MONTANA INBRE

IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence

Spring
2017
Newsletter

What's Killing the Bees?

MSU's Michelle Flenniken discusses pathogens and other factors

Mosquito-borne disease and risk assessment

MSU's Bob Peterson reflects on the role of scientists in a "post-fact media landscape"

Contents

MONTANA INBRE

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INBRE grants are designed to enhance biomedical research capacity, expand and strengthen the research capabilities of biomedical faculty and provide access to biomedical resources for promising undergraduate and graduate students throughout eligible states.

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THIS ISSUE

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Letter from the Director

Welcome to the first Montana INBRE newsletter of 2017. We hope that your year is off to a nice start. March is the month many of us start thinking about saying goodbye to snow and ice and hello to the wonders of spring. This is a particularly exciting time for me as the new Director of Montana INBRE. I took over the leadership role from Dr. Allen Harmsen last summer. I would like to begin by thanking. Allen for his vision and dedication to improving the quality, access, and cultural diversity in higher education and scientific research across the state of Montana. The education and research landscape of Montana is dramatically different in 2017 compared to when Dr. Harmsen began working with INBRE and the IDEA programs. Opportunities in public health and medical science have never been as available to all residents of Montana as they are today. With support from the IDEA program at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences - National Institutes of Health, Montana INBRE has been able to touch the lives of Montanans in every corner of the state.

My first involvement with INBRE was as a student research mentor. Here I had a first-hand opportunity to open the door to scientific research for a diverse group of students. I worked with students from Tribal Colleges, schools on the reservations, MSU undergraduates, and students from small towns across the state. The most rewarding aspect of being a mentor is that moment when students first realize the power of the scientific method--when they have posed a question for which they did not know the answer, and then answered it for themselves through experimentation. For many people (not just students) this is an empowering moment. It can bring into focus the importance each and every one of us brings to our social group, community, the state.

Now in my role as Director of Montana INBRE, I have the opportunity to provide inspiration and access to research to a broad swath of Montanans. INBRE is charged with investing in Montana's biomedical research capacity and workforce pipeline. Why should everyone in Montana be interested in what we do? Because health and healthcare impacts every aspect of our lives, including our ability to pursue an impactful and rewarding career. INBRE can provide the spark, but for our program to be reach its full potential, students, teachers, faculty, and community members across Montana need to be active participants in the process. We need to start with the issues faced on a daily basis that are obstacles to health and mental well-being. This is where the community comes in. At Montana INBRE, we have a renewed effort to engage the people of Montana, to learn the negative and positive influences they experience on a daily basis, and to facilitate the use of community-based participatory research to guide positive outcomes.

In the coming months, members of the Montana INBRE team and I will be visiting many of your communities. We want to hear what you think, what you would change, and the concerns you have about health, healthcare, and careers in the biomedical arena. I look forward to meeting the people who make this a successful organization, YOU. ■

Café scientifique

eat. drink. talk science.

Fact Check

MSU's Bob Peterson reflects on mosquito-borne disease, the word "but," and what he's calling "the post-fact media landscape"

Bob Peterson
Photo by Kelly Gorham, courtesy of MSU Communications

There's no denying it - truth, facts and, more recently, "alternative facts" have emerged as underlying themes in major news stories in 2017. Most scientists are content to leave questions of epistemology to their colleagues in the philosophy department, but widespread reports of fake news and occasional rumblings of gag orders have suddenly left many researchers asking, 'what's my role in all this?'

Bob Peterson, Montana State University entomologist and incoming president of the Entomological Society of America, thinks that scientists have something more than data to add to this ongoing national conversation - especially when it comes verifying truth claims, comparing competing courses of action, and offering policy recommendations.

Peterson, who specializes in comparative biological risk assessment, recently delivered a Café Scientifique talk to a packed house at the Baxter

> "I view science as a force for good ... the scientific method is still the best tool we have to discover truths about the world."

