Welcome back home! The Department of Biology at The University of Texas at Tyler is keen to keep in touch with all our alumni. Although you have moved on to bigger and better things, we hope that want to keep in touch and know what is happening in the department. The purpose of this first newsletter is to reacquaint you with the department and tell you about recent new developments. A number of changes have happened in the department in the last few months: a new Chair, new faculty members, and of course, many new students.

In the future, we will keep you informed of departmental events and accomplishments and profile individual faculty, staff and students.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR: Srini Kambhampati

It is my pleasure to introduce myself as the new Chair of the Department of Biology. I joined the department in January 2011 after serving 18 years as Professor of Genetics and Evolution at Kansas State University. It is truly an honor to be chosen to serve an amazing group of faculty, staff, and students. I have spent the past few months getting to know everyone and am in the process of making plans for continuing excellence and growth. Your feedback is welcome and much appreciated. I hope you will contact me for any questions you may have about the department, to give feedback, or simply to say “hi!” srini@uttyler.edu
Dr. Don Killebrew: Scientist and gentleman

After 34 years of tireless service to the department (21 years as Chair), Don finally decided to hang up his proverbial forceps for blissful retirement. Don joined UT Tyler in 1976 as an Assistant Professor, eventually becoming Professor and Chair in 1989. He was responsible for departmental administration and taught courses in genetics and evolution.

Under his leadership, the department underwent phenomenal growth, expanding from just a handful of faculty to the current 12. During Don’s tenure, the department also began its transition from a primarily teaching mission to equal emphasis on teaching and research. Under Don’s guidance, the department hired several young faculty with strong research backgrounds. We are continuing along this trajectory as we seek to fill vacant faculty positions.

The entire department is deeply appreciative of Don’s service and efforts in nurturing the department into one of the best on campus. As a result of his efforts, Biology majors outnumber all others at UT Tyler. We thank Don and wish him and his wife, Susan, the most enjoyable and peaceful of retirements.

Where are we headed?

The Department of Biology has exciting plans for the future. The main thrust will be to enhance our research capabilities and infrastructure. We plan to do this through strategic faculty hires in highly fundable areas of research, procure key pieces of equipment, obtain more extramural funding to support research, and attract the best graduate students.

We are also overhauling and updating our course offerings to enhance the student learning experience. Our goal is to provide the best possible training in all aspects of Biology to all our students. We are emphasizing undergraduate research experience because it helps students improve their understanding of classroom materials.

As we make these changes, we would love to hear what you liked and, more importantly, what you did not like about the department! Please help us by sending your comments and suggestions to the Chair at srini@uttyler.edu
MEET THE FACULTY and STAFF

The Department of Biology has 10 full-time faculty with 2 more joining soon. All faculty are engaged in cutting edge research with focus on ecology and evolution of various organisms.

Dr. Ali Azghani. Associate Professor. Pulmonary injury and disease research.

Dr. Josh Banta. Assistant Professor (beginning August 2011). Plant evolution and genomics.

Dr. Blake Bextine. Associate Professor. Insect genomics and plant-insect-bacteria interactions.

Ms. Jessica Coleman. Lecturer. Coordinator and instructor for General Biology I and II.

Dr. Stephanie Daugherty. Adjunct Lecturer. Introduction to Microbiology.

Dr. Neil Ford. Professor. Snake reproductive physiology and ecology of freshwater mussels.

Dr. Karen Gomez. Assistant Professor. Plant molecular biology.

Dr. Srini Kambhampati. Professor and Chair. Evolution and genomics of insects.

Dr. James Koukl. Associate Professor. Turtle ecology and physiology. Pre-health professions adviser.

Dr. John Placyk. Assistant Professor. Molecular population genetics of snakes and turtles.

Ms. Suzanne Pundt. Senior Lecturer. Coordinator and instructor for Anatomy and Physiology.

Dr. Lance Williams. Associate Professor. Aquatic and landscape ecology.

Ms. Paula Hibbert. Administrative Assistant.

Mr. Brad Low. Laboratory Supervisor.
ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Biology is a comprehensive unit that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in Biology. The department is housed in a modern building with state of the art research and teaching labs. The strengths of the department lie in ecology and evolution which we hope to build on in the future.

The department offers several health-related pre-professional tracks that qualify students for admission into various professional programs including medicine, veterinary science, physician assistant, nursing, dentistry, etc.

We offer a rigorous curriculum leading to the M.S. degree in Biology. Students undertake original research in the laboratory, field, or both to complete the degree requirements.

Please visit our Web site at www.uttyler.edu/biology for more information. You may also e-mail us at biology@uttyler.edu or call 903-566-7402.

PLEASE help us go green! To receive this newsletter electronically in the future, please send an e-mail to biology@uttyler.edu with “NEWSLETTER” in the subject line. Thank you for helping the environment!