

## Duke SRP uses blog to explain research projects

By Sara Mishamandani

This summer, the Duke University Superfund Research Program (SRP) has ramped up postings on its [blog](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?page_id=1877), ([http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?page\\_id=1877](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?page_id=1877)) ToxInsider, to explain NIEHS-funded research findings and provide insights into scientific research from trainees.

"The blog is a great way to make more information about Duke SRP environmental health research accessible to those who don't really have a science background," said Gretchen Kroeger, Duke SRP Research Translation Core (RTC) member who leads the blog project. "As communicating research to a variety of audiences becomes more important for a young scientist, getting interns to write blog posts is a great way to teach science communication while kick-starting our blog."

### Clarifying scientific concepts for a general audience

Duke SRP's focus is on how exposure to chemicals early in life may impact development and lead to health issues later in life. The SRP scientists study how pesticides, flame retardants, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and nanocompounds impact brain development, behavior, thyroid function, and more.

In July, new posts included [Exposing Nemo](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2066); (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2066>) [What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. True for fish, too?](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2049); (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2049>) [Are there flame retardants in health care settings?](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2033); (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2033>) and [Country Roads](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2020) (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2020>) - all written with a personal touch by Duke SRP interns and graduate students. Interns discuss their personal experiences at Duke, while explaining difficult scientific concepts.

"We are hoping to reach out to people at Duke who may not know about us or our research," said Noelle Wyman, another Duke RTC member. "When we post something on Facebook from our blog, we also get a spike in traffic to the rest of our website, increasing our exposure outside the Duke SRP community," said Kroeger.

### Explaining model organisms

In an effort to familiarize readers with organisms studied in Duke SRP labs, the blog also began a [Friend Request Accepted](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2014) (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=2014>) series. Just as Facebook provides an opportunity to expand networks, stay in contact with people, and get to know them better, these Facebook-inspired posts introduce some of the model organisms used in research projects at Duke SRP.

Part I of the "Friend Request Accepted" series features the [mummichog](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/06/Mummichog_Blog.pdf), ([http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/06/Mummichog\\_Blog.pdf](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/06/Mummichog_Blog.pdf)) a model organism used to research mechanisms of PAH toxicity at Duke. Part II highlights the model organism *C. Elegans*, (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/07/CelegansBlog.pdf>) and part III explains the use of the [Sprague Dawley rat](#)



Shown left to right are Savannah Volkoff, Gretchen Kroeger, and Noelle Wyman, members of the Duke SRP RTC and contributors to the blog. (Photo courtesy of Gretchen Kroeger)



Volkoff, right, sorted mummichogs on a recent research field trip to the Elizabeth River in Southern Virginia. Volkoff, a recent graduate of San Francisco State University in California, has been working with the Duke RTC and developed the idea for the Friend Request Accepted series. She has also written several blog posts throughout the summer and will continue the project into the fall. (Photo courtesy of Gretchen Kroeger)



Volkoff, left, and Kroeger, right, described their sampling trip to the Elizabeth River in their June blog post, [Mummichogs and Milkshakes](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=1974). (<http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/?p=1974>)  
(Photo courtesy of Gretchen Kroeger)

([http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/08/SpragueDawley\\_FB3\\_Blog.pdf](http://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/superfund/files/2013/08/SpragueDawley_FB3_Blog.pdf))  
to explore the impacts of chemical exposure.

"One of the great things about the Friend Request Accepted posts is that the general public doesn't typically understand how a worm or a mouse study can relate to human health," said Wyman. "This series helps clarify how we can use model organisms to better understand human and ecosystem health in a way that makes sense to a general audience."

### Disseminating relevant SRP research

Duke SRP publicizes its blog on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SuperfundAtDuke)  
(<https://www.facebook.com/SuperfundAtDuke>)  
and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/DukeSuperfund).

(<https://twitter.com/DukeSuperfund>)  
The Duke SRP lab, led by Richard Di Giulio, Ph.D., also maintains a Twitter account for [Casper the Mummichog](https://twitter.com/CasperFundulus),  
(<https://twitter.com/CasperFundulus>)  
with additional information about Duke SRP research and events.

"We also want to provide information that relates general themes of Superfund research to environmental issues we hear about in the news," said Wyman. "Social media is a great way for us to network and share information with people who may care about these issues but wouldn't otherwise ever see our website."

(Sara Mishamandani is a research and communication specialist for MDB Inc., a contractor for the NIEHS Superfund Research Program and Division of Extramural Research and Training.)

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