Hotel in downtown Bozeman. During his talk, he summarized his lab's research on mosquitoes and provided an overview of the tools and techniques scientists in his field use to manage mosquito-borne diseases like West Nile, Zika, malaria, yellow fever and dengue.

Peterson stated that the scientific method and scientifically derived facts form the bedrock upon which comparative risk-evaluation models are built.

"Reasoning which insect-management solution to use, when to use it or whether to intervene at all in a particular situation involves weighing a complex set of environmental factors, risks and expected benefits," he said. "These inputs are all based on facts and inferences derived from the scientific method."

In the case of using pesticides to control mosquito-borne disease, Peterson explained how researchers in his field tend to be extremely conservative in their calculations. Because the inputs are based on observable, repeatable, peer-reviewed facts, researchers like Peterson are justifiably confident that research-based recommendations for pesticide interventions will fall well below levels that would cause harm to humans and the environment.

To illustrate how this works, Peterson described the intricate and robust methodological safeguards scientists in his field use. One common technique for evaluating the risks pesticides pose involves calibrating risk-assessment models to worst case scenario levels. The result of measuring risk against an implausibly high threshold, Peterson explained, is that scientists often only recommend pesticide application levels that are orders of magnitude below what the evidence says causes harm.

The point of this example, Peterson said, is that comparative-risk research on mosquito-borne diseases illustrates how the scientific method can do more than just elucidate facts about the natural world. He also sees it as tool that can help researchers and policy makers weigh potential consequences and ultimately inform decision-making.

"I view science as a force for good," Peterson said. "We figured out about 400 years ago how to test, falsify and verify truth claims, and since that discovery, we've experienced, on balance, the greatest flourishing in human history. Hundreds of years later, the scientific method is still the best tool we have to discover truths about the world and then use those insights to improve our decisions about what to do next."

So what is a scientist's role in this new and confusing media landscape, which now contains widespread reports of fake news and alternative facts?

For starters, Peterson thinks that scientists who want to get involved and speak publicly should get better at telling compelling stories rather than just presenting data.

"Our brains are hardwired to respond to narrative arcs that include protagonists, tension and resolution," he said. "Scientists can use this narrative template to inform the public about their research in more reliably captivating and effective ways."

One simple hack that Peterson says will add narrative tension is to insert the word "but" deliberately when telling a story about one's research.

"Most science 'stories' sound like this: 'and then this happened, and then this happened, and then this ...' ad infinitum," he said. "There's no tension there. There's no narrative. Instead, talk about a person the audience can identify with, use the word "but" to introduce a conflict, and then later resolve that tension in a meaningful way."

Peterson acknowledged that not all researchers are comfortable speaking in public in this way, but he quickly added that far more could develop and effectively use these skills than currently do. ■

How well did we do following Bob's advice?
Reread the first paragraph and judge for yourself.

Bob Peterson (Baxter Hotel Ballroom - Bozeman)
Photos and text by Bill Stadwiser

AWARDS & PUBLICATIONS

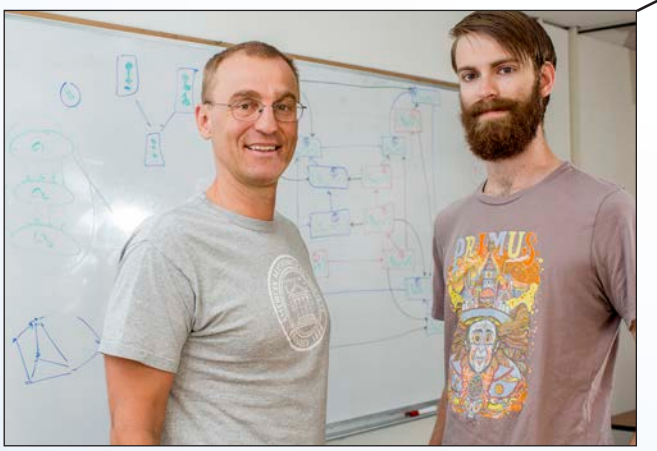
2016 was a banner year for Montana INBRE students & researchers. Here are just a few of the highlights:

MSU's Selena Ahmed publishes several INBRE-supported articles including, "Beyond yields: Climate change effects on specialty crop quality and agroecological management."

