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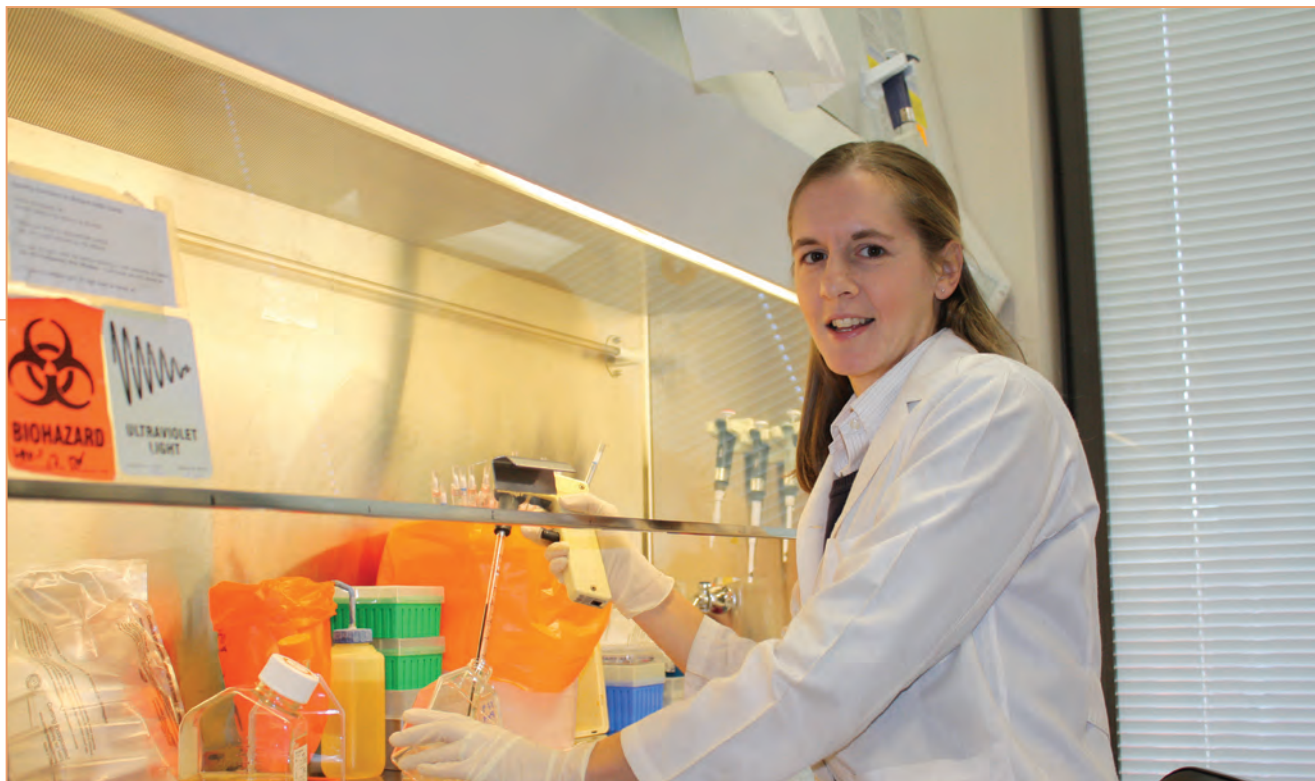
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novel research in UAB's novel course

Ramya Singireddy



UAB's Phage Genomics course is a notable addition to the existing science curriculum and further improves the university's standing as a highly active research university. The Howard Hughes Medical Institute, one of the most prominent research foundations in the world, chose to sponsor UAB as one of only twelve universities to offer this course nationally.

Any freshman or sophomore UAB student may apply for a position in the Phage Genomics course taught by Dr. Denise Monti, but only a handful of applicants are selected. Each student isolates a new bacteriophage, a type of virus, and analyzes its genome. The first semester involves wet lab work in which the students use techniques such as streak plating and titer assays to obtain their unique phages. Each student then sends his or her phage to HHMI to be sequenced; they spend the second semester of the course evaluating the gene sequence of these phages.

"The most unique part about this class is that it's a real world experience," says Angelina Joshi, the course's graduate student teaching assistant. "Students are discovering something novel that no one has ever seen and becoming genuine scientists in the process." According to Joshi, this class adds to the pool of new knowledge being discovered about novel genes and their functions, which could potentially be used for gene therapy and other treatments.

Indeed, through Phage, students conduct completely original research in a near-professional lab setting. In addition to learning research techniques, students keep official laboratory notebooks, attend weekly Journal Club meetings, present their results in the UAB EXPO at the end of the school year, and eventually publish their work. At the end of the semester, one student is chosen to present his or her results at the HHMI site in Maryland along with students chosen from the other universities that offer the course.

"I think that Phage will open up many doors regarding research for me. It's a great way to be introduced to the world of research and what it entails," says sophomore Rikita Patel, who is currently enrolled in the Phage Genomics course.

Phage truly is a crucial educational experience for young people at UAB interested in pursuing scientific professions, and its addition to the curriculum solidifies UAB's status as one of the top research universities in the nation.