



Science alumna receives prestigious graduate research award

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EAU CLAIRE — A 2005 University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire biochemistry/molecular biology graduate is one of 13 graduate students from universities across North America to receive the prestigious 2012 Harold M. Weintraub Graduate Student Award sponsored by the Basic Sciences Division of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

As a recipient of the award, Beverly Piggott — now a doctoral candidate in molecular and integrative physiology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor — will give a research presentation during a scientific symposium May 4 at the Hutchinson Center in Seattle. At the University of Michigan, Piggott has spent six years studying the neural circuits that allow the nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* to move. Most recently, she was the lead author on an article, "[The neural circuits and synaptic mechanisms underlying motor initiation in \*C. elegans\*](#)," published in November in the scientific journal *Cell*.

The Harold M. Weintraub Graduate Student Award recognizes outstanding achievement during graduate studies in the biological sciences. According to the Hutchinson Center, nominations for the award were solicited internationally; winners were selected on the basis of the quality, originality and significance of their work.

Piggott, a native of Footville and graduate of Parkview High School in Orfordville, credited her experience doing research as a UW-Eau Claire undergraduate with helping her determine her career goals. Beginning her junior year at UW-Eau Claire, Piggott worked with then chemistry faculty member Dr. Marcia Miller researching enzyme kinetics.

"Prior to this research experience, I had always imagined myself pursuing a medical degree," Piggott said. "Working in the lab with Marcia, I began to consider a career in research. I enjoyed designing and trouble-shooting experiments, as well as the excitement of waiting for a result."

Having undergraduate research experience also made a difference when applying to graduate schools, Piggott said.

"Without that experience, it is unlikely I would have gotten into graduate schools like the University of Michigan," she said.

Her UW-Eau Claire education provided a strong foundation for her chosen career path, said Piggott, who next fall will begin a postdoctoral position at the University of California, San Francisco, where she will continue her neuroscience research. After that she plans to search for academic positions and to start her own laboratory.

"The education I acquired from my biochemistry/molecular biology major set the stage for my pursuit of a Ph.D. in molecular and integrative physiology," she said. "I was essentially taking biochemistry and molecular biology to the next level, to understand the cellular basis for physiological functions."

Piggott noted a few of her UW-Eau Claire professors who "stand out" as most influential: Miller; Dr. Rodolfo Buiser, assistant professor of biology; Dr. Scott Hartsel, professor of chemistry; and Dr. Julie Anderson, associate professor of biology.

"It is always so thrilling to hear that a former student went on to accomplish great things and it is personally gratifying to know that her experience in my course made a lasting impression," Anderson said. "Receipt of this award not only underscores Beverly's hard work and dedication in graduate school, but also highlights the strong undergraduate programs in science here at UW-Eau Claire that helped prepare her for a successful future."

The Harold M. Weintraub Graduate Student Award honors the late Harold M. Weintraub, a founding member of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center's Basic Sciences Division. Weintraub, who died from brain cancer in 1995 at age 49, was an international leader in the field of molecular biology; among his many contributions, he identified genes responsible for instructing cells to differentiate, or develop, into specific tissues such as muscle and bone.

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