Meeting of the Minds
CBR launches trainee initiative that will reap benefits for UVic Research

In the spring of 2013, the Centre for Biomedical Research (CBR) launched a new initiative geared at getting biomedical research trainees together from all faculties. Our primary goal for this initiative was to foster the development of networks between trainees in order to trigger, enhance and strengthen collaboration between researchers with common or overlapping interests. Another important objective was to create a platform to deliver important and much desired career development training for our postgraduate students.

For several good reasons, faculties and departments become "siliced". While this is not necessarily always a negative thing, it does create barriers for positive crosstalk and collaboration that hinder overall university-level growth and collaboration – and in the end, productivity. In my experience, trainees, suffering less from departmental and faculty-based constraints have always been the natural vectors for communication between groups and have often been flexible to seek new ideas and new ways of answering questions.

To this end, on May 1 2013, the CBR held the first annual "Meeting of the Minds" in the Grad House to trigger the start of the trainee group. A large number of trainees (45 students) came out from (8 faculties) and the CBR trainee group was born, now brimming with 75+ active members.

"We hoped that starting this up would be a catalyst for creativity and I am extremely pleased by how the trainees have supported this initiative."

– E. Paul Zehr, Director, Centre for Biomedical Research

The group is very much self-directed with minimal guidance (but full support) from the CBR. In a short time they have become quite active, with a seminar series and career development workshops.

The seminar series - Trainees in Biomedical Research - Student Seminars for Students (http://cbr.uvic.ca/trainees/seminar-series) has hosted over 15 UVic student seminars thus far. Trainees attending conferences have access to travel grants, provided they present their material in the trainee seminar series. In addition to this platform for practice in disseminating research results, the group also has access to important career development training, such as a recent visit by several members of the NIKE Natural Motion Team who visited from NIKE World Headquarters in Beaverton, OR. In this session, the students were able to get key insight into the questions running through the minds of most grad students at one point or another, such as the classic, "should I finish with a Master's or switch to a PhD?"

"I have really enjoyed the variety of student-led seminars we've had so far. It becomes clear during question periods that boundaries between disciplines are being bridged, allowing people to bring new ideas to their own projects and labs."

– Ben Sutherland, PhD candidate, Department of Biology and CBR trainee group

Several students have emerged as leaders in this largely self-directed group. Honing confidence in leadership skills is another clear benefit from involvement in the program – a transferable skill to a variety of career paths.

"I'm really thrilled about our upcoming Pecha Kucha event at IdeaFest this March! It's a perfect opportunity to engage the community and share my research with members of the CBR from many different departments using a unique platform!"

– Andrew Boyce, Master's Candidate, Division of Medical Sciences and CBR trainee group