Dear WIT Members,

“It’s hard to believe that it’s now been exactly a year since the SOT Council decided to cancel the 2020 Annual Meeting (as my fellow WIT EC members will remember, that’s something I said at the time would happen “when pigs fly!”), and that this year’s meeting starts at the end of this week. The challenges associated with the constant pivoting to adapt to the “new normal” of lockdowns, social distancing, and shortages of just about everything in the early days to struggling through the convoluted logistics of trying to secure vaccination appointments most recently, all while balancing the demands of keeping ourselves and our families employed, educated, entertained, fed and protected, have imposed a level of stress that some of us haven’t experienced since graduate school or early career days. Kudos to two of our younger members who have taken the time to remind us of the importance of recognizing and dealing effectively with the stressors in our lives, and for the reminder that there is indeed a light at the end of the COVID tunnel, with the approval of several vaccines under EUA that will expedite getting back to something like the “old normal”. Reading through these articles reminded me of the importance of us as women professionals and scientists to continue to support, mentor and encourage one another much more creatively through the current trying times and in the better times ahead.

Part of the “new normal” for 2021 is the first 100% virtual SOT Annual Meeting. Despite the lack of face-to-face networking and brainstorming that normally gives birth to the contents of the meeting program in the following year, WIT has once again stepped up to contribute to providing high quality scientific and career-oriented content to the program (check out the list of our endorsed sessions on Page 3). Also make sure to check out the WIT poster as part of the Component Group poster session. And despite missing the in-person interactions at our annual business meeting/mixer, the WIT EC has been working hard to come up with a fun and creative alternative – among other things, we’re planning to shorten the business meeting a spend much of our time in a series of rotating breakout rooms where there will be the chance to compete for door prizes! Hint: anyone who shows up wearing the Women’s History Month color will automatically be entered into a prize drawing.

Looking forward to “seeing” you all soon!

Cheers,

Susan

Susan Emeigh Hart, VMD, PhD, DACVP, DABT, ERT
President, Women in Toxicology
News and Announcements

The 60th SOT Annual Meeting and ToxExpo is just around the corner! The meeting will be held virtually in 2021. Check out the meeting website for the program, registration, ToxExpo Exhibits, information about the virtual format and mobile app, and Online Planner.

Mark your calendars! WIT (Virtual) Annual Awards Ceremony, Reception, and Business Meeting

Thursday, March 18, 4-6pm ET

A virtual business meeting and awards ceremony will be held as part of the SOT Annual meeting.

A virtual reception will follow including rotating break-out rooms where WIT members will have the opportunity to virtually meet, network, and catch-up with each other. Opportunities to win door prizes too!

We look forward to “seeing” you on March 18th!
**WIT-Endorsed Sessions at the SOT Annual Meeting**

- **CE Course (CE05): Less Is More: Sustainable Product Development Requires More Toxicological Considerations (1005)**
  - Friday, March 12; 10am-1:45pm ET

- **Understanding the Spread and Toxicological, Environmental, and Public Health Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the African Continent (1062)**
  - Monday, March 15; 2:45-4:05pm ET

- **Across the Life Span: Emerging Mechanisms of Prenatal and Transgenerational Toxicity (1156)**
  - Wednesday, March 17; 2:45-4:15pm ET

- **Navigating Your Health and Wellness through Graduate School and Early Careers (1187)**
  - Thursday, March 18; 11:15am-2pm ET

- **CE Course (CE06): Insider Secrets for Design and Analysis of Defined-Mixture Experiments (1006)**
  - Friday, March 19; 9:30-10:30am ET

- **The Community Exposome: Effects of Environmental Contamination on Health Disparities and Marginalized Populations through the Lens of a Toxicologist (1237)**
  - Monday, March 22; 2:45-4:15pm ET

- **CE Course (CE14): Understanding Tox21/ToxCast High-Throughput Screening Data and Applications to Modeling (1014)**
  - Friday, March 26; 11am-2:45pm ET
Thank You Volunteer Committees!!

