



News Release

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UST Graduate Receives National Award for Biology Research

HOUSTON (June 17, 2008)– Nam Nguyen, a 2008 UST biology graduate, received the John C. Johnson award in the cell, organismal and developmental biology category for his scientific poster presentation at the Tri-Beta Biological Honor Society 2008 Biennial National Convention. The convention was held May 28 through June 1 at North Kentucky University. Nguyen received a \$750 travel grant to present at the national convention when he presented his research at the South Central Regional Tri-Beta Biological Honor Society in the spring semester, where he won the highest honor for the competition.

Nguyen's research focused on a gene that Dr. Debra Bramblett, assistant professor of biology, discovered in mice during research she completed as a post-doctoral associate at Baylor College of Medicine. The gene is responsible for aspects of neural development in mice, including eyesight. Nguyen found a similar gene in the purple sea urchin using bioinformatics and performed experiments to determine where and when the gene is expressed in the developing sea urchin embryo. Dr. Bramblett, who has been working with Nguyen on this project for more than two years, says his research allows for the opportunity to learn more about how the gene ensures proper retina function in mammals without having to use an actual vertebrate animal.

"This is an incredible achievement," Bramblett said. "The competition at the national convention was really steep, and Nam's accomplishment reflects his knowledge of the subject. He is certainly prepared to go on and have a career in biological research."

Nguyen said he was proud to be able to represent UST at the national convention. "It was a really awesome feeling," he said. "I was extremely happy. It was such an extraordinary experience because I competed against winners of other districts and students from large universities that have biology graduate programs and a great deal of financial resources. I am so grateful to the UST biology professors, especially Dr. Bramblett for all of the research experience that she has taught me. They are truly invested in their students, and try to give us the best research experience and education possible."

In addition to majoring in biology, Nguyen minored in chemistry, philosophy and studio arts. He served as president of UST's local Tri-Beta chapter, Nu Beta. He is currently working as a research assistant at the University of Texas at Houston Medical School's biochemistry lab, and plans to go to graduate school to obtain a Ph.D. in biochemistry and an M.D.

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