**Student-Led MPBP Department Retreat Cultivates Collaboration and Innovation**

The Department of Molecular Physiology and Biological Physics recently hosted a dynamic and successful student-led retreat on October 3, 2024, bringing together over 100 trainees and faculty members to foster collaboration and build community within the department. The event was a vibrant celebration of research and professional development, featuring a diverse array of presentations, discussions, and activities.

The retreat showcased an impressive lineup of student presentations, alongside insights from three new faculty members, highlighting the breadth of research topics and methodologies characterizing this thriving department. Participants engaged in roundtable discussions covering essential themes such as navigating graduate school, exploring career pathways, understanding postdoctoral opportunities, and generating actionable strategies for improving departmental initiatives. The interactive format encouraged lively dialogue and the sharing of ideas, creating a truly enriching environment.

A heartfelt congratulations is extended to all speakers and poster presenters for their outstanding contributions. Their clarity, engagement, and punctuality made for an inspiring day of learning and collaboration.

The event was led by Dr. Ilya Levental, whose guidance ensured a smooth and inclusive experience for all participants. Special thanks are due to the dedicated student organizers: Emir Maldosevic (Jomaa lab), Natchanon (Bond) Sittipongpittaya, Jennifer Korchak, Micah Lehe (Sheynkman lab), Wyatt Schug, and Skylar Loeb (Isakson lab). Their meticulous planning and attention to detail were key to the retreat’s success.

The retreat also highlighted exceptional student achievements, with several awards presented:

* Inaugural Minor Award 2024 ($500 cash prize, made possible by the generosity of Dr. Wladek Minor):
	+ Jason Li – Biophysics Program (Qi lab, J Clin Invest, 2024)
	+ Jeremi Kuklewicz – Biophysics Program (Zimmer lab, Nature, 2024)
* Best Talk Prizes:
	+ Addie Walsh – Physiology Program – Lukens lab
	+ Skylar Loeb – Physiology Program – Isakson lab
* Best Poster Prizes:
	+ Hannah Cannon – Biophysics Program – Kenworthy / Levental labs
	+ Sara Zdancewicz – Biophysics Program – Jomaa lab

Congratulations to all winners; your hard work and dedication make us proud!

As we reflect on the success of this retreat, the department is excited to build on the momentum generated and continue fostering a collaborative environment that encourages innovation, mentorship, and professional growth.

"We are incredibly proud of our students for their impressive scientific presentations, engagement, and community-building efforts. We also appreciate their valuable suggestions on improving our department, and we look forward to implementing their ideas," said Dr. Ling Qi, the Department Chair.