

## Dr. Simmons Collaborates with Students on Bovine Genetics Research

At a moment's notice, Dr. Alexandra Simmons, University of St.

Thomas assistant professor of biology, eagerly jumped in the car with two freshman biology students in hot pursuit of dairy cow blood samples.

The June 19 trip to a Prairie View dairy farm was a moment of triumph for the Venezuelan-born professor and her students. They had spent the better part of the spring 2009 semester searching for samples to conduct genetic research on a metabolic disorder called fatty liver disease, which adversely affects the health, milk productivity and reproductive performance of cows.

Simmons, who earned degrees in education, biology, chemistry and human genetics in Venezuela, came to Houston in 2006 to conduct postdoctoral studies at Baylor College of Medicine. She joined

the UST community as an adjunct professor in fall of 2008, teaching courses in general biology and genetics. In May, she



*From left to right: Louanne Honrado, Steven Konstantin, Dr. Alexandra Simmons and Jonathan Zalamea*

accepted a position as a tenure-track assistant professor in the Biology Department.

Simmons says she finds the greatest joy when she can combine her love of scientific research with her love of teaching. That's why she didn't waste any time assembling an undergraduate research team in her first year at UST.

Simmons' research, simply known as the "cow project," is a collaboration with Dr. Carolina Rios Phillips, an ICUSTA scholar from Universidad Santo Tomás in Santiago, Chile. Simmons selected a team of four freshman biology students – Louanne Honrado, Jonathan Zalamea, Adriana Pozo and Steven Konstantin – to assist her with the research while they learn basic molecular genetics techniques such as DNA extraction, DNA sequencing and Gel Electrophoresis.

"In the era of genomics, it is of major importance that biology and medical students learn how to apply the techniques that are currently being used in the field of genetic diagnostics," Simmons said. "We are learning universal techniques, so what we are learning may also be applied to processing human DNA and for most organisms. This research will be good experience for whatever these students wish to pursue in the future."

Louanne Honrado, who is also from Venezuela, said she feels blessed to have the opportunity to work on Simmons' research team.

"At first, taking on a genetic research projects a freshman was kind of intimidating because we had only taken general biology," Honrado said. "But Dr. Simmons has such faith in us, and she explains everything with clarity and patience. I am learning lab skills that will serve me in my goal to become a doctor, and I can't wait to get back to work in the fall."

Read the complete story at [www.stthom.edu](http://www.stthom.edu).

## Srinivas Appointed Dean



**D**r. Ravi Srinivas has been appointed to the position of Dean of Extended Programs. In his new role, Srinivas will continue to direct the Master in Liberal Arts Program. The Office of Extended Programs will be the new home for nontraditional programs and students at UST.

“Nontraditional undergraduate students will be better served through the revival of the adult degree completion program,” Srinivas said. “Extended Programs will house the summer session programs for continuing and visiting undergraduate and graduate students.

In addition, the Office will take the lead on the development of distance learning initiatives. It aims to identify new market opportunities for developing strong credit academic programs and continuing education classes.”

Srinivas joined the University of St. Thomas in 1993, most recently serving as the director of the MLA program for the last three years. He also served as the director of the Mendenhall Summer Institute in 2008, an associate professor and chair of the Environmental Studies, Academic Affairs Operational Planning Coordinator, and chair of the Faculty Senate/Faculty Council.

He was the 2004-2005 recipient of the Joseph M. McFadden Excellence in Service Award.

## Staff Honored at Overton Awards Luncheon

**U**niversity of St. Thomas has honored 7 staff members with the Tom Overton Staff Excellence Award, which includes a certificate and monetary gift for their outstanding performance on the job. The award was named for the late Tom Overton, former director of Public Affairs at UST from 2001 until his untimely death in 2007.

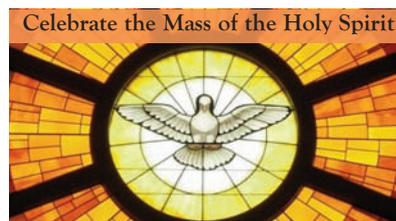


Pictured above from left to right, this year’s recipients are **Ruth Carranza**, Custodial Staff, **Ryane Jackson**, Institutional Advancement, **Chris Zeglin**, Marketing/Communications, **Mrs. Judy Overton**, **Abigail Showalter**, Advancement Projects, **Shelly Richard**, Career Services/Testing, **Salomon Medina**, Financial Aid and **Sr. Maura Behrenfeld**, FSE, Campus Ministry (not pictured).

President Robert Ivany declared the staff excellence award be named after Tom Overton because he was a man of honor, good humor and an excellent attitude, who exemplified UST’s core values of goodness, discipline and knowledge.

“As part of the University of St. Thomas’ ongoing effort to recognize excellence and outstanding service to the university community, we are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2008-2009 Tom Overton Excellence Award,” said UST President Dr. Robert Ivany.

“These award recipients represent a diverse group of individuals who have contributed significantly to the UST community through their honor, good humor and excellent attitude. We are grateful to have their leadership in Campus Ministry, Institutional Advancement, Financial Aid, Career Services and Testing and in our Facilities Operations. We congratulate the award recipients, and thank them for their ongoing service to our University community,” Ivany said.



Celebrate the Mass of the Holy Spirit

**J**oin the University in prayer and celebration of a new semester at the Mass of the Holy Spirit and reception from 12:45 – 2 p.m. Thursday, **Sept. 3**. The Mass is held in the Jerabeck Gym with a reception following in Scanlan. All are welcome. Principal celebrant is Fr. Mike Buentello, CSB.

