

A Newsletter for IRREC Advisory Committee Members, Faculty, Staff and Students

From the Director



Photo by
 Velma Spencer

This December we celebrate the accomplishments of eight students who have earned degrees.

The graduates have earned one Doctor of Philosophy award, one Master of Science degree, and six Bachelor of Science degrees. The graduates completed degrees in topics such as Soil and Water Science, Environmental Management, Microbiology and Cell Science, Horticultural Science, and Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences.

This month we honor one international student from China, and three native Floridians.

One student is a former Alachua Town Councilman. Simon Sokolof-Kemp completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management; in the spring, he will begin a Master's degree in Soil and Water Science.

Graduate Tanya Gorneiwicz was recently hired by the St. Lucie School District to teach biology.

Graduate Ashley Witkowski graduated Summa Cum Laude and was a UF/IFAS College of Agricultural Sciences Honors Scholar. She works at the USDA Horticultural Research Service, adjacent to IRREC.



Recent IRREC graduate, Tanya Gorneiwicz, was recently hired by the St. Lucie School District to teach in her field

Two graduates, are members of the charter students who enrolled in the Microbiology and Cell Science Bachelor of Science degree program.

Because IRREC degrees fit the needs of busy students, coursework is completed online, and accompanying laboratory study plans are held here in IRREC. Volunteer and internship opportunities are exemplary.

Please read about our graduates. Their work will affect change for organizations, and for the environment. And, on behalf of the university, our faculty members and staff, we are very proud of each student, all who achieved high quality educational accomplishments at IRREC.

Pete Stoffella

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Doctorate Graduate



Dr. Jason Broach, when he was a graduate student at IRREC

Vero Beach resident Jason Broach has been named a Doctor of Philosophy in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences. He completed his doctoral work under the direction of IRREC Associate Professor Dr. Courtney Ohs.

Jason's doctorate research took place here at IRREC, at the Aquaculture Demonstration Facility, and involved the study of nutritional and environmental requirements of larval pinfish and pigfish. The fish are two types of baitfish that are important to the southeastern U.S. sport fishing industry.

Jason is employed with the University of Florida at the Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory, in Ruskin, Fla. His work focuses on small species of zooplankton to feed larval marine fishes.

He earned a Master of Science degree in Fisheries and Allied Aquaculture at Auburn University and a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology at Erskine College in South Carolina.

Jason is an avid and successful sportfisherman.

Master's Degree Graduate



Xiaojing Yu completed graduate research in the Postharvest Facility

Xiaojing Yu has completed a Master of Science degree in Horticultural Sciences. A native of Hefei, China, Xiaojing's graduate research was supervised by Dr. Mark Ritenour.

During her academic tenure at IRREC, she served as a research assistant. Her graduate thesis involved research to improve fresh market citrus fruit peel condition for consistent customer satisfaction.

According to her thesis, peel breakdown is a physiological disorder that may develop during postharvest handling.

If it occurs, large economic losses are experienced by the grower and shipper.

Xiaojing's studies were conducted during the 2011 & 12 Florida citrus seasons to further evaluate materials applied preharvest, in an effort to determine their efficacy and possible mechanism(s) in reducing peel breakdown. All of the citrus trees and fruit used in the project were from commercial citrus groves in Indian River and St. Lucie Counties.

Bachelor of Science Degree Recipient



Hayley Alber is one of IRREC's charter Microbiology and Cell Science students

Hayley Alber has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and Cell Science.

Her next two steps are well defined and ambitious. Step one is to become a Registered Nurse, which she will pursue at Indian River State College. Step two in her career plan is to pursue certification as a Nurse Practitioner.

Hayley's interest in the medical field began at an early age as a patient. She wanted to understand why doctors had to respond to so many possibilities for a single symptom.

Hayley has for nine years been employed at Indian River Estates Retirement as a

Certified Nursing Assistant, or a CNA. There she works along with the community's physicians and nurses, assisting them with patient care.

Serious and devoted to a lifelong medical career, Hayley meets regularly with practicing Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners to learn more about their work.

She graduated with Honors from Indian River State College with an Associate in Arts degree in General Studies.

During her IRREC tenure, she was recognized with the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Florida Rural Rehabilitation Corporation Off Campus Scholarship Award, and the Bud Adams Family Scholarship Award.

Bachelor of Science Degree Recipient



Jennifer Brown cultivates a palm tree orchard at her Stuart home

Jennifer Brown has completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management with a minor in Environmental Horticulture.

Following a long and successful banking career, Jennifer and her family moved to Stuart about 10 years ago. It was then that she realized a passion for Florida native landscaping and for the state's natural resources.

To enhance her personal gardening interests she started taking courses at Indian River State College in horticulture and earned two degrees: an Associate in Arts degree in Forestry and Wildlife Ecology; as second, an Associate in Science degree in Horticulture Technology.

