Join us for the inaugural "Neuroscience Research Evening"  
Oct. 11!

The McKnight Brain Institute is initiating a number of new efforts that are intended to stimulate communication and collaboration among the broader UF neuroscience community. One such effort includes “Neuroscience Research Evenings,” which will be held on the second Wednesday of each month. The topics will vary and will typically include short presentations in thematic areas. We will also use this time as an opportunity to socialize and get to know our neuroscience colleagues from all over campus. All individuals engaged in neuroscience are invited and encouraged to attend.

On behalf of the entire MBI executive committee, I invite you to join us for the first "Neuroscience Research Evening," which will be from 5:30-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 11, in the Biomedical Sciences Atrium. I, and members of the executive committee, will provide a brief overview of the new directions that we are planning for the MBI and the opportunities available for neuroscientists across campus. Snacks and beverages will be served. I encourage you to attend in order to provide feedback and suggest your own ideas. We need your input as we push forward on our research, education and outreach agendas. I look forward to working with you to strengthen our local neuroscience community and to build our reputation nationally and internationally.

Please help spread the word and join us!

- Todd E. Golde, M.D., Ph.D., MBI director

MBI in the News!

MBI members penned four well-read essays for The Conversation this summer that have gotten lots of buzz. The Conversation is a website that publishes essays written by academics for a lay audience; the
pieces often are picked up and published again by major newspapers across the country.

"Glioblastoma, a formidable foe, faces a ‘reservoir of resilience’ in McCain," by Duane Mitchell, M.D., Ph.D.

"Concussions and CTE: More complicated than even the experts know," by Russell Bauer, Ph.D., and Michael Jaffee, M.D.

"Parkinson’s disease: New drugs and treatments, but where are the doctors?" by Michael Okun, M.D.

"Can you pass this smell test?" by Steven Munger, Ph.D.

In addition, our news release on UF’s new Smell Disorders Program generated much interest, with TV and radio stories and a piece in the Gainesville Sun featuring Dr. Munger, director of UF’s Center for Smell and Taste.

The Sun also recently featured UF Health's Fear Facers Day Camp, started by MBI member and psychiatry vice chair Carol Mathews, M.D.

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Summer Neuroscience Internship Program 2017

The UF department of neuroscience and the MBI hosted 13 students from across the country for the second year of the Summer Neuroscience Internship Program, or SNIP, which focuses on research for students not yet enrolled in a graduate program.

Sara Burke, Ph.D., an assistant professor of neuroscience and leader of the program, said the goal is to recruit talented students and give those from smaller institutions opportunities to participate in research.

“We really want to tap into students who want to have research careers. So primarily, we’re looking for students who want to enroll in a Ph.D. program or an M.D. and Ph.D. program,” she said.

The 10-week program, which ran through Aug. 4, engaged students in research projects specific to their interests, said Burke. Students are not made an offer until the staff has found a mentor who is willing to work with them. This guarantees that each student will have the guidance of a mentor for their research.

The program also offered weekly seminars and a professional development symposium organized by Joseph McQuail, Ph.D., co-director of SNIP. Students also had an opportunity to present their research at the end through a poster competition.

The tentative application deadline for next summer is March 15, 2018. For information on how to apply for next summer, please visit SNIP’s website.
The interns are given a $400 stipend as well as housing in Oakbrook Walk.

“Right now the program is all funded internally, which actually is very cool and it shows you how much support there is at UF for undergraduate research and education,” Burke said.

Jacob Sperber, a senior psychology major at Williams College who is currently enrolled in SNIP, said he was especially excited to attend neuroscience seminars every week and do research in the UF Center for Smell and Taste.

“I’m a big foodie,” he said. “The sense of smell is really important for tasting things and this was one of the few places where I had seen the opportunity to work with olfaction, and the sense of smell and how it relates to neuroscience.”

-- By Isaac Heller

MBI opens new state-of-the-art labs supporting cognitive aging and human MRI-based research

Newly renovated high-tech labs are now up and running in the Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Brain Institute that will significantly enhance human subject research capability across the UF campus.

Researchers from many disciplines will benefit greatly from the new labs — whether they’re on the quest to discover ways to slow age-related memory loss, better understand brain development of adolescents or advance knowledge of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases.

UF’s Center for Cognitive Aging and Memory Clinical Translational Research (CAM Center) and the Advanced Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Spectroscopy Facility (AMRIS) now have new expanded spaces in the MBI that will support a wide array of ongoing and new studies.

