

CTHB MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME, 2011

Prepared by Kershney Naidoo



CTHB Mentorship group of 2011. Back Row (left to right): Markus Wilken, Angelique du Preez, Brigitte Van Dyk, Shaun van der Walt, Ethan Besaans. Third row: Tanweer Mahomed, Danielle Roodt, Estine Theron, Wilke Strasheim, Annika Theron, Prof Emma Steenkamp, Darryl Herron. Second row: Kershney Naidoo, Andy Wilson, Mariette Ferreira, Thato Mohajane, Mia Kruger. Front row: Prof Mike Wingfield, Omphile Sehoole, Colan Balkwill, Mohamed Seedat. (Missing from photo: Robynne Clark, Thoko Mhlambi, Samila Ramchariter and Michael Reiche.)

The Centre for Tree Health and Biotechnology (CTHB) has over the last six years maintained a highly successful mentorship programme aimed at attracting bright young minds. This year, 2011, was no different. Applications from undergraduate students across the Faculty of Science and Agriculture were received in vast numbers. Screening against both academic credentials as well as a panelled interview, led by Kershney Naidoo, Markus Wilken and Darryl Herron, formed the selection criterion. The CTHB Mentorship Programme offers a unique opportunity for the development of young passionate minds into the Science sphere. Mentorship teaches both parties the value of and the ability to communicate at a scientific level.

The overarching aim of the Mentorship programme has been to broaden the horizon in terms of encouraging postgraduate studies by giving undergraduate students a preview to scientific research. This not only allows these students to make more informed choices in terms of career paths but also enables communication amongst undergraduates as to the importance of postgraduate studies.

A total of twenty successful undergraduate applicants (eight second year and eleven third year students) were chosen from the pool of individuals. This was the highest intake of mentees since the

inception of the Mentorship programme in 2005. Mentors, filled with enthusiasm to engage these young minds, were carefully chosen and paired with the mentees on the basis of preference and similarity to the focus field of the applicant. This year also saw the inclusion of a staff member from the department of Genetics, Dr Jason Pienaar, who was willing to take part in the mentorship programme as a mentor.

A meet and greet session for the mentors and mentees held in early March 2011 served to “break the ice” for both parties alike. Mentees are paired with mentors from the Departments of Genetics, Microbiology and Plant Pathology. This offers them diversity in their exposure to the focus of CTHB principles and practices as well as a feel for postgraduate research interlinked to the specific departments. Mentors were encouraged to train, develop and enthuse their mentees’ minds to instil a sense of passion for the development of Science and Technology as a whole on the tertiary platform.



Mentorship student lunch. Left (from left to right): Dr Pieter Clase, Mr Wallace Isaacs, Prof Mike Wingfield and Mr Edwin Smith (all who have supported MRYE as an important student body at the University of Pretoria). Right: MRYE group and other mentorship students at lunch

Mentees are encouraged to become an integrated part of the broader FABI group by participating in the social events. Many mentees attended the fun filled evening of Scientific Presentations of Outrageous Findings, SPOOF, and got to see the lighter side of science. They are welcome to attend the monthly FABI teas and social networking after seminars. These activities allow the students to network amongst professors and peers alike, all drawing common ground in their passion for science.

Mentees have also been involved with other outreach programmes linked to the CTHB. One such is the UP with Science initiative, which communicates science in a fun way to high school learners. This initiative is run by the University and integrates disciplines across faculties. Mentees are exposed to ways of making science education accessible to the ordinary man.

The cycle of mentorship has come full circle in that some mentees have become mentors in the programme, enforcing the value of such a dedicated training exercise. We can proudly say that two mentees, Mr Duncan Patterson and Mr Simon Martin, have both gone on to Cambridge and Oxford Universities, respectively, to do their Doctorate degrees. Another of our 2005 mentorship students, Dalemarie Swanepoel (nee Crowther) completed her PhD at London University and is now doing post doctoral research at Oxford University.



At the presentation of the mentorship programme certificates: Photo left (from left to right): Omphile Sehoole, Kershney Naidoo, Prof Emma Steenkamp, Darryl Herron, Danielle Roodt , Markus Wilken and Mohamed Seedat. Photo right (from left to right): Shaun van der Walt, Brigitte Van Dyk and Andy Wilson join Emma, Darryl , Kershney and Markus.

Each year CTHB mentors and mentees are invited to lunch at FABI. On 1 November this year Prof Mike Wingfield hosted a joint lunch for both the mentorship group and the Mpepu Rural Youth Encouragement (MRYE) outreach group which was greatly enjoyed by all as the photos below bear testimony. Since 2010, the students taking part in the CTHB mentorship programme have been presented with certificates which are valuable documents to add to their CV portfolios.

The CTHB mentorship programme has been so successful that it has been used as the benchmark in the creation of a similar such mentorship programme in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Agriculture.



MRYE group with Jenny Mike and Emma.