your full name and graduation year.

## Stellar Student Spotlight: Tyler King

*Tyler is a senior and an Undergraduate Research Assistant in the [Jones Group](#)*

**What influenced your decision to attend the University of Texas and study chemistry?**

I knew I bled burnt orange from a young age, so UT was and has always been my first choice. I studied chemistry through a very fortunate admissions decision.

I originally applied to study chemical engineering first and chemistry second and was placed into chemistry, which was undoubtedly the best thing that could have happened. The College of Natural Sciences and the Department of Chemistry feel like home. My interest in chemistry was initiated by a high school teacher, Ms. Kacy Stallman, who allowed me to do little experiments and demonstrations for the class like soaking dollar bills in isopropanol and water and lighting them on fire without burning the dollar bills.

**Describe your current research or outreach project:**

My current research involves the synthesis and characterization of luminescent lanthanide bioprobes that could potentially replace existing organic bioprobes. The research I do is a mixture of inorganic/organic synthesis, tissue culture, microscopy, and fluorimetry.

**What are your plans for the future?**

My future plans are to go to graduate school with a focus in bioinorganic chemistry followed by a Post-Doc position and hopefully continuing in academia.



## *Chair's Letter, continued*

On a personal note, I am looking forward to February 2016, when I will celebrate my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday with a symposium organized by group alumni and current students. The weekend-long event will be part scientific conference and part Martin Research Group homecoming. For more information, please visit the [symposium website](#).

In closing, I am appreciative of this past year and the second opportunity to lead as Chair. Furthermore, I look forward to the very promising future for the Department of Chemistry.

# Faculty News

## Dave Thirumalai Joins Department as Chair

We are excited to announce that [Professor Dave Thirumalai](#) of the University of Maryland College Park has accepted the chairmanship of the Department of Chemistry at UT Austin. Thirumalai will join the Department in January 2016.

Thirumalai received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and was a postdoc at Columbia University. In 1985, he joined the faculty at the University of Maryland and rose through the ranks where he is currently a

distinguished university professor and founding director of the bio-physics program. Thirumalai's research is primarily theoretical at the interfaces of chemistry, physics, and biology.

We look forward to his arrival and leadership!



## Welcome New Faculty

The Department of Chemistry welcomes two new assistant professors: [Carlos Baiz](#) and [Livia Eberlin](#). Baiz is a former postdoc in the Andrei Tokmakoff research group, first at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and later at the University of Chicago. Baiz's research investigates the structure, dynamics, and self-organization of proteins and lipids in biological membranes

Eberlin joins the department following a postdoc with Dick Zare at Stanford. Research in the Eberlin group focuses on applying novel mass spectrometry imaging technology to health related research.

Additionally, this semester we welcome new lecturers **Tony Campos**, **Ben Meekins**, and **Alisha Bohnsack**.



Carlos Baiz



Livia Eberlin

## Alan Cowley Honored at Symposium and

On October 9th and 10th, **Professor Emeritus Alan Cowley's** career and contributions were honored during a two-day symposium attended by former colleagues and research group alumni. The scientific lectures covered topics influenced by Cowley's 54-year career of inorganic chemistry research, including talks by Didier Astruc of the University of Bordeaux and Jerry Atwood of the University of Missouri-Columbia.

On Saturday, symposium participants, members of Cowley's family, and invited guests attended a banquet at the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center. During the dinner, attendees enjoyed a slideshow of photographs from throughout Cowley's career and touching remarks were shared by friends and family.

The Alan H. Cowley Endowed Graduate Student Fellowship in Chemistry has been established in tribute to more than 50 years of research, teaching, and service. Funds distributed annually from the Alan H. Cowley Endowed Graduate Student Fellowship in Chemistry will be used to support graduate students studying inorganic chemistry at the University. If you are interested in contributing, [please visit the giving page for more information](#).

## Graeme Henkelman Promoted



Congratulations to [Graeme Henkelman](#) on his promotion from associate professor to full professor, effective September 1, 2015. The primary focus of the Henkelman group is the development of simulation methodology to study kinetic processes at the atomic scale.

Henkelman also serves as associate chair for the Department.



Professor Cowley (center) and his research group alumni

# Department News

## Welch Hall Crowd-Funding Opportunity

The College of Natural Sciences has launched a crowd-funding campaign to support Welch Hall renovations, allowing UT Austin community members to invest in facilities and research in new ways.

Welch hosts 10,000+ UT students every day for classes, seminars and labs, and is in need of significant renovations. In June, Governor Abbot signed legislation authorizing construction bonds to pay for part of the project, but the rest will come from donations. The new campaign is looking for more than 1,300 backers who will support the transformation of Welch, making the heart of UT a world-class hub for discovery and hands-on learning. Renovations will include top-of-the-line classrooms, modern research and teaching labs, dedicated Freshman Research Initiative labs and more.

The campaign includes a series of gift levels with examples of their real-world impact. For example, 100 individual gifts at the \$5,000-level will transform the Grand Hall into a student-centered community space. Gifts made during the next five years will be recognized on the Catalyst Donor Wall in the updated building. All contributions at every level are very much appreciated.

If you are interested in participating, please visit the [campaign's website](#).



Familiar to many: the Welch Grand Hall today



Open and bright: the proposed Grand Hall of tomorrow

## Monika Hill Retiring

After 31 years of service at the University of Texas at Austin, Accounting and Procurement Manager **Monika Hill** is retiring at the end of December. Monika joined the Department of Chemistry in 1985 and is not only a fantastic coworker and friendly face, but also an irreplaceable expert and resource for institutional knowledge.

With so much experience and a long career, Monika has witnessed many changes on campus. In particular, technology has improved many aspects of the procurement process. "When I first started working here we did not have any computers and had to manually type everything," Monika recalls. "When we had to type a purchase order it consisted of nine pages on NCR paper. When you made a mistake you had to use white-out on every page individually."

It will be difficult for the Department to adjust to Monika's retirement, as we will miss her expertise, helpfulness, and outgoing, pleasant personality. "I am really going to miss is

all the wonderful faculty, staff and students that I have worked with through all the years," says Monika. "I have made many friends and am going to miss everyone. The Department of Chemistry is a really interesting place to work and there is always something going on every day. It seems like there is never a dull moment."

Monika plans to spend her retirement with her family, including quality time with her husband and spoiling her two grandsons.

A retirement party is planned for December 9, 2015. If you are interested in attending, please contact Jessica Myer at [jmyer@cm.utexas.edu](mailto:jmyer@cm.utexas.edu).