WIT volunteer committees have been working hard on several activities ahead of the SOT Annual Meeting, and their efforts are very much appreciated!

*Thank you all for your help!*  

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<th>WIT Awards Committee</th>
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WIT Newsletter Committee 2020-2021

- Grace Chappell (chair)
- Allison Franzen
- Colleen McLoughlin
- Krisa Camargo

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**Internship Announcement**

**Pfizer**

**Drug Safety Research and Development (DSRD) Graduate Student Internship**

Eligible candidates will be enrolled in a PhD-toxicology program. The internship duration is for 3 months and can occur at any time during the year. Ideally, the candidate’s PhD research will align with Pfizer’s DSRD research areas allowing the intern to advance their research as part of the internship, continue to collaborate with DSRD scientists after the internship and possibly include the DSRD mentor on their PhD thesis committee. The following research areas are present at either our Groton, CT or La Jolla, CA sites: biomarkers, computational toxicology, developmental and reproductive toxicology, genetic toxicology, general toxicology, safety pharmacology, immunotoxicology, and microphysiological systems, along with numerous specialized areas utilizing world class equipment, facilities and scientists. Proteomics is conducted at our Andover, MA site. Pfizer will provide a stipend, housing allowance, and pay for all the research supplies. If you are interested, please visit this [LINK](#).

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**In Memorium – Dr. Jerry Hook**

Long time SOT member and Past President Dr. Jerry Hook passed away on January 9th, 2021. While SOT president, Dr. Hook was instrumental in furthering the involvement of women toxicologists in the Society by ensuring that all appointed committees included women members. The first meeting of the Women in Toxicology SIG was held during the 1988 SOT Annual Meeting, under the support of Dr. Hook. The late Dr. Hook and his wife, Dr. Jacquelyn Smith, have been supporters of WIT's missions and are the gracious benefactors of the WIT Smith and Hook Award. Dr. Hook and Dr. Smith generously contributed to the Celebrating Women in Toxicology Endowment Fund and enabled the establishment of WIT's Smith and Hook Distinguished Service Award. This award honors an individual for their long-term dedication to promote career development opportunities and recognition of the accomplishments of women toxicologists, and for their service and longstanding support to the SOT and/or the WIT SIG.

Read more about Dr. Hook and his impact on the society via the SOT blog post [here](#).
Reflections on Serving Through the WIT Presidential Tract and Thoughts for a Bright Future  
By Janis Hulla, Ph.D., DABT, ATS; WIT Presidential Chain 2017-2021

Over the past four years I have served on the WIT Executive Committee as Vice President, President-Elect, President, and (currently) Past-President. While there have been many challenging responsibilities, the positives, such as the joy I have experienced from my participation, have far outweighed any negatives. To me, the most enlightening part as been the dedication of the women, and men, with whom I’ve served. Together we have accomplished a lot. However, because the WIT SIG, at over 860 members, is the largest SOT component group, I believe we have the resources to do more. I encourage each of you to develop a new initiative to build on the WIT goals of mentoring, visibility, leadership, and education. By growing our members’ participation, we can improve the condition of the American people and people world-wide.

So, why participate? What are the societal impacts of the Society of Toxicology? Perhaps the members of the Ethical, Legal, Forensics, and Societal Issues Specialty Section are most familiar with the huge impact the practice of the toxicological sciences plays in our justice system. I refer you to the third edition of the Reference Manual on Scientific Evidence. This manual was published by the National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine in collaboration with the Federal Judicial Center. The introduction was written by Stephen Breyer, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The Manual is intended to “…assist judges in managing cases involving complex scientific and technical evidence by describing the basic tenets of key scientific fields from which legal evidence is typically derived.” Membership in the Society of Toxicology is cited in the Chapter titled, “Reference Guide to Toxicology” as one of the criteria judges can use to define who is an expert in toxicology (https://www.nap.edu/read/13163/chapter/13#677).

