



Three Department Chairs Leave Maryland to Become Deans Elsewhere

Over the past 20 months, three department chairs have been named the dean of another medical school. For the University of Maryland School of Medicine, this brings both a sense of great achievement and a sense of loss.

These individuals worked diligently to make their departments the best they could be. They leave behind large shoes to fill, but will undoubtedly put the same energies and enthusiasm into their new roles.

Here's the run-down:



Jay Perman, MD, former professor and chair, Department of Pediatrics, left in April 2004 to assume the position of vice president of clinical affairs and dean at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine.



William L. Henrich, MD, MACP, professor and chair, Department of Medicine, accepted the position of vice president for medical affairs and dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at San Antonio, effective March 6, 2006.



Eve J. Higginbotham, MD, professor and chair, Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences, will assume the position of senior vice president and dean at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, Georgia, effective April 24, 2006.

New Online Calendar System



A new online calendar has been launched to highlight School of Medicine events. The new calendar allows users to search for events by keyword, view events for a specific department, division or program, or view all events throughout the school for a specific day, week or month.

The new calendar software will be phased in as part of the school's Website improvement initiative. Current Web calendars will be moved into the new system as soon as possible, and the software will be made available when department Websites are reviewed and updated.

As always, events of general interest may be submitted to the Office of Public Affairs for inclusion in the school-wide calendar, which is accessible from the School of Medicine homepage: <http://medschool.umaryland.edu>.

To submit a school-wide event, contact public relations manager Heather Graham at 6.1521 or hgraham@som.umaryland.edu.

To add the new calendar to your Website, contact Larry Roberts, director of Web communications, at 6.4939 or lroberts@som.umaryland.edu.

Governor Proposes Center for Regenerative Science

Speaking before a crowd of researchers, educators, and business and political leaders, Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. announced on January 11 funding plans to make Maryland the nation's leading state for bioscience and biotechnology. Among the plans was a proposal to build a \$12 million Center for Regenerative Science at the UMB BioPark, and to support that center with a \$1.5 million start-up budget.

The announcement was made in the first of the UMB BioPark buildings before an audience that included representatives from the Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO), the Maryland Industrial Partnerships program, the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, and the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

The governor's proposal, which totals more than \$150 million, calls for creation of the Center for Regenerative Research at the UMB BioPark and other allocations, such as \$20 million in operating funds for the Stem Cell Research Fund to be administered by TEDCO, \$6 million for a biotechnology tax for individuals and corporations investing in small Maryland-based biotechnology companies, \$50 million for a new Teacher Education and Technology Complex at Salisbury University, \$19 million for eight science projects at community colleges, \$5 million for the East Baltimore Biotechnology Park, \$3.5 million for the University of Maryland R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center, and \$5 million for the Johns Hopkins Hospital Critical Care Tower.



First Lady Kendall Ehrlich, Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, State Senator Sandra Schrader, School of Nursing Dean Janet Allan, Dean Donald Wilson, USM Chancellor William "Brit" Kirwan, State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Secretary S. Anthony McCann, and UMB President David Ramsay.

Search Committee for New SOM Dean

In September 2005 Dean Wilson announced his plan to retire in September of this year. The quest for a new dean for the School of Medicine is now under way and the search committee has been formed.

President Ramsay hopes to announce a new dean by late spring.

The search committee consists of the following:

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| Dr. Christian Stohler, Chair (Dean, Dental School) | Dr. Hugh Mighty (SOM, OB/GYN) |
| Dr. Timothy Babineau (UMMC, Senior VP & Chief Medical Officer) | Dr. Patricia Morton (School of Nursing) |
| Dr. Stephen Bartlett (SOM, Surgery) | Mr. Jeffrey Rivest (UMMC, President & CEO) |
| Mr. Michael Cryor (SOM Board of Visitors) | Dr. Yvette Rooks (SOM, Family Medicine) |
| Dr. Natalie Eddington (School of Pharmacy) | Dr. Michael Shipley (SOM, Anatomy & Neurobiology) |
| Mr. John Erickson (UMMS Board of Directors) | Dr. Alan Shuldiner (SOM, Medicine) |
| Mr. Gregory Handlir (SOM, Resource Management) | Dr. Marc Simard (SOM, Neurosurgery) |
| Dr. Charles Hobelmann (UM Medical Alumni) | Dr. Carol Tacket (SOM, Medicine) |
| Professor Diane Hoffman (School of Law) | Dr. Susan Wolfsthal (SOM, Medicine) |
| Dr. Robert Koos (SOM, Physiology) | |
| Ms. Amanda Kramer (3rd Year Medical Student) | |

