

THE 2013 CTHB MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

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The DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) mentorship program, hosted by FABI, is growing to new heights each year since its inception. This program seeks to mentor and nurture blooming undergraduates into the often challenging but exciting world of postgraduate research and beyond. Every year the program is faced with a cohort of mentees with unique personalities, and this adds more value to the program.



Mentors and mentees of 2012 with Prof Mike Winfield, Prof Emma Steenkamp and Jenny Hale.

Postgraduate students (potential mentors) in FABI are from different Departments in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. This allows for undergraduate students from diverse fields within the Faculty going into their 2nd and 3rd years of study, to apply and join the CTHB mentorship program. This year the selection team (Markus Wilken, Darryl Herron and Mmatshapho Phasha) dealt with over 60 applications from potential students. The main criterion used for considering students in the program was their academic merit. About 25 students were interviewed based on their academic records and interest in laboratory work

and research. The students' fields of study included Biotechnology, Genetics, Microbiology and Entomology. Based on interest and the availability of suitable mentors, 22 students were successfully paired with mentors. In cases where a mentee had very broad interests, 2 mentors were assigned.

The successful candidates were formally introduced to their mentors and FABI at a briefing session where they were informed as to what was required of them throughout the year. Prof Brenda Wingfield spoke about the importance and function of mentorship. The briefing session ended with a pizza lunch where mentees and their mentors got to know each other.

At the end of the first semester reports were produced by both mentors and mentees and these were then reviewed. Some of the reports highlighted mentor-mentee relationship differences and these were dealt with successfully. In the second semester three mentees could not continue in the programme due to academic and other pressures. The remainder of the mentees progressed very well academically, and gained experience in various techniques employed to answer scientific questions.



2012 Mentorship Lunch: Mentors and mentees.

FABI often hosts social functions to which mentees are invited. In July 2013, the Institute held its annual Scientific Presentations of Outrageous Science (SPOOF) social meeting to which mentees are invited and where they meet and mingle with all FABIans. On the 7th of November 2013, the mentorship program will host a ceremonial lunch at which mentees will be presented with certificates reflecting that they have successfully completed the CTHB mentorship program.

The membership of the mentorship selection committee changes slightly each year. The new committee, under the leadership of Mmatshapho Phasha, look forward to interviewing, selecting and welcoming the new cohort of mentees to FABI in 2014.