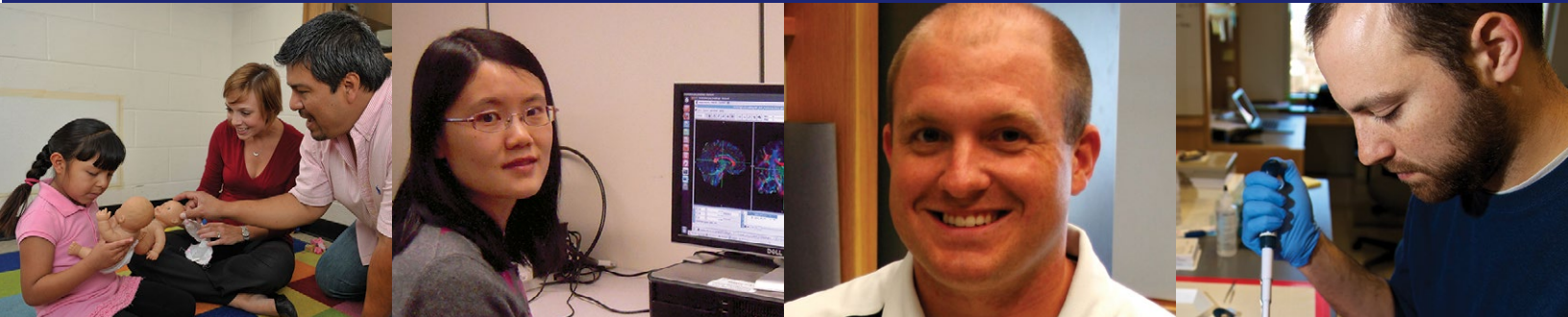


Why Graduate Students and Postdocs Rock!



Pictured left to right: Courtney Wright, Qiyun Fan, Marc Mergy, and Christopher Muller,

The Rock Stars of Science (Rock S.O.S.) national campaign (see p. 3) encouraged youth to pursue careers in science. As a Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, the VKC plays a leadership role in training predoctoral and postdoctoral investigators in intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) research. Below we highlight a few. All our predoctoral students and postdoctoral fellows are the Future Rock Stars of IDD Science!

Courtney Wright, Doctoral Student in Special Education, Kaiser KidTalk Projects Coming from speech pathology, I knew about development and assessment, but not much about how to help young children and their families. Now I have learned a number of evidence-based practices for teaching a variety of skills to young children with disabilities. I feel confident within my clinical work and my ability to include and teach families strategies to use in their everyday lives. I look forward to passing these newly acquired skills on to future practitioners.

Qiyun Fan, Doctoral Student in Biomedical Engineering, Cutting Lab I study the neurocorrelates of reading ability in the brain using magnetic resonance imaging. I am developing new imaging and analysis techniques to study how neural tissues are organized in the brain, and how brain regions with distinct functions collaborate to underpin complex cognitive behavior. At the VKC, I have unique opportunities to take

advantage of this platform where engineers, psychologists, pediatricians, educators, clinicians, and others brainstorm ideas, so that interdisciplinary questions can be addressed and the frontiers of science pushed forward.

Marc Mergy, Doctoral Student in Neuroscience Graduate Program, Blakely Lab I chose neuroscience research because the brain and many brain disorders remain an elusive “black box.” There is plenty left to learn! My own work focuses on a new mouse model of ADHD that I have used to further our understanding of the molecular mechanisms underlying this disorder. It’s a great feeling to know that my work has developed a useful tool for future research.

Christopher Muller, Doctoral Student in Neuroscience Graduate Program, Veenstra-VanderWeele Lab Earlier, I worked in a human genetics laboratory involved in collecting DNA samples from families with a history of autism. Although I enjoyed it, I was frustrated that I could not do more for families. I searched for neuroscience graduate programs with strength in translational autism research, which led me to Vanderbilt, where I am doing research in a lab developing and characterizing novel animal models of autism. If my work can somehow someday help a family affected by autism, it will be worth the struggle. ■

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