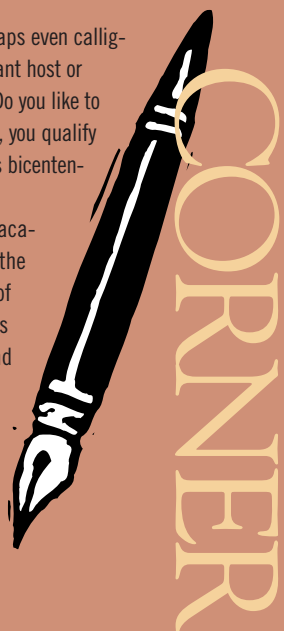
Bicentennial

Do you have good penmanship, or perhaps even calligraphy skills? Did you work as a restaurant host or hostess to help pay college expenses? Do you like to meet new people and help others? If so, you qualify for an important job during the school's bicentennial in 2007.

Throughout next year, we will host academic programs and celebrations for the campus and the public. The success of these events will depend on volunteers to address envelopes, greet guests and provide numerous other talents.


Ours is the nation's oldest public medical school and the fifth oldest overall. We have a lot to celebrate, and you are invited to be an important part of our celebration. To volunteer, call the bicentennial hotline at 6.2007, or contact Jo Martin at jmartin@som.umaryland.edu.

Be sure to look in the March issue of SOMnews for details on bicentennial activities!





QUICK STUDIES

► **Angela H. Brodie, PhD**, professor, Department of Pharmacology & Experimental Therapeutics, has been awarded the 2006 Dorothy P. Landon-American Association for Cancer Research Prize for Translational Cancer Research. This international prize was established in 2002 to create awareness of landmark scientific achievement in the prevention and cure of cancer, to recognize and reward scientists for their superb achievements and to motivate others to develop novel ideas. The scientists who are chosen for this prize must have made a discovery that has accelerated progress against cancer and has implications for future discoveries and contributions to cancer research. In addition to receiving a prize of \$200,000, Dr. Brodie will present a major scientific lecture on her pioneering work on aromatase inhibitors in April during the 97th Annual American Association for Cancer Research Meeting. ► **Donald L. Gill, PhD**, professor, and **Maria A. Spassova-Nikolo, PhD**, assistant professor, both of the Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, were co-authors on a paper entitled “Role of Endogenous TRPC6 Channels in Ca²⁺ Signal Generation in A7r5 Smooth Muscle Cells” in the December 2 issue of the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. ► **David Hartley, PhD**, assistant professor, Department of Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine, was the lead author on a paper entitled “Hyperinfectivity: A Critical Element in the Ability of *V. cholerae* to Cause Epidemics?” in a recent issue of *PLoS Medicine*. Co-authors were **David Smith, PhD**, adjunct assistant professor, and **Glenn Morris, MD, MPH**, professor and chair, Department of Epidemiology & Preventive Medicine. Dr. Morris also was awarded the James D. Bruce Memorial Award for Distinguished Contributions in Preventive Medicine from the American College of Physicians. 



Bradley E. Alger, PhD

Physiology Professor Studies the Brain's Own Marijuana

In 1990, Bradley E. Alger, PhD, was an associate professor in the Department of Physiology when he and his colleagues made a major discovery in their laboratory on the 5th floor of the Bressler Building. They found a new mode of cellular communication in the brain that affects synaptic transmission—the primary ways in which neurons talk to each other. The new communication regulates synaptic inhibition

caused by the amino acid GABA, which is a neurotransmitter that is recognized as especially important for processes ranging from epileptic seizures to learning and memory.


“Many laboratories began studying this new kind of signaling system to find out how it worked, and much effort was expended before the amazing discovery was made that the signal was a molecule that has been called ‘the brain’s own marijuana,’” says Dr. Alger, now a professor of physiology.