Suzanne Held receives ~$2 million NIH/NIGMS grant for "Improving chronic illness management with the Apsáalooke Nation: The Baaniilaa study."

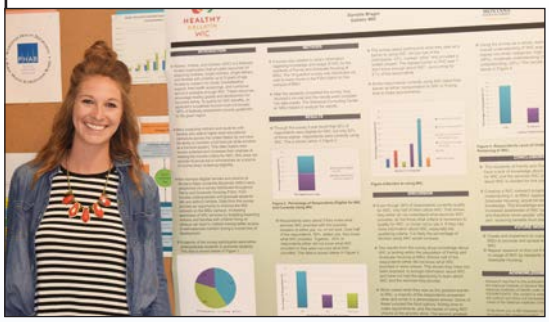
Photo courtesy of MSU Communications

January February March April May June



INBRE students, Zane Huttinga and Josh Carter, receive Goldwater Scholarships - the nation's premier scholarship for undergraduates studying math, natural sciences and engineering.

Pictured Above: Zane Huttinga with INBRE mentor, Tomas Gedeon
Photo courtesy of MSU Communications



MSU Public Health Intern, Danielle Braget, presents research at 2016 NCUR meeting in Asheville, NC

Former INBRE Director, Allen Harmsen, receives a five-year, $20 mil. NIH/ NIGMS grant to initiate a clinical & translational research collaboration between Montana and Alaska with a specific focus on American Indian and Alaska Native health.

Photo by Kelly Gorham, courtesy of MSU Communications

Read more online from MSU News Service:
www.montana.edu/news/16311/msu-and-partners-awarded-20-million-grant-to-address-native-health-disparities-in-montana-and-alaska

INBRE student, Josh Carter, receives Rhodes Scholarship to study in Oxford, England Photo by Adrian Sanchez-Gonzalez, courtesy of MSU Communications

MSU Public Health Intern, Ellen Guyer, wins scholarship to present research at 2016 MPHA conference in Billings, MT

July August September October November December

Former INBRE student, Michael Ruiz, receives NSF fellowship to pursue doctoral studies at Harvard University

Pictured Above: Michael Ruiz with mentor, Ron June
Photo by Kelly Gorham, courtesy of MSU Communications

INBRE student, Riley Shearer, wins Schwarzman Scholarship for a year of study in China

Photo by Adrian Sanchez-Gonzalez, courtesy of MSU Communications

If you have a MT INBRE-related story, award, publication or announcement to share, let us know! Email:

william.stadwiser@montana.edu

What's Killing the Bees?

MSU's Michelle Flenniken to discus pathogens and other factors

Up next in Montana INBRE's Café Scientifique speaker series: Michelle Flenniken, discussing the plight of honey bees in Montana, the US and the world. Join us on Tuesday, March 28, at the Baxter Hotel Ballroom in downtown Bozeman.

It's easy to overlook the fact that honey bee labor reliably adds billions of dollars to the U.S. agricultural economy each year. Even for those of us who are generally aware of bees' vital role in food production, rarely do we spend days on end, let alone careers, contemplating and deciphering the nuances of what makes these small creatures tick. Michelle Flenniken, however, is not your average bee-enthusiast.

Flenniken is an assistant professor in the Department of Plant Sciences and Plant Pathology in MSU's College of Agriculture and co-directer of MSU's Pollinator Health Center - a cross-disciplinary effort aimed at understanding and addressing issues related to pollinators like bees.

