2014 WCC Rising Stars

Prof. Julia Brumaghim
By Michelle Rogers

Prof. Julia Brumaghim was one of the 2014 WCC Rising star award winners for her research on the impact of metal ions on DNA damage and cell death at Clemson University. *Julia* received her Ph.D. in 1999 from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and from there went on to a NIH postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, Berkeley. Following her postdoctoral research, she joined the facility at Clemson University.

Julia loved chemistry all the way back to high school, where the concept of electron orbitals was especially interesting. In fact, *Julia* wrote one of her college application essays on why orbitals were so fascinating. During her undergraduate career, she was originally a biochemistry major, but switched to chemistry her junior year because of all of the questions she was asking. However, her interest in biological aspects of chemistry did not go away; therefore, following her Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry, she pursed a postdoc in bioinorganic chemistry followed by molecular biology. It is the combination of all of these aspects of her training that led her to pursue her independent career in DNA damage research.

Throughout *Julia*'s career she has never officially had a mentor. However her graduate advisor, Professor Greg Girolami, was a great teacher and she learned how to be an effective teacher from watching him.

When asked what advice *Julia* would give to other people coming up in this career field she replied: "Make sure you love what you are doing because it will be hard at times, and sometimes you have to be your biggest cheerleader. Develop an unshakable resolve that you will succeed, and be persistent. The typical graduate school/postdoc/faculty track is not a one-size fits all solution, so make sure you explore your options at every stage to make informed career decisions that are tailored to your needs and interests rather than following the beaten path of those around you."

Additionally for women in chemistry, *Julia* had the following advice: "If this is what you want to do, then do it. I have had an exciting time full of ups and downs, but I would not trade my career as a chemistry professor for any other. In addition, don't feel that you have to put your personal life on hold to be successful. As with many things in life, there will likely never be an ideal time to focus on family instead of a career, but if you want both, you should pursue both. Yes, a family can be time-consuming, but what matters more is how you manage your time, not how many hours you work. A good balance can make one happier and more productive, not less." Congratulations!

Prof. Lauren Benz
By Amy Balija

Prof. Lauren Benz's spark for chemistry came from her high school teacher, Mrs. Kathleen Sullivan. *Lauren* remembers "that she [Mrs. Sullivan] would dress up like a witch for Halloween and do chemistry demonstrations that captured everyone's interest (bubbling cauldrons, color changing reactions)….in order to demonstrate key principles to the class and garner interest. It worked for me!" After high school, *Lauren* attended the University of Rhode Island where she credits her older brother for teaching her good study habits and the magic of the dry-erase board

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