Everywhere in the mammalian central nervous system are specialized receptors that recognize and bind THC, the active ingredient in the cannabis plant that produces marijuana. The natural compound that is active at these receptors is not THC, but an “endocannabinoid,” an endogenous cannabinoid that is now recognized as capable of carrying signals between brain cells.

“It turns out that there are several endogenous cannabinoid systems throughout the brain, and our work focuses on understanding how these systems normally operate and why,” says Dr. Alger. “Endocannabinoids are known to be anticonvulsants and pain relievers. They also reduce anxiety, nausea and neuronal death following certain brain injuries, to name a few of their functions.”

Dr. Alger’s work has implications not only for the study of memory and learning but also for the development of medications that trigger the natural cannabinoid system to stimulate appetite and alleviate the unpleasant side effects of chemotherapy, two of the presently approved therapeutic uses of cannabinoid derivatives.

Dr. Alger studies neurons in *in vitro* brain slices to understand how the endogenous cannabinoid system can be stimulated without the use of marijuana. “We are finding ways to do this by targeting other neurons in the brain,” says Dr. Alger. “We may be able to learn how to trick the body into using its own endogenous system more effectively.”

Work in Dr. Alger’s laboratory is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. His recent findings have been published in such prestigious journals as *Nature Neuroscience*, *The Journal of Neuroscience* and *Progress in Neurobiology*. 

“It turns out that there are several endogenous cannabinoid systems throughout the brain, and our work focuses on understanding how these systems normally operate and why.”

New Findings Validate Adage:


You Can't Teach an Old Dog New Tricks

It's true: You can't teach an old dog new tricks. As people age, they become set in their ways and less able to adapt behavior to new circumstances. This fact is evident in controlled studies of cognitive flexibility in elderly patients. Research has shown that this ability to adapt behavior is critically dependent on the pre-frontal cortex in the brain. Now, new research from Geoffrey Schoenbaum, MD, PhD, assistant professor of anatomy & neurobiology, links this age-old saying to impaired processing in the orbitofrontal part of the pre-frontal cortex. Dr. Schoenbaum's research findings will be published in the March 2006 issue of the *Journal of Neurophysiology*.

The research, supported by a K08 Mentored Scientist Award from the National Institute on Aging, required young and elderly rats to learn that specific odors piped into an enclosed chamber predicted either a “reward” of water laced with sucrose or a “punishment” of water laced with bitter tasting quinine. “After the rats solve the initial problems, we reverse the meaning of the two odor cues and ask the rats to shift their behavior based on this new information,” says Dr. Schoenbaum. “So the odor that was predictive of reward becomes predictive of quinine and vice versa. Young rats learn these reversals rather quickly, but a subset of older animals is particularly impaired at acquiring them.”

According to Dr. Schoenbaum, elderly rats that could not adjust their behavior after reversal of the odor problem had abnormal neural firing patterns in the orbitofrontal cortex, which is a part of the pre-frontal cortex that is particularly important for flexible decision-making. “The neurons in the orbitofrontal cortex in aged-impaired rats were inflexible in the way they encoded the associations between the odors and the outcomes, essentially firing in a way that reflected the old association after reversal,” he says. “These data provide a piece of the puzzle as to why some elderly rats, and perhaps people, have trouble changing their behavior or learning new ‘tricks.’”

“Such animal models, which have validity for what we see in humans,” says Dr. Schoenbaum, “can be used to identify specific circuits and molecules that might be potential therapeutic targets.”

Related research is ongoing in Dr. Schoenbaum's lab to investigate what other brain processes might be impacted in “reversal-impaired” elderly rats and to examine why some rats exhibit normal or even enhanced processing in the orbitofrontal cortex as they age. 




Geoffrey Schoenbaum, MD, PhD, in his lab.