At 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 28, Flenniken will present, "What's Killing the Bees? The Impacts of Pathogens and other Factors on Honey Bee Health" at the Baxter Hotel Ballroom in downtown Bozeman. The event is hosted by MSU and co-sponsored by its INBRE and COBRE programs. It is free and open to the public.

Bees have been in the news since around 2006, when widespread reports of higher-than-average bee colony collapses began circulating. As those trends continued in following years, much ink was spilled speculating as to the potential causes. It's fair to say that not all of those stories were equally rooted in science.

Flenniken intends to use her Café Scientifique talk as an opportunity to examine the importance of pollinators and outline current scientific facts and uncertainties surrounding honey bee health. Throughout the talk, she will also emphasize the

Café scientifique

eat. drink. talk science.

importance of basic scientific research in addressing complex problems.

"Honey bee health, at both the individual and colony levels, is affected by multiple biotic and abiotic factors, including pathogens, chemicals, the availability of quality forage, climate and specific weather events and more," Flenniken said. "It's important to consider these factors separately and synergistically in order to understand how these factors influence bee health."

According to Flenniken, annual losses of honey bee colonies have averaged more than 33 percent since 2006, which is up from the historic average of around 10 to 12 percent.

Flenniken's presentation will also examine bees within larger economic and public health contexts by addressing the ways in which bees affect agriculture and food security.

"Bees are important pollinators of plants in both agricultural and non-agricultural landscapes, and honey bees are the primary pollinators of many fruit, nut and vegetable crops," Flenniken said. "Without bees, the diversity of produce and nutritional value of our typical western diet would be dramatically reduced."

According to baseline statistics released in 2016 by the Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service, honey bees are responsible for pollinating an estimated $15 billion of U.S. crops each year. Yet even as bees reliably contribute billions of dollars each year to the agricultural economy, higher annual colony losses place additional burdens on commercial beekeepers to keep pace with those losses, Flenniken said.

"Beekeepers have been trying to adapt to these challenges, but it's difficult for any agricultural producer to weather 30 percent losses or more year after year," she said. "Though beekeepers have continued to meet agricultural demands for pollinators by splitting their colonies more frequently, high levels of annual losses are concerning to beekeepers, growers, scientists and members of the general public."

Flenniken will conclude her talk by highlighting current research efforts of faculty affiliated with MSU's Pollinator Health Center, including ongoing investigations into the impact of pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, fungi and trypansomatids (a type of single-celled organism) on honey bees and understanding honey bee immune defense mechanisms.

Flenniken is a microbiologist and an assistant professor at MSU whose primary research interest involves investigating honey bee host-pathogen interactions. Flenniken earned a bachelor's in biology from the University of Iowa, served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ghana and received a Ph.D. in microbiology from MSU. She completed her postdoctoral research at the University of California, San Francisco. ■

Learn more about Café Scientifique:
www.inbre.montana.edu/cafe

Visit MSU's Pollinator Health Center
www.montana.edu/pollinators

Photos on this page courtesy of Kelly Gorham - MSU Communications

RESEARCHER Spotlight

Sarah Keller, et al.

Sarah Keller - Montana State University-Billings

Five Montana INBRE investigators receive award for suicide prevention paper

Montana INBRE investigator and Montana State University-Billings professor, Sarah Keller, will receive a Top Competitive Paper Award at the 108th Annual Eastern Communication Association Convention this spring in Boston for a multi-author paper titled, "A Look at Stigma as it Relates to Suicide: Content Analysis of Community Theatre."

Co-authors on the award-winning paper also include Graham Austin (Montana State University), Joy Honea (MSUB), Vanessa McNeill (MSUB) and Lani Paulson Miller (MSUB).

The paper examines young adult and adolescent experiences with stigma and perceived barriers to seeking professional help by analyzing interactive role-playing and performances about suicide.