Meanwhile, she took up palm tree cultivation and now cares for an orchard of more than 80 palm trees.

Jennifer's goal for her second career is to affect change in the local region's ecology restoration efforts.

She recently gained employment with the U.S. Department Agriculture at the Farm Service Agency here in Fort Pierce, as program technician. She previously held a full-time position as a nursery customer service specialist at Palm City Palms and Tropicals, LLC.

Jennifer's exemplary academic work with UF was recognized with a number of scholarships from local sources, as well as the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. She was the premier IRREC student to have been recognized three times with the Martin County Master Gardeners Scholarship Award. She also garnered the James H. Davis Memorial Scholarship from the National Foliage Foundation administered by the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association; and, a John F. Smoak Memorial Scholarship for students of agriculture.

During her studies at Indian River State College, she was recognized with two Martin County Orchid Society Scholarship Awards and a first scholarship award from the Martin County Master Gardeners.

Bachelor Degree Recipient



Tonya Gorneiwicz was hired as a full-time biology teacher soon after graduation

Tanya Gorniewicz, 20, has graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology and Cell Science.

Following her May, 2014 graduation, she was hired to teach biology at St. Lucie West Centennial High School in Port St. Lucie.

A resident of Port St. Lucie, Tanya experienced a unique opportunity as a student at IRREC when she was featured in a headline on the University of Florida's main website landing page, as a student of online education. As part of the university's effort to promote online education opportunities, she was also noted in UF then-President Bernie Machen's "Inventing Our Future" State of the University address.

During her UF academic tenure, she was honored with the highest level Bright Futures Florida Academic Scholarship, providing 100 percent of her college tuition.

Tanya completed an Associate in Arts degree at Indian River State College. She attended both Lincoln Park Academy and The Clark Advanced Learning Center in Martin County, where she earned her diploma. Throughout her high school tenure she volunteered at the Martin County Blake Library.

Tanya's mother, Maria Gorniewicz, earned a Master of Science in Agriculture and Communications at IRREC! A Poland national, Maria is employed as an accountant with Martin County Administration.

Bachelor Degree Recipient



Lance Johnson, far right, enjoyed Dr. Wilson's field trips

A fourth-generation native Floridian, Lance Johnson has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management, with a minor in Environmental Horticulture.

A native of Melbourne, Lance has a deep appreciation for the environment, and particularly for the location where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Indian River Lagoon. He is the quintessential Florida surfer; in his own words he says: "there is something special about riding on water that is moving."

During his tenure at IRREC, his favorite courses were soil and water science classes, as well as Dr. Wilson's Environmental

Horticulture courses. The field trips with the horticulture classes were fun and fully informative he said.

Lance has been successful working full-time in a construction career. With his new degree, he hopes to work for the St. John's Water Management District, or for a local governmental agency. He is seeking work in which he may contribute to the protection of the environment he has enjoyed all of his life.

Prior to his academic tenure at IRREC, he earned an Associate in Arts degree in Science from Eastern Florida State College.

Bachelor Degree Recipient



Rae McSween is a member of IRREC's charter Microbiology and Cell Science degree students

Rae McSween is a member of IRREC's charter Microbiology and Cell Science degree students.

Graduating fall semester, 2014, she had been employed full-time while she worked towards the degree.

A Medical Technologist at Saint Lucie Medical Center in Port St. Lucie, she is currently licensed as a clinical laboratory technologist in the state of Florida in the areas

of Microbiology, Hematology, Serology, Clinical Chemistry, Immunohematology, and Molecular Pathology.

Ambitious and always working towards advancement, Rae will be sitting for the ASCP (American Society for Clinical Pathology) board exams sometime next year. The new designation will provide her with the ability to gain national licensure in her field.

Bachelor Degree Recipient

Simon Sokolof-Kemp has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management with a minor in Environmental Horticulture.

An avid environmental steward, Simon plans to commence work on a Master of Science degree in Environmental Sciences, fall 2015. His graduate work will be supervised by Dr. Patrick "Chris" Wilson.

During Simon's tenure as an IRREC undergraduate student, his outstanding academic work was recognized with two Donald A. Graetz Education Awards. The prestigious scholarship is named for a UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Professor Emeritus Donald A. Graetz, who instructed courses in environmental protection.

At IRREC, Simon volunteered in Dr. Patrick Chris Wilson's environmental toxicology laboratory, working with water samples from run-off water.

During the IRREC Land Grant Celebration event held in 2012, he presented a soils display to members



Simon Sokolof-Kemp, when he presented during the Land Grant Celebration

of the attending public. He also served for a year as a volunteer for the St. Johns Water Management District in Brevard County.

A native of Micanopy, Florida, Simon once was the youngest serving Alachua Town Councilman member. He was also employed at Kanapaha Botanical Gardens in Gainesville, Florida.