Another piece of evidence of the potential impact of your service to the WIT and SOT can generate is the text of H.R.1709 - Scientific Integrity Act. This piece of bipartisan legislation has been introduced into the US House of Representative with 232 cosponsors. If passed, the Act will allow federal employees to take on leadership in the scientific community. For example, sit on scientific advisory or governing boards; join or hold leadership positions on scientific councils, societies, unions, and other professional organizations.

The underlying intent of both the Manual and Act is to ensure scientific integrity. It can’t happen without the service of people like you. I encourage you to nominate yourself or provide your CV to a colleague willing to nominate you. Alternatively, send your new initiative idea to a member of the WIT Executive Committee.

As I close out my term of service, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the many colleagues who have contributed their knowledge and expertise. It’s been a very rewarding experience, thank you all.

Disclaimer: I participate in the activities of the SOT and WIT in a personal capacity. The opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent the position of the US Army Corps of Engineers, Army or Department of Defense.
Accessibility with Trust: A Perspective on the Prevalence of Mental Health Conditions Among Trainees

By Sarah Carratt, Ph.D.; Post Doctoral Fellow at Oregon Health & Science University

With the high prevalence of depression and anxiety among doctoral students, mental health resources are becoming a standard part of graduate school. In 2019, an article in *Nature* reported 36% of survey respondents sought help for anxiety or depression, both of which they attributed to their PhDs studies (N = 6,320)\(^1\). However, of the students that said they had sought help, only 26% said they got real assistance at their institutions and 10% said there were no resources available to them.

As a graduate student, I attended a university where wellness resources and services were discussed upfront at orientation. However, during the Q&A part of the orientation, the presenter was asked if the hotline was truly anonymous. The response was: if the university services felt care needed to escalate, then there was a chance personal health concerns may not remain confidential. With the possibility of this decision being made without my consent, I didn’t trust the campus resources, and treatment outside the University-provided options was cost-prohibitive. Therefore, despite access to resources, I did not take advantage of them because I didn’t feel I could trust my institution’s health providers to keep my personal health information private.

If mental health problems were not stigmatized, I may not have been so scared to let people know that I was seeking help. For instance, one story that has stuck with me, is the one I heard from a peer when I was rotating labs as a new graduate student. In this case, my peer left a lab because his PI had a mental health disorder. While I support his decision to leave a lab where he didn’t feel adequately supported, this stigma that a PI couldn’t be successful because of their mental health made me question what that could mean for me as a future PI. To add to this stigma, some peers would criticize their lab mates for working fewer hours or “never coming in on the weekends.” This in turn felt like being perceived as pushing yourself to your limits was as important as actually finding your limits and succeeding. The same 2019 survey of PhD students reported that 76% of respondents were working more than 41 hours per week, with 49% of respondents agreeing with the statement, “The culture at my university calls for long hours and sometimes working through the night”\(^1\). Thus, my experience in graduate school was a normalization of anxiety and stress, despite everyone saying that mental health was important.

To add to the mental health stigma, a 2017 study of PhD students in Belgium (N=3659) found approximately half of PhD students experience psychological distress during graduate school\(^2\). The same 2017 study also reported that work and organizational context, which includes work-family interface, job demands, supervisors’ leadership styles, team decision-making culture, and perception of a career outside academia, were significant predictors of mental health problems\(^2\). However, while many academics are quick to offer comments on the number of hours worked or papers published, few talk about whether they are receiving or need help for their mental health. We ultimately work so hard to show our competence and excellence that we hide the rest.
In graduate school, I had access to regular support as well as crisis support, and my PI was an excellent mentor who would have likely provided me with tailored resources if I had asked. Nonetheless, I feared stigmatization for regularly receiving professional support. I also didn’t trust the university to maintain confidentiality in a crisis.

Reflecting on what would have enabled me to take better care of myself as a graduate student, I think it all comes back to accessibility to trust. Students need to be able to feel that they can trust the provided resources and utilize them without stigma. They also need to feel like they can take time off of work without needing to justify their time away from lab to their peers. We can improve this culture of support and trust by changing the way we talk about mental health, where we stop the promotion of self-care as a reward, and where we do not speak negatively about people with mental health conditions. Regarding long hours in the lab, I’m not sure I will ever fully get away from working late when my research excites me, but graduate students should never feel that their success comes at the cost of their mental health.