"Despite alarmingly high suicide rates in Montana, little is known about how to develop and deploy effective strategies targeting high-risk groups," said Keller. "In particular, strategies that improve interpersonal communication about suicide, which is a known protective factor against suicide risk, are limited, as are strategies aimed at reducing stigma."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Montana has one of the highest rates for death by suicide among all states. The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, a leading private-public partnership advancing a national strategy for suicide prevention, lists stigma against suicidal ideation and professional help as significant barriers to preventing suicide.

For this paper, Keller and her co-authors examined original scripts from a community-based theatre program that focused on suicide and suicide prevention. Keller et al. analyzed the scripts, performances and themes in order to identify barriers to help-seeking, experiences with mental illness, factors of suicide and themes related to stigma.

"It was important for our research model to be grassroots, insofar as we wanted the participants and the audience to come from the same population. We wanted participants to draw from their knowledge and prior experiences so that we could identify real and current barriers to intervention."

In examining factors of suicide expressed in the youth theatre performances, Keller claims that social isolation and the feeling that one does not belong among one's peers was the predominant factor participants

> "It was important for our research model to be grassroots, insofar as we wanted the ... participants to draw from their knowledge and prior experiences so that we could identify real and current barriers to intervention."

mentioned or described. Keller went on to say that stigma against expressing emotional vulnerability, seeking professional help, and acknowledging mental illness were dominant themes in the plays.

"In our study, defensive-avoidance, which is a fear-based control response

that occurs when an individual feels unable to control a risk, was the most commonly expressed barrier to help-seeking," said Keller. "We believe that the perception of public stigma against mental illness and mental health treatment may have contributed to these defensive-avoidance reactions. Our study also showed that hopelessness – the belief that one is unable to do anything to resolve a health threat – was the most common self-reported mental health problem."

Keller hopes that by illuminating the construct of stigma and its relationship to help-seeking behavior and suicide, she and her co-authors will contribute to future research on experiences of stigma surrounding mental health topics and the development of more effective interventions.

Sarah Keller is a professor of communication in MSUB's Department of Communication & Theatre. Her teaching and research interests include public relations, applied communication research and health communication. She earned a Master of Science in journalism from Columbia University and a doctorate in health communication from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Eastern Communication Association is a professional organization of scholars, teachers and students of Communication Studies. The ESA was initially established in 1910 and claims to be the oldest professional communication association in the United States. ■

Read more online from MSU News Service:

www.montana.edu/news/16748/montana-inbre-researchers-receive-award-for-suicide-prevention-paper

Statistics Success Story

Kenning Arlitsch

Kenning Arlitsch - Montana State University Library Dean

MSU dean achieves lifelong dream – with some help from the Statistical Consulting and Research Services Team

"I recently fulfilled a lifelong dream of earning a Ph.D., and my dissertation was vastly improved with the help of MSU's Statistical Consulting and Research Services team. I had little knowledge of statistics, but Dr. Lillian Lin and her staff helped me turn the data that I'd collected into a meaningful story, complete with graphical elements that brought my analysis to life. The staff emphasized careful use of language, assuring that I would not overstate or understate my findings. SCRS staff were generous with their time and advice and I am now comfortable with basic R functions and commands.

My advice for Montana researchers is to take advantage of this wonderful service and to involve SCRS in your project as early as possible. SCRS helped me make sense of the data that I'd collected, but they also showed me how to better structure that data for analysis and I could have saved myself time and effort if I had sought their advice sooner. I intend to call on them again as I continue to submit grant proposals, conduct research, and publish." ■

Learn more about the INBRE-funded Statistical Consulting & Research Services:

www.montana.edu/statisticalconsulting

Advice from a PRO

Dr. Lawrence Tabak, Principal Deputy Director at the NIH, shares his thoughts on a successful career in science