Formerly configured as conference rooms LG-110A and B, the ground-floor spaces have been turned into testing rooms for clinical and cognitive assessments, an electrophysiology suite, a transcranial magnetic stimulation lab and new waiting areas for study participants right next door to the new Siemens 3T MRI/S state-of-the-art scanner commissioned in January. In addition, there is a new phlebotomy lab in close proximity.

The expanded AMRIS facility will serve investigators from across campus who are working with human subjects using both the Siemens and the Philips 3T MRI instruments. Investigators seeking to use the new AMRIS facility may make reservations on the AMRIS website.

“This new space will allow researchers more space and flexibility to screen and test their research participants before or after using the MRI scanners,” said AMRIS director Joanna Long, Ph.D. “We are also looking forward to research participants taking advantage of our new comfortable waiting area, should they arrive early.”

The new Cognitive Aging and Memory space will serve investigators conducting human clinical trials as well as basic research studies.
“This is a major milestone for us,” said CAM Center director Ronald Cohen, Ph.D. “This space provides critical infrastructure that will enable successful completion of our current research on cognitive and brain aging and also support continued growth of NIH-funded research focusing on the original mission of the endowment from the McKnight Brain Research Foundation.”

That mission is to support scientific research aimed at understanding and alleviating age-related memory loss.

The new location of the center in close proximity to AMRIS significantly improves logistics, as many CAM Center studies involve neuroimaging, Cohen said.

“These facilitates also bring human clinical translational research back to the MBI, thereby fulfilling an important goal of its mission,” Cohen said.

For trial participants, the new spaces will offer far greater convenience.

“It becomes a one-stop shop for cognitive aging and memory research,” said Adam Woods, Ph.D., CAM Center assistant director, who is leading a team on the largest Phase III clinical trial yet designed to test transcranial direct current stimulation, or tDCS. “Previously, we used a golf cart to shuttle people from place to place on campus for different research services. Now, we have a state-of-the-art research facility with parking spaces nearby, that provides participants with a central location for cognitive aging and memory research studies.”

Other MBI renovations this spring and summer have included the relocation of the UF Center for Smell and Taste to the ground floor of the MBI and relocation of the MBI administrative offices to the fifth floor of the building.

The final phase of this portion of MBI structural renovations, which have been funded by the institute, is underway and includes upgrading the equipment in conference rooms on each floor to offer the latest equipment and upgraded meeting space now that LG-110 is no longer available.

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**Malaty takes helm at Florida Society of Neurology**

Irene Malaty, M.D., an associate professor in the department of neurology, has been chosen as president of the Florida Society of Neurology.

Malaty will officially become president at the conclusion of the statewide organization’s annual meeting, which has been rescheduled for Dec. 15-17 due to Hurricane Irma.

Malaty first became involved with the society as a resident, and over more than a decade, she has served in several roles, including resident board member and secretary. The first woman chosen as president, she will take the helm of the 338-member organization as it marks its half-century anniversary in 2018.

“It is a great honor to step into this role, as I have worked together with several great leaders of the organization for more than a decade, and have learned from their contributions and the evolution of the organization,” Malaty said. “I hope to continue their trend of bringing individual talents together and working to ultimately benefit the care of neurological patients in our state.”

The FSN brings together neurologists from multiple types of practice settings to advance the common goals of promoting neurological education, advocating for patient needs and working to address practice issues to best care for patients.
“The society is special in that it unites neurologists from different geographical locations and different types of practices -- academic, solo practice and group practice -- and gives them a voice together,” Malaty said.

MBI researchers shed light on process of neurodegeneration

Over the last few years, there has been great interest in learning more about the proteins that accumulate in brains affected by various neurodegenerative disorders and the idea that these proteins can spread from one area of the brain to another.

Now, a team of MBI neuroscientists has published findings that shed new light on the mechanisms helping to explain the process of neurodegeneration in diseases such as Parkinson’s disease.

In a paper published in the journal Molecular Neurodegeneration and cited by the news website Alzforum in June, a team led by Paramita Chakrabarty, Ph.D., an assistant professor of neuroscience, and Benoit Giasson, Ph.D., a professor of neuroscience, revealed findings that are important in understanding the pathophysiology of disorders including Parkinson’s disease and the related disorder known as dementia with Lewy bodies.

In particular, the researchers used a mouse model to examine the spread of alpha-synuclein (protein) clumps, which are involved in a number of neurodegenerative diseases, and explored how glial cells — which provide support and protection for neurons — may be responsible for the propagation of this neurodegeneration or the disease itself. Read the story here.

MBI news to share?

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