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A Grad Student’s Guide to the Stressors of 2020

By Sumira Phatak, B.S., Ph.D. candidate; Utah State University

As if graduate school weren't challenging enough! Here I am, a grad student just trying to survive my degree program, and then... 2020 -- where the American Psychological Association (APA) reported our mental health in 2020, especially young adults and students, are the most overwhelmed.

Even though the extent of the mental health crisis among graduate students is challenging to estimate, its existence is undeniable. The multifactorial causes of these mental health disturbances are complicated and may include any possible combination of several stressors (Figure 1).

Additionally, who can forget the impending doom of preparing for qualifying exams or defense examination? Then professionally, we are expected to juggle both teaching and research appointments with little training. As students we are also responsible for troubleshooting while also receiving critical evaluation. Grad students often work long hours that often prevents well-deserved breaks. Women, LGBT+, people of color, and other minority groups are sensitive subpopulations that encounter additional isolating stressors, further complicating the situation. Naturally, all of these factors can contribute to mental health instability or burnout.
Another factor to consider is the graduate student-mentor relationship as about half of the grad students who experienced mental health problems reported a dysfunctional relationship with their PI. The most common themes included: 1) the trainee does not feel valued by the PI, 2) the PI is not an asset to the future profession, and 3) the PI does not provide mentorship, support, or improve emotional wellbeing. Another study found that a dysfunctional advisor relationship actually predicted depression among grad students.

A survey of my peers within the American Society for Nutrition (n=166) also revealed that 49% of respondents had a dysfunctional relationship with their PI, so you are certainly not alone if you feel the same way (Figure 2). Stories of advisor-gone-wrong relationships are in no short supply, but considering that all advisors were once students, this revelation remains baffling.

Then, in 2020 we found ourselves trying to navigate a new world in isolation. We watched those around us get sick, some who didn’t survive, and the best thing to do about it was to stay home. We watched helplessly as our planet was ravaged by natural disasters with a record-breaking 30 tropical storms and a record-breaking 58,250 wildfires that burned 10.3 million acres in the US alone. Violence and suicide spiked, while we also witnessed police brutality against ethnic minorities and other racial injustices became a daily headline. We watched the economy collapse...
alongside political polarization that was disquieting from any angle. The refugee crisis and international conflict persisted.

After all of these events, we transitioned classes and meetings to exclusively online. Yet, International trainees found themselves trapped and unable to return to school or home, and continue to face ongoing visa struggles. While those of us with active experiments scrambled to adapt, many new experiments were postponed indefinitely. Preliminary findings from an ongoing survey indicate that a quarter of all grad students expect a delay in degree completion of at least six months; 25% of grad student worry about housing security and 24% worry about food security; 35% have symptoms of depression, 33% have symptoms of anxiety, and 31% have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder; and 17% have changed their career plans.6

To further add to the confusion 2020 brought, limits were placed on social interactions, and we lost in-person conference opportunities to market ourselves and secure that next chapter of our career. We’ve also had to overcome the awkwardness of giving remote presentations to connect with our audience. I am feeling grateful to simply be employed, which makes it challenging to feel optimistic about the what lies ahead, especially with Zoom fatigue becoming a unifying trend as we work remotely.

Fortunately, it is possible to survive and thrive during these bizarre times. This is important to note, especially as graduate enrollment increased 3.6% from the past year.7 As we move forward, focus on the positives, continue to amass a wealth of knowledge, and form lifelong relationships to make graduate school a wonderful experience. Let’s break the mold and be the type of mentors we wish we had! Until then, if you find yourself experiencing mental health disturbances, please take advantage of the National Graduate Student Crisis Line (800.472.3457).