Top Ten Things I have Learned*

10. Science has become a team sport – learn to play nice with others
9. Mentors come in all shapes and sizes
8. Do not reinvent the wheel- always seek out expert advice
7. Humor can be an effective tool – as long as the joke is on you
6. Use experiments of nature to guide your research questions
5. Do not be seduced by your own voice or ideas
4. Know what "good" is and aim for it
3. Take the path that offers the most options and do not be afraid to fail
2. You do not have to be the smartest person in the room to succeed – just make sure you are always in a room with smart people
1. Be a mensch – offer help to others without any expectation of "return"

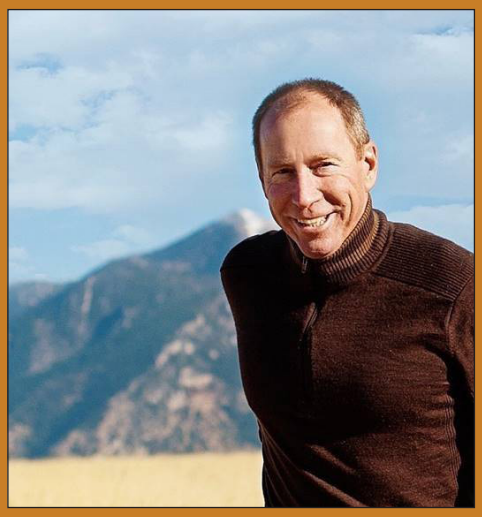
*with apologies to David Letterman

Welcome!

New Faces

Brian Bothner

INBRE Principal Investigator & Director



Montana State University professor Brian Bothner has been named the new director and principal investigator of the Montana IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence, or INBRE, program, effective July 1, 2016.

Bothner, a highly respected professor in MSU's Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry in the College of Letters and Science and a longstanding INBRE collaborator, brings vast experience in biomedical research

Bothner has served as a principal investigator on several federal research grants, including grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and Air Force Office of Sponsored Research. The focus of his NIH-related research is discovery of biomarkers for hemorrhagic shock and use of viruses for gene therapy.

Bothner said he is excited to continue INBRE's investments in student research across Montana.

"I do not think that you can overemphasize the value of discovery and active learning," Bothner said. "This is the way people learned for thousands of years, and as educators now appreciate, it is the best way to foster engagement."

Read more online from MSU News Service:

www.montana.edu/news/16310/msu-professor-brian-bothner-named-new-director-of-montana-inbre

Barbara Bunge

INBRE Program Finance Manager

Barbara Bunge joined INBRE's administrative staff as Fiscal Manager and Program Specialist in November, 2016.

Barbara's most recent position was with Montana State University's Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) where she served as the Subcontract Manager & Fiscal Manager. As part of her former role with OSP, Barbara worked closely with Montana INBRE as its main campus contact for developing and finalizing project subcontracts among partner institutions.

"I would like to thank my colleagues at OSP for 11 great years," said Barbara, who also indicated that she was excited to begin deepening her involvement on the project side of INBRE awards.

Barbara was also quick to express gratitude for former Fiscal Manager Laurie Howell's contributions to the INBRE network.

"It can be hard to replace someone of Laurie's caliber or follow in her footsteps," said Barbara. "She left behind a great legacy here at INBRE that's well respected across campus and the state."

Montana INBRE's Program Coordinator, Ann Bertagnolli, said, "Barbara brings a wealth of experience to this position, and we hope that everyone will join us in welcoming her to INBRE. We feel very fortunate to have her on our staff."

OPPORTUNITIES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

MONTANA INBRE BULLETIN BOARD

UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH INTERNSHIPS

Priority applications for 2017 Montana INBRE Public Health Internships are due March 31st. Undergraduate students attending MSU-Bozeman who will be entering sophomore, junior, or senior year are eligible to apply. More details available at:

www.inbre.montana.edu

The 42nd annual American Indian Council Powwow will be held on April 14-15, 2017, at the Brick Breeden Fieldhouse at Montana State University in Bozeman. More details available at:

www.montana.edu/aic/index.html

RAIN Regional Alliance of INBRE Networks

INBRE investigators and program staff from Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico are invited to join us for this exciting RAIN Biomedical Research Conference on Monday and Tuesday, June 26-27, 2017 in Big Sky, Montana. We look forward to seeing you there!

