

ASBMB TODAY

Drawing added to Aspirnauts' toolkits

*By Lauren Dockett, Managing Editor of ASBMB Today
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Portrait artist Igor Babailov sketches the dean of Vanderbilt's medical school, Jeff Balsler.
STEVE GREEN, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

It's been 10 years since kidney-disease researcher Billy Hudson, who grew up in rural Arkansas and now directs the Center for Matrix Biology at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, and his wife, Julie Hudson, Vanderbilt's assistant vice chancellor for health affairs, dreamed up the Aspirnaut program.

Established to help rural K – 20 students achieve careers in the STEM fields, the program officially launched in 2007 with a wired school bus that provided middle- and high-school students with laptops and a broadband connection, allowing them to log into science, technology, engineering and math lessons during their long rides to and from school. Then came the weekly beaming of STEM labs into rural American elementary and middle-school classrooms and a summer STEM-related research program mentoring high-school and undergraduate interns from rural and underrepresented backgrounds on the Vanderbilt campus.

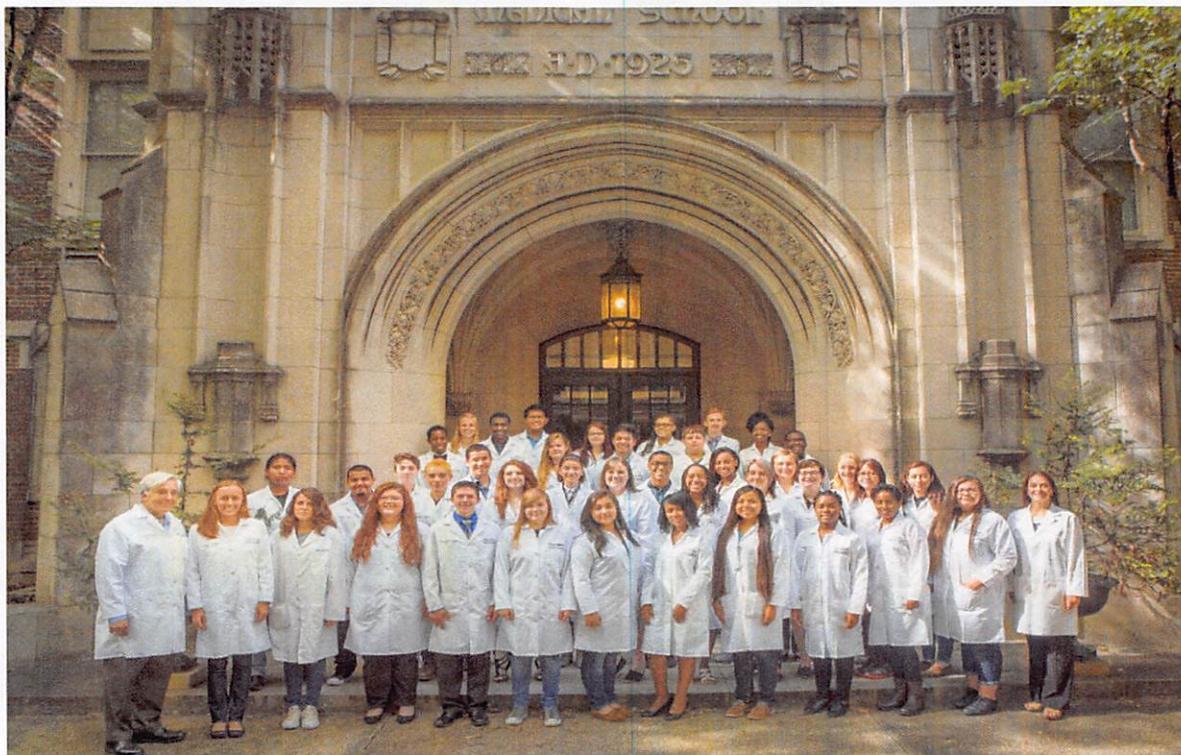
This year's summer Aspirnaut interns, who spent six weeks conducting research at Vanderbilt, were introduced to yet another new program called Drawing in Science. Emphasizing the ways in which art can inspire scientific creativity and is also an important tool for translating and summarizing complex scientific ideas, Hudson strongly encouraged his interns to develop drawing skills.



Aspirnauts Lauren May and Sheila Johnson
STEVE GREEN, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

The Drawing in Science event launched with a visit from international portrait artist Igor Babailov. Forty Aspirnaut interns watched as Babailov — whose commissioned works include portraits of Popes Benedict, Frances, and John Paul, Vladimir Putin, Rudolph Giuliani and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney — sketched Jeff Balser, dean of Vanderbilt's medical school.

Many former mentees of the Aspirnaut program have chosen to remain in the STEM fields and have also been involved with a string of discoveries at Hudson's lab. A mixed-age cohort of 83 Aspirnauts published a report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on the evolutionary origin of a chemical bond, and other work by program participants has been featured in Cell and Nature Chemical Biology.



Summer 2015 Aspirnauts
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