References


See the flyer at the end of the newsletter for the SOT workshop “Navigating your health and wellness through graduate school and early career” featuring these authors and other speakers
Coronaviruses (CoVs) are not new to humans, as there are four human coronaviruses (HCoVs) circulating at any given time: NL63, HKU1, 229E, and OC43. The CDC states that HCoVs are the second most common cause of the common cold, and most people exposed to the 4 HCoVs are asymptomatic. However, lower respiratory tract illness, bronchiolitis, and pneumonia can be seen following exposure to HCoVs in immunocompromised individuals, older adults, and infants.

This is not the first time the world has encountered a wide-spread CoV. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was first reported in Asia in February 2003 and within a few months, spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia prior to containment of the SARS global outbreak (CDC, 2017). Next, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) was reported in Jordan in April 2012 and unfortunately, has resulted in death in approximately 3 or 4 out of every 10 patients reported with MERS (CDC, 2019). Now the world is faced with a third novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

SARS was able to be contained without vaccination; and MERS has not been declared contained. There is no approved vaccine for either SARS or MERS. However, drug companies did work on developing SARS and MERS vaccines, which included conduct of some clinical trials. Some drug manufacturers were able to leverage data from SARS and MERS vaccine trials to add to the body of knowledge for their COVID-19 vaccines. It is true that clinical trials for COVID-19 were conducted in an abbreviated timeframe with fewer participants than in the past, but previous experience from studies conducted with the CoV vaccines that were previously undergoing development are being leveraged. Most drug companies are targeting the spike protein for both vaccines and CoV therapies, which is one of the 4 major structural proteins of CoV and is responsible for receptor binding and virion entry into cells.

MHRA, the UK’s Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency was first to approve Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine under Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Later, the FDA also approved the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine under EUA and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) approved the vaccine under a conditional marketing authorization. Other health authorities around the world also provided authorization for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and then health authorities started to authorize use of additional COVID-19 vaccines, such as Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine. With an EUA, the FDA “may allow unapproved medical products or unapproved uses of approved medical products to be used in an emergency to diagnose, treat, or prevent serious or life-threatening disease or conditions caused by CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) threat agents when there are no adequate, approved, and available
alternatives.” Thus, the conditional approvals for COVID-19 are not full approvals of products and come with strict guidelines and rules that must be followed. The global health crisis is what prompted health authorities to provide conditional approvals to meet the global need to vaccinate and initiate herd immunity.

At the Annual 2020 American College of Toxicology meeting, Dr. Robert Amler (New York Medical College) reminded everyone of what the world looked like in 1952 with iron lungs and polio ravaging the world. Then, the Salk vaccine was introduced, and the world took on the initiative to eradicate polio. We all hope for a similar outcome with COVID-19.

WIT Member Spotlight - Program “Promis”: Decoding the Role of Exposome in Endocrine Health

By Allison Franzen, Ph.D.; ToxStrategies Inc

Dr. Aleksandra Buha Djordjevic, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Belgrade, and her team have been working on a large project (supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, PROMIS) aimed to provide scientific evidence for the role of toxic metal mixtures and exposome fragment induced endocrine disorders. Over the last few decades endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) exposure continues to contribute to a wide variety of different diseases, including thyroid gland disorders, metabolic disorders, hormone sensitive cancers, female and male reproductive disturbances. While the data available on the genomic profile of endocrine disrupters are available there is a lack of data currently, on the detailed characterization of the exposome and EDC induced diseases. This project encompasses a human biomonitoring-based exposome-wide-association study to collect data on internal levels of toxic metals across different cohort groups, to assist with determining endocrine disrupting features linked to exposures of metal mixtures (Arsenic, Lead, Mercury, Cadmium, Chromium and Nickel). In addition, an animal study will be performed using dosing levels reflective of exposure levels obtained in the human biomonitoring study to simulate exposure of the general population to metal mixtures. Together, this project aims to provide a better prediction of risk factors for the development of endocrine disorders, to move the mark on mixtures evaluations and to assist with the development of future guidelines for hazard characterization for EDCs.

To learn more about this project, check out the website, Instagram account (@decodexpo), Twitter account (@DecodExpo), or email Dr. Aleksandra Buha Djordjevic at: aleksandra.buha@pharmacy.bg.ac.rs
Celebrating YOUR Success!