www.inbre.montana.edu

Regional & National Opportunities

American Indian Health Research Conference: Oct. 13, 2017

Grand Forks, ND

Conference is designed as an opportunity to learn about working with American Indian communities and sponsored in part by the North Dakota INBRE program

ruralhealth.und.edu/projects/american-indian-health-research-conference

2017 NIH IDeA Western Regional Conference: Oct. 18-21, 2017

Jackson, WY

Wyoming INBRE welcomes faculty, administrators, staff and students from the NIH IDeA Western Region (Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, Montana, and Wyoming) and NIH administrators and staff to the fifth biennial NIH IDeA Western Regional Conference. The conference will feature oral and poster scientific sessions, keynote talks, professional development workshops, and information sharing sessions with NIH officials.

www.uwyo.edu/wyominginbre/articles/western-idea-conference-2017.html

INTRODUCING

RAIN

Regional Alliance of INBRE Networks

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to announce that the first Regional Alliance of INBRE Networks (RAIN) Biomedical Research Conference will be held Monday and Tuesday, June 26-27, 2017, in beautiful Big Sky, Montana.

Idaho, Montana, and New Mexico INBRE Program Administrators formed RAIN to leverage our existing strengths and reduce programmatic redundancy as we continue to build biomedical research capacity in our states. We share complementary biomedical and public health challenges and opportunities, as well as the same NIH INBRE grant-renewal schedule.

The INBRE Directors, Program Coordinators and Program Managers identified numerous areas with interstate collaboration potential, including our INBRE Bioinformatics Cores, undergraduate student research opportunities, graduate programs, access to unique patient populations, mentor expertise, faculty research programs and others.

Learn more:

www.inbre.montana.edu

The purpose is to bring INBRE-supported faculty investigators together to share their research findings, identify creative collaborations, and communicate with each other about experiences as research mentees and student research mentors. We know we can learn from each other's achievements and challenges. We believe getting together will facilitate peer-mentoring among faculty at primarily undergraduate institutions and with faculty in more research intense settings. Additionally, we hope to catalyze synergistic use of research capabilities and resources, and identify common needs and unique expertise to enhance programmatic impact.

Big Sky, Montana, was selected for the inaugural RAIN Biomedical Research Conference. Nestled in the Madison Mountain Range just outside of Yellowstone National Park, the Big Sky Conference Center is a place where people from around the world come to work, contemplate, recreate, and create.

INBRE investigators and program staff from our three states are invited to join us for this exciting RAIN Biomedical Research Conference on Monday and Tuesday, June 26-27, 2017. We look forward to seeing you there!

Sincerely,

Brian Bothner, Montana INBRE Director, Montana State University
Carolyn Hovde Bohach, Idaho INBRE Director, University of Idaho
Shelley Lusetti, New Mexico INBRE Director, New Mexico State University

Sneak Peek: Next Newsletter Summer 2017

INBRE's Community Engagement Core has had a productive 2016 and an exciting start to 2017.

The addition of Montana's newest IDeA program - The American Indian Alaska Native Clinical and Translational Research Program - as well as the reconfiguring of CHERM into MSU's new Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity (CAIRHE) have INBRE Community Research Associates working on new collaborations, new partnerships, and new ideas for advancing community based participatory research in the state.

Learn all about these efforts and more in our next newsletter, including a farewell to recently retired Community Research Associate, Sarah Young.

Sarah Young, Emily Matt Salois, Anna Buerhaus
Photo courtesy of MSU Communications

If you have a MT INBRE-related story, award, publication or announcement to share, let us know! Email:

william.stadwiser@montana.edu

IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence

RESEARCH. COLLABORATION. OPPORTUNITY.

Montana's biomedical research network

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