\$3.5 Million Grant Establishes Clinical Nutrition Research Center



Clinical

QUICK STUDIES

► **Robert A. Barish, MD**, vice dean for clinical affairs, and professor, Department of Surgery, received the Maryland Meritorious Service Medal from Governor Robert Ehrlich in recognition of his meritorious service and volunteer efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This is the second highest military award in the state. Additionally, Dr. Barish, along with University of Maryland faculty physicians and other members of the MD Defense Force-Baltimore County Emergency Medical Volunteers Medical Reserve Corps, was recognized by the United States Office of the Surgeon General Medical Reserve Corps Program for participation in the hurricane response and recovery efforts in Louisiana. ► **Donna L. Farber, PhD**, associate professor, Department of Surgery, was appointed to the Cellular and Molecular Immunobiology-B Study Section for the National Institutes of Health. ► **Gary M. Fiskum, PhD**, professor, Department of Anesthesiology, and **Robert E. Rosenthal, MD**, professor, Department of Surgery, conducted a study that generated the first research to establish a close relationship between protection against brain energy metabolism and cell death when using normal oxygen levels during resuscitation after cardiac arrest in animals. The current standard clinical practice uses 100 percent oxygen. Their findings were reported in the November issue of the *Journal of Cerebral Blood Flow and Metabolism*. These new findings strongly support their previous work demonstrating an improvement in neurological outcome when using normal levels of oxygen compared to 100 percent oxygen. ► **John A. Kastor, MD**, professor, Department of Medicine, has published a book entitled *Specialty Care in the Era of Managed Care: Cleveland Clinic versus University Hospitals of Cleveland* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). ► **Steven J. Kittner, MD**, professor, Department of Neurology, published "Pregnancy and Stroke" in the July 2005 edition of *CNS Spectrums*, Vol. 10, No. 7. ► **Alan E. Tomkinson, PhD**, professor, Department of Radiation Oncology, and the University of Maryland Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Cancer Center have been awarded a three-year American Cancer Society Institutional Research Grant (ACSIRG) to support promising new research by junior faculty. The ACSIRG provides seed money to new investigators without a national competitive research grant so they can obtain preliminary results that will enable them to compete successfully for national research grants. ► **William J. Weiner, MD**, professor and chair, Department of Neurology, published "Differential Diagnosis of Parkinsonism" in *Neurological Diseases*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Summer 2005 and "Parkinson's Disease—Diagnosis and the Initiation of Therapy" in *Mimerva Medical 2005*, Vol. 96, No. 3. ► **Donald E. Wilson, MD, MACP**, vice president for Medical Affairs, University of Maryland, and dean, School of Medicine, has been named vice president of the Board of Directors of Alpha Omega Alpha. 



Susan K. Fried, PhD

The University of Maryland School of Medicine has received a five-year, \$3.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create a clinical nutrition research center that will focus on how diet and exercise influence people's risk of developing chronic diseases, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and osteoporosis.

"With obesity reaching epidemic proportions, these types of chronic conditions now detract from the quality of life and life expectancy of a majority of Americans and represent a major burden on our health care system," says Susan K. Fried, PhD, professor of medicine, who will serve as the center's director. "This center will expand the scope of our nutrition-related research and develop effective therapies and interventions."

The center will bring together 44 NIH-funded basic scientists and clinical investigators from the University of Maryland, Johns Hopkins University and its Bloomberg School of Public Health, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Beltsville. It will be the first Clinical Nutrition Research Unit core center in the region and one of eight centers funded by the NIH's National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases. The National Cancer Institute funds two additional nutrition research centers.

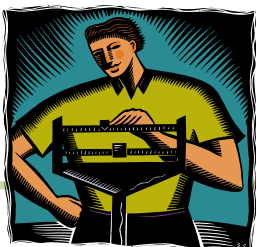
"The state of Maryland has a lot of complementary strength in nutrition-related research but it is spread among a number of institutions. This new center will provide a focus for nutrition and obesity-related research and promote interactions between laboratories. It will provide infrastructure, facilities, equipment and skilled technical expertise to help researchers apply innovative methods to address important questions in the field of nutrition," says Dr. Fried, who specializes in the study of fat (adipose) tissue.

The multidisciplinary research team at the University of Maryland has considerable expertise in nutrition, genetics, cellular and molecular biology and clinical research as well

as experience in testing diet and exercise interventions to treat obesity and related disorders, including high blood pressure, hyperlipidemia and glucose intolerance.

Scientists affiliated with the new center will try to identify genes that influence nutrient metabolism. For example, some people's triglyceride levels skyrocket when they eat a diet rich in fat while others eat the same food and their triglycerides remain the same. Researchers also will investigate the molecular mechanisms that contribute to the risk of developing chronic disease and explore genetic and nutritional factors that contribute to health disparities, such as the high prevalence of obesity and diabetes in minority populations.