These accomplishments were earned September 2020 - January 2021; **CONGRATULATIONS!** These announcements are a great way to recognize WIT members' achievements and advancements.

Please share your recent accomplishments to be highlighted in the next newsletter edition! Click [HERE](#) to fill in a short questionnaire. This link will remain active until June 1, 2021. We look forward to hearing your good news!

**Career Advancement/Transition**

**Kathy Orsted, MS,** Gilead Sciences
Promoted from Sr. Associate Scientist to Research Scientist

**Awards (Employer)**

**Gloria Post, PhD,** New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
2020 New Jersey State Public Service Recognition Award for the Governor’s Team of Excellence awarded for "longstanding and exceptional commitment and outstanding scientific knowledge and expertise that protects the health of New Jersey's residents"

**Danielle Kozlosky, MS,** Rutgers University
Toxicology in Excellence Award

**Awards (Non-employer)**

**Phoebe Stapleton, PhD,** Rutgers University
SOT Inhalation and Respiratory SS Young Investigator Award

**Danielle Kozlosky, MS,** Rutgers University
Mechanisms Specialty Section Sheldon D. Murphy Student and Postdoctoral Endowment Award; WIT, Celebrating Women in Toxicology Award

**Kim Zaccaria, PhD, DABT,** SRC, Inc.
2020 CNY 40 under Forty Award

**Linda Birnbaum, PhD,** NIEHS/NTP (Scientist Emeritus) and Duke University (Scholar in Residence)
Frank Hatch Environmental Health Leadership Award from "Defend Our Health" - an advocacy organization working on "Solutions for a Toxic-Free Tomorrow"

**Lisa Prince, PhD,** Purdue University
President of the Purdue Postdoctoral Association

**Other**

**Barbara D. Beck, PhD, DABT, ATS,** Gradient
Made Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science

**Phoebe Stapleton, PhD,** Rutgers University
Published paper in Particle and Fibre Toxicology: "Nanoparticle translocation and fetal deposition after acute lung exposure during late-stage pregnancy"

**Monika Roy, MSPH,** UMass Amherst
Published paper in Chemosphere: The sulfate metabolite of 3,3'-dichlorobiphenyl (PCB-11) impairs Cyp1a activity and increases hepatic neutral lipids in zebrafish larvae (Danio rerio)
~ Thanks for reading! ~

Editor-in-Chief: Grace Chappell, PhD, ToxStrategies
Assistant Editors:
  Krisa Camargo, BS, Texas A&M University
  Sarah Campion, PhD, Pfizer
  Lisa Prince, PhD, Purdue University
  Aleksandra Buha Đorđević

Interested in contributing to a future WIT newsletter?
Contact WIT Secretary-Treasurer: gchappell@toxstrategies.com

Connect with WIT on LinkedIn!

Search for the “SOT - Women in Toxicology” group on LinkedIn and request to join
https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8348363/
Navigating your health and wellness through graduate school and early career

Speakers
Courtney Sulentic
Wright State University
Chair

Judith Zelikoff
New York University
Co-chair

Samantha Goodman
Texas A&M University
Grad student perspective: imposter syndrome

Sumira Phatak
Utah State University
Grad student perspective: mental health crisis

Christine Perdan Curran
Northern Kentucky University
Faculty perspective: mentor/mentee relationship

Sarah Carratt
Oregon Health & Science University
Postdoctoral perspective: finding balance

Stephani Page
ADVANCE Resource & Coordination (ARC) Network
Women in Engineering ProActive Network (WEPAN)
founder of #BLACKandSTEM
Inequity, social media, & connectivity

Lauren Lewis
Takeda
Early career perspective: managing stress

Endorsers
Women in Toxicology (WIT)
Graduate Student Leadership Committee (GSLC)
Postdoctoral Assembly (PDA)

Join workshop live Thursday 03.18.2021 @ 11:15 - 2 EST for presentations, Q&A, & break-out rooms!