

New companies offer insight from the start

Grad students intern at area Pharma start-up companies

Two young startup companies developing therapies to treat medical ills may soon offer renewed promise to patients, thanks, in part, to a cooperative program with the college. This program – a collaborative effort between the college's Drug Dynamics Institute (DDI) and Austin Technology Incubator (ATI) – has provided these early-stage ventures with pharmacy graduate student interns. In turn, these students have the unique opportunity to work closely with bio-science entrepreneurs.

The DDI was established in 1974 to further faculty collaborations and research initiatives. DDI serves as a multi-disciplinary research center where scientists, educators, businesses and regulatory agencies collaborate in finding solutions to a range of biomedical, pharmaceutical and public health issues.

ATI is a non-profit division of UT's IC2 Institute, established 20 years ago as a place for students to gain real life entrepreneurial experience. ATI works to harness local business, government and academic resources to provide strategic counsel, operational guidance and infrastructure support to technology-focused companies in their early stages of development. Traditionally ATI has worked to place UT business graduate students in internships, but the recent launch of the bioscience program opened internship opportunities for students in pharmacy and other science fields.

One ATI-Bioscience member company, Minimus Spine, is developing a treatment for herniated discs. Another company, Savara, is developing a technology for reformulating drug therapies, a new process to administer a group of drugs that show promise but have performed less than ideally using conventional administration methods. Business leaders for both companies found just what the doctor ordered through the program.

Angela Winegar, a graduate student nearing completion of her doctorate program in pharmaceuticals, had the opportunity to work with Minimus Spine during a Spring 2009 internship.

"I have considered working as a government liaison where I could navigate regulatory pathways for pharmaceutical industry," Winegar said recently, speaking of her plans beyond her graduation. "The internship provided me with an opportunity to test my skills and interests. I really enjoyed it."

Winegar followed fellow pharmaceuticals graduate student, Alan Watts, who held the first DDI/ATI internship in Fall 2008 when he worked with Savara. Watts, who completed his Ph.D. in pharmaceuticals this summer, helped Savara with technology evaluation, putting his experience in the lab to use in



Alan Watts

an entirely different setting.

"My background is in developing new treatment options through research," he said.

"The internship gave me an opportunity to see what happens once the process leaves the laboratory – to see the actual start of a company that could eventually bring the idea to patients."

Janet Walkow, director of the DDI, speaks enthusiastically about the opportunities created through the internship.

"The internship provides students a venue for gaining critical experience and making valuable contacts in the professional world," she said. "It provides ATI member companies with professional resources at a critical point in their company development. It's a winning arrangement for everyone."

Jessica Hanover, director of ATI-Bioscience, was thrilled to collaborate with DDI. "The talent we have within the College of Pharmacy is impressive. In order to establish a sustainable bioscience community in Austin and Central Texas, it is essential that we leverage the knowledge base within UT. ATI's new partnership with the College of Pharmacy is a wonderful example of how young startup companies can really benefit from all that UT has to offer, particularly when they are in the very-early stages of formation and growth."

For additional information about the DDI or the internship program, contact Janet Wilkow at jwalkow@mail.utexas.edu or call (512) 475-9746.