A major focus will be to study the mechanisms by which diet and exercise influence obesity, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis.



In addition, scientists will look at how weight loss through diet and exercise improves risk factors for type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and test the effectiveness of these types of lifestyle changes in preventing and treating obesity and related conditions.

"A major focus of our research will be to study the mechanisms by which diet and exercise influence obesity, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis," says Dr. Fried, who is also a researcher in the Department of Medicine's Division of

Endocrinology, Diabetes and Nutrition.

The new center will also promote nutrition education with lectures and seminars for researchers, clinicians and medical students and will have three core laboratories. Dr. Fried will be the director of the adipose biology laboratory. Alan R. Shuldiner, MD, professor of medicine and director of the Program in Genetics & Genomic Medicine, will oversee the genetics laboratory. He will also serve as co-director of the nutrition research core center. Andrew P. Goldberg, MD, professor of medicine and head of the Division of Gerontology, will be in charge of the clinical research laboratory. 

fMRI Technology Aids Study of Children with ADHD



Julie Schweitzer, PhD, with the fMRI machine she uses in her research.

The advent of functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) technology has changed the scope of Julie Schweitzer's research. Before joining the School of Medicine in 1999, Dr. Schweitzer, a PhD, had to conduct her brain imaging research in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Earlier in her career she had worked with children who suffered from the disorder and she longed to do so again. She believed that studying the individual with ADHD at an earlier time in development could have a greater impact on understanding how to better diagnose and treat patients at an earlier stage of the illness.

As an assistant professor of psychiatry in the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Dr. Schweitzer is looking at how the brain functions when children with ADHD perform working memory

tasks. The introduction of fMRI has allowed her to examine brain activity during specific behaviors—a technique that identifies what regions of the brain are involved in the disorder that affects between five to seven percent of children in the US.

"One of the goals of our research is to better understand the connection between what we see in the brain imaging laboratory and its relationship to the child's behavior in the natural environment," says Dr. Schweitzer. "Ultimately, clues from these types of studies should enable us to better understand how children with different behavioral characteristics use their brain to solve complex tasks. The long term goal is to use these data to suggest ways of more precisely diagnosing children with ADHD and potentially help us discover pharmacological, behavioral and educational interventions targeted to children with ADHD, depending on activity in certain parts of the brain."


fMRI is a brain imaging technique that uses strong magnetic fields to generate images reflecting the relationship between neural activity in response to specific behaviors and stimulation. "It's a powerful tool used to examine the dynamic, living brain," says Dr. Schweitzer.

In previous studies, Dr. Schweitzer and her research team identified functional differences in three key regions of the brain in children with ADHD—the frontal cortex which controls attention and organization, the basal ganglia associated with motor functioning, learning and response to reward, and the cerebellum which plays a role in posture, motor functioning and cognition.

"My hypothesis is that children with ADHD aren't able to use the frontal cortex of the brain like other peo-

ple do," Dr. Schweitzer says. "The frontal cortex is associated with management, attentiveness and allocation of resources from other parts of the brain. If that area isn't working properly, other areas of the brain have to compensate but aren't able to do the job as efficiently."

In addition, Dr. Schweitzer and her research team are currently analyzing data from an fMRI study examining the differences in how boys and girls complete simple mathematical problems. She's also spearheading a study to identify subtypes of ADHD.

"What we ultimately want to do is link what we see behaviorally in children with what we see anatomically so we can develop better behavioral testing to understand the relationship between the symptoms of the disorder with the underlying neural dysfunction," she says. "The information we are gathering from the fMRI could help clinicians understand the neural significance of their patients and how that might relate to their behavior. This could lead to tailored diagnostic and treatment procedures." 

THE IMPORTANCE OF DONATING BLOOD



Audrey Segal

For third year medical student Audrey Segal, it's all about donating blood. Diagnosed in October 2004 with aplastic anemia (AA), Audrey has had to face myriad unexpected events surrounding her diagnosis, such as feeling sick and fatigued, too many doctor's appointments to count, endless trips for blood and platelet transfusions, and changes in her appearance—and all while keeping up with her classes in medical school. But Audrey does not dwell on her condition and how it has changed her life—instead she is focused on raising public awareness on the importance of donating blood.