Simon graduated from Eastern Florida State College with an Associate in Arts degree. He heard about IRREC while he was a member of the East Florida's Environmental Club at the school's Palm Bay campus.

Bachelor Degree Award Recipient



Ashley Witkowski achieved status as an UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Honors Scholar

Ashley Witkowski has earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Management with a minor in Environmental Horticulture, graduating Summa Cum Laude.

She is IRREC's premier student to have achieved status as an UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Honors Scholar.

A lifelong resident of Vero Beach, Ashley has devoted her career to sustain the region's renowned citrus industry.

While earning the bachelor's degree, she has for four years been employed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture U.S. Horticultural Research Laboratory, where she contributes to science as a biological science technician, under the direction of Dr. Ed Stover, a horticulturalist and geneticist for the federal laboratory's horticulture and breeding unit, a citrus scion breeding program.

Ashley's work at the USDA laboratory involves management of a greenhouse in which citrus greening resistance experiments are conducted. At this time the laboratory's goal is to promote citrus trees resistant or tolerant to Huanglongbing, or citrus greening disease.

Ashley has continued with her education and is at this time pursuing a Master of Science degree here at IRREC.

During her undergraduate work, Witkowski was presented with a Simpson Family Foundation Graduate Student Scholarship Award, the Garden Club of Indian River County Scholarship and a Treasure Coast Gator Club Scholarship in honor of Ray and Beth Smith.

In 2010, she earned an Associate in Arts degree in Biology at Indian River State College, while dually enrolled as a high school student at Indian River Charter High School in Vero Beach.

Her career goal is to continue her employment with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and gain advancement within the federal laboratory.

IRREC Teaching Program Highlights



Since the UF Indian River Research and Education Center's Teaching Program inception in 1999, 10 students have earned PhD's; 44 Master of Science degrees have been awarded; 57 students have earned Bachelor of Science degrees; and, 7 certificates have been issued.

Some interesting trends in IRREC education are that the number of graduate students is now out-pacing the number of undergraduate students, as an increasing number of online degree opportunities have changed the undergraduate college landscape.

In 2008, we graduated our first two PhD's, Dr. Veronica Manrique, and Dr. Rodrigo Diaz, who both secured post-doctoral positions here at IRREC, working in the Norman C. Hayslip Biological Control and Research Laboratory.

Today, Dr. Diaz is now an Assistant Faculty member at Louisiana State University.

Following their graduations, eight more IRREC students have completed Doctorates. Four are currently employed with the University of Florida; two work at UF/IFAS's aquaculture research center in Ruskin, Florida. Three of IRREC's doctoral graduates have returned to their native countries abroad.

Dr. Ramona Smith-Burrell is a professor at Eastern Florida State College.

Of those who have earned Master's degrees at IRREC, more than half of the degrees have been awarded within the last five years. Three are employed with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers; seven are employed with UF/IFAS; many are private entrepreneurs.

Several graduates completed their degrees while performing full-time laboratory careers, earning their degrees by conducting research in laboratories at their place of employment. Dr. He's prominence as a world-class scientist attracts mid-career professionals from points around the globe, who are seeking to earn higher degrees.

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Most of the students who approach Dr. He about a graduate degree find him by conducting online searches.

Five students who earned Master's degrees, had also earned Bachelor's degrees at IRREC.

Adrienne Smith earned a Master's degree in Environmental Horticulture, and is now pursuing a doctorate in Gainesville; Colombia native and Fulbright Scholar Angie Nino, completed a Master's in Entomology with Dr. Cave, and is now pursuing a Doctorate, under Dr. Cave's leadership. Our local county extension service Director, Anita Neal, earned a Master's degree in Agricultural Education and Communications, and is now pursuing a PhD, under Dr. Cave's leadership.

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Our local county extension service Director, Anita Neal, earned a Master's degree in Agricultural Education and Communications, and is now pursuing a PhD, under Dr. Cave's leadership.

Dr. He, Dr. Ritenour, and Dr. Sandra Wilson have all mentored graduate students who have earned or are currently pursuing both master's and doctoral degrees.

Sambhav Singh, whose graduate studies were mentored by Dr. Ritenour, is employed with Driscoll's, one of Florida's most prominent fruit and vegetable producers; Dr. Wilson's graduates, Kari Ruder and Ruben Koch, were successful agricultural entrepreneurs prior to their studies at IRREC. They both feel their master's degrees have increased their success.

Rene Cerezo, an urban entomologist, holds a prominent pest control management position with the city of Miami. His new master's degree helped him achieve a pay increase.

Graduates who have earned degrees at IRREC continue to make contributions to the industries for which they work. The center will continue to serve graduate education through the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

The Indian River Research and Education Center News is published quarterly. To submit material or story ideas please contact editor Robin Koestoyo at koestoyo@ufl.edu, or (772) 468-3922, Ext. 103

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