This opening Mass of the 2009-2010 school year will invoke the presence, protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit on all the studies, activities, and efforts of the UST community. This blessing includes the importance for each person giving themselves to their continued growth humanly and spiritually, with an openness to the Spirit’s promptings in their lives.

For more information, contact Campus Ministry at 713-525-3589.

## Call to Holiness Evangelization Conference

Several University of St. Thomas professors will speak at the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston's Call to Holiness Evangelization Conference to be held Friday-Saturday, Sept. 11-12

at the George R. Brown Convention Center. The theme of this conference is "Responding to the Call to Holiness in Today's World." On Friday, Sept. 11, UST speakers for the theological symposium include Fr. Donald Nesti, CSSp, Msgr. James Anderson, Fr. Leon Strieder, Dr. Jeremy Wilkins, Fr. Brendan Cahill and Fr. Bill Kelly.

"The Call to Holiness Conference has been organized by some lay Catholics who really wanted a serious dialogue about living out the Christian call to holiness in the real world," Fr. Cahill said. "I imagine that each person who participates will prayerfully have their minds expanded about the possibilities of service that range from giving up everything to serve the poorest of the poor to living daily life fully in the spiritual awareness of Jesus in every moment. The key to the conference is that every baptized Christian has the chance for a radical ("to the root") commitment to Christ – it isn't just reserved for Mother Theresa, Pope John Paul II and the other saints – we are called to do what we do every day in the awareness of Christ and in this way we can be just as holy as the greatest of the saints."

The Archdiocese expects more than 3,000 attendees to participate in the theological symposium, the general conference, and the youth track program. For more information, go to [www.ct2009.org](http://www.ct2009.org) or call 713-391-3609.

## CFC 'Twitter Twitter' Conference Explores Family and Relationships in the Age of Me



The University of St. Thomas Center for Faith and Culture will host the conference "Twitter, Twitter: Connecting and Loving in the Age of Me" from 6:30 to 9 p.m. on Friday, **Sept. 25** and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, **Sept. 26**.

This conference will cover how to integrate social, cultural, spiritual and psychological views of relationships, marriage and family in today's mentality. The focus will be on self-awareness and the capacity for meaningful relationships regardless of state or vocation in life. The speakers are Rev. Donald S. Nesti, CSSp, Dr. Catherine Barber, Dr. Joseph and Catherine Garcia-Prats and Dr. Prachi Shah.

The event is open to the public. The conference is \$10 for students, who are encouraged to bring friends, and \$15 for non-students, which includes continental breakfast and lunch. The conference will be held in Scanlan Room, Jerabek Center, 4000 Mt. Vernon, and For more information, go to [www.stthom.edu/cfc](http://www.stthom.edu/cfc) or call 713-942-5066.

## Former U.S. Ambassador the Honorable R. James Nicholson to Speak on Campus

President's Lecture Series presents the **Honorable R. James Nicholson** at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, **Sept. 15**, in UST Jones Hall.

Nicholson is the senior counsel for Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber, Schreck law firm. Nicholson served as the United States Ambassador to the Holy See from 2001 to 2005.



In this position, he became a well known advocate in Rome for the elevation of human dignity, giving special emphasis to human trafficking, religious freedom, starvation and bio-tech food, HIV-AIDS and international terrorism.

He also served as secretary of Veteran Affairs from 2005 to 2007, where he was responsible for a nationwide system of hospitals, health care clinics, benefit programs and national cemeteries for America's 25 million veterans.

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Shawna Wallstein at 713-525-2160.

## Summer Programs Benefit UST Freshman



Over the summer, UST bridged the gap between high school and college for 69 incoming freshman through the Mendenhall Summer Institute and the Science and Math Summer Institute.

The participants in both Mendenhall Summer Institute and the Science and Math Summer Institute comprise nearly 25 percent of the incoming freshman class. Students in both programs got an early start to their college education, received cohesive support through academic advising, mentoring, tutoring and counseling and made friends before the semester began.

In its second year, the Mendenhall Summer Institute was able to serve a greater number of students, expanding from 25 in 2008 to 44 in 2009. The program was directed by Dr. Elizabeth Maynard, and courses were taught by Dr. Sophia Esquiff Von Holden and Dr. Evelyn Potter.

The Math and Science Summer Institute, directed by Dr. Tom Malloy, was held for the first time this year. The Institute is designed to increase student success in entry-level science, technology, engineering and math courses, and is funded for two years by the Department of Education through a \$2.4 million grant under the Comprehensive College Access Act for Hispanic Serving Institutions. Courses were taught by Drs. John Starner, and John Palasota.

See full stories at [www.stthom.edu](http://www.stthom.edu).



Singapore



Turkey



Ireland

## Study Abroad Maps Out Future Trips

Keeping pace with its national rankings, the University of St. Thomas Study Abroad Program continued to enjoy a track record of success in the 2008-09 academic year.

The first general information session for the academic year's study abroad programs will be held at 6 p.m. **Oct. 2, 2009** in Anderson 103. The Study Abroad Web site will be updated at the beginning of the fall semester and students are always encouraged to come to Tiller Hall for information and study abroad advising. Please contact Diana Garcia, Study Abroad Coordinator, at [garciad@stthom.edu](mailto:garciad@stthom.edu) or call at 713-525-3530.

Read a recap of the 2008-2009 Study Abroad at [www.stthom.edu](http://www.stthom.edu).

*Star View* is published by the Office of Marketing Communications as a means of informing the UST community about University and campus news. Call 713-525-3116 with questions and/or comments.

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