Aplastic anemia is not a single disease, but a group of closely related disorders characterized by the failure of the bone marrow to produce all three types of blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. Aplastic anemia is rare, affecting fewer than 1,000 people each year in the United States, and its exact cause is unknown, although it has been linked to exposure to chemicals and radiation. Some cases of aplastic anemia also are believed to be genetic or due to a viral infection.

The choice of treatment depends upon the severity of the disease. Patients with severe aplastic anemia (very low blood cell counts) require immediate treatment to stabilize their disease until a blood cell or marrow transplant can be performed. Patients with mild or moderate symptoms often receive frequent red blood transfusions, platelet transfusions and/or drug therapy; hence Audrey's many trips for transfusions.

Some patients, especially those with severe aplastic anemia, look for a matched donor who can provide the blood-forming cells for a transplant. Blood-forming cells are immature cells that can develop into the three types of blood cells. These cells can be obtained from marrow, umbilical cord blood or from a donor's circulating blood.

A marrow or blood cell transplant cannot take place unless a matched donor can be located. About one third of patients can find a compatible family member, typically a sibling. Unfortunately for Audrey, she had no sibling match. Patients without a matching related donor can search for a donor among the more than five million volunteers registered with the National Marrow Donor Program.

Throughout it all, Audrey has remained upbeat, utterly positive and doggedly determined to get through the hardships, encourage blood donations, graduate medical school and come out a productive, fulfilled member of society.


One of the more positive experiences to come out of her diagnosis has been communicating with a thirteen-year old actress from California and her mother, Carina, who was diagnosed with aplastic anemia 25 years ago in Sweden. The actress is Emma Degerstedt, the star of Nickelodeon's *Unfabulous*. Tasked with a school project, Emma decided to research aplastic anemia and how it has affected her mother. She sent a letter to the School of Medicine's Office of Student Affairs. Michael Plaut, PhD, assistant dean for student affairs and associate professor of psychiatry, received her letter and passed it onto Audrey, asking if she had the time respond to Emma. Audrey did have time, Emma obtained the information for her project, Carina wrote back to Audrey, and a bond was formed.

To Audrey, Carina is an inspiration and a symbol of survival. "She's a real survivor. She is my survivor story. Back when Carina was diagnosed, she was only the third person in Sweden to receive treatment with antithymocyte globulin and cyclosporine for her aplastic anemia—the same treatment I received for mine," says Audrey.

She continues, "Both of us had no sibling matches for a bone marrow transplant, and as a result had to undergo treatment with immunosuppressants. She shared many details of her struggles, but was lucky enough to get into full remission, which is very encouraging to me as I am not yet in remission. AA is so rare. I have met only two other people suffering from AA and patient response to therapy is so varied, it's comforting to hear Carina's success. After talking to her, I feel positive about my future. Carina is a great example of surviving AA, leading a healthy life and accomplishing one's goals."

The exchanges Audrey has shared with Carina have impacted her life and further fueled her desire to be a physician. As a patient, she established a support network with Carina; as a future doctor, she experienced the educational component through her conversations with Emma. And she had the opportunity to impress upon Emma the importance of donating blood, which she drives home again and again to whomever she's speaking.

She says, "My wish for those reading this article is for them to understand how important donating blood is for people who are sick, people who have been in accidents, people who are dying. Don't donate out of pity, donate out of the sheer willingness to help."

Audrey is on target to graduate on time with the rest of her classmates in May 2007, and she plans to do just that. 

For more information on how to donate blood, please contact the Red Cross at <http://www.redcross.org/donate/give/> or call 1.800.GIVE.LIFE.



Student Seminar

Understanding Your Credit

Wednesday, February 8
12:15 p.m.—1:15 p.m.

Student Center on Pine Street

FREE brown bag lunches
will be provided at noon!

Please register by noon on February 3
if you would like a lunch.

RSVP to Student Services at 6-7117.

This is a free "Lunch and Learn"
presentation of Financial Aid,
the University Athletic Center,
the Office of Student Services, and
SECU Credit Union.

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