REMEMBERING DR. SIWEK: FACULTY AND STUDENT TRIBUTES
Members of the department reflect fondly on beloved professor Dr. Don Siwek as we approach the one year anniversary of his passing.

RECENT DEPARTMENT PUBLICATIONS
Publications remain steady here in the department as students and faculty continue to contribute to the vast scientific literature.
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FACULTY UPDATE: ANN ZUMWALT ELECTED TO AAA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Congratulations to Dr. Ann Zumwalt, Associate Professor in our department, for being elected to the Board of Directors for the American Association of Anatomists (AAA), the largest national anatomy organization in the country, for the 2018-2020 term. Dr. Zumwalt has been a member of the AAA since 2005 and has previously served as the student-postdoc representative on the Board of Directors and on the Professional Development Committee and Advisory Committee for Young Anatomists.

Her responsibilities will include providing governance and establishing policy for the AAA, while assuring the activities of the AAA are consistent with its mission, vision, and strategic plan.

A dedicated member of the AAA, Dr. Zumwalt remarks, "[the] AAA is a vibrant, dynamic organization that fosters a national community of anatomists. Both as a center of community and financially the AAA supports the work of anatomists on both the education and research sides of our academic lives. We have a strong track record of supporting the needs of anatomist-educators as well as anatomist-researchers (and the intersection of the two) and I think that is a great strength of the organization. My personal goals are to work closely with the AAA leadership, who I respect very much, to continue to help the organization to be forward-thinking, proactive, and always working to support a diverse community of anatomists at all stages of their careers."

STUDENT CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Lauren Zajac (pictured right), a fifth year PhD student working in Dr. Killiany’s lab, presented at a Nanosymposium on “Perceptual and Spatial Human Learning” at the Society for Neuroscience Meeting on November 11, 2017 in Washington, D.C. Her talk was titled “Functional connectivity of regions that preferentially respond to coherent optic flow during an egocentric spatial orientation task are related to self-reported spatial navigation ability.”
Dear Fellow Members of the Department of Anatomy & Neurobiology,

As 2018 winds down, it seems an appropriate time to reflect on the past year, which has been one of significant change for the department. Just under a year ago, we lost our dear colleague and teacher Don Siwek (Dec. 11, 2017) to whom this newsletter is dedicated, and there are many fond remembrances of Don included herein.

There were a number of important transitions of faculty and students this year. Alex Wink, Sharon O’Neill, and Flora Ren successfully defended their dissertations and went on to excellent jobs in academia and industry, and 4 of our PhD students passed their qualifying exams. In February, Dr. Bang-Bon Koo, who has an outstanding research program in biomedical imaging, was appointed Assistant Professor in the department. In July, we welcomed Dr. Jon Wisco as Associate Professor and Dr. Linda Afifi as Assistant Professor to the department, and in September, phenomenal educator and colleague Dr. Rick Hoyt transitioned to emeritus status. We know that Jon and Linda will greatly support and enhance our teaching mission and we hope to see Rick often on an ad hoc basis in the coming years. Most recently, Maryann Macneil was promoted to Assistant Professor- a well-deserved promotion for Maryann who brings great energy and expertise to her many teaching responsibilities. Three of our faculty can be congratulated for receiving teaching awards this year, including Ann Zumwalt (Stanley L. Robbins Award for Excellence in Teaching), Tarik Haydar (Educator of the Year in Graduate Medical Science) and Peter Cummings (Physician Assistants Program Didactic Instruction Award). This has been an excellent year with regard to research funding as well, with 10 of our faculty receiving significant Federal grant awards and/or Industry contracts. Our graduate training programs continue to do well, and in September we welcomed 9 new students to the Vesalius Master’s program, 4 new students to the PhD program, and 50 new students to the four Professional Masters programs. To provide specific support for the Vesalius and PhD graduate programs, in October, Selvin Marroquin was hired as an excellent addition to our administrative team.

One major transition deserves special focus; on June 1, Dr. Mark Moss stepped down as Waterhouse Professor and Chair of the department after 20 years of distinguished service. During his tenure, Mark oversaw many positive developments for the department, including the establishment of 5 Masters programs and the recruitment of stellar teaching and research faculty. Most importantly, Mark strongly facilitated and supported the continued preeminence of our department in the realms of medical education and biomedical research. Under Mark’s leadership the department retained and enhanced its national and international reputation as a center of excellence in anatomy, forensics and neuroscience education, training and research. The department was very fortunate to benefit from Mark’s expert direction over the past two decades and we all wish him the very best as he moves on to new endeavors.

Taking on the role of Chair ad interim has been an illuminating and interesting experience for me over the past 5 months. During this time, I have focused on maintaining a sense of continuity for the department, while attending to a large variety of tasks related to faculty, student and staff professional advancement and support. The coming months promise to be productive and full of continued growth. On January 1, we will welcome Dr. Chandramouli (Chand) Chandrasekaran as a new Assistant Professor. Chand will bring an exciting research program and terrific energy to the department. Of note, the LCME site visit, very effectively overseen by Dr. Debbie Vaughan, will take place during the last week of February. It is to be hoped that the new year will bring many additional new accomplishments and developments to each of us as faculty, students and staff individually, and to the department as a whole.

Wishing everyone a year of continued growth and excellence in a spirit of warm collegiality as we accomplish the teaching, training and research missions of our department.

Jennie Luebke, Professor and Chair ad interim
ALUMNA UPDATE: LINDA AFIFI, PHD

Dr. Linda Afifi is a 2012 graduate of the Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology and is a new Assistant Professor in the department this year. She was previously an Assistant Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston. She teaches Clinical Anatomy, Medical Histology, and Neuroscience for first-year medical and dental students. She also serves as a graduate student advisor and thesis mentor in the Tufts Master of Biomedical Sciences Program.

In her role as an educator, Dr. Afifi is committed to lifelong learning: “As a teacher, it’s important to be receptive of the fact that as educators, there is still so much to learn from the topics we teach. Each year the students ask exceptional questions and I find myself in the role of a student: doing research and asking questions on a topic to find the answers. This is exciting because it means I gain a new perspective that helps consolidate my understanding even further in the subjects I teach.

Sometimes students can be the best of teachers!”

DEPARTMENT GRADUATE STUDENTS LEAD HURRICANE RELIEF FUNDRAISER

The Anatomy and Neurobiology Department Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion was proud to support a fundraiser to provide relief to victims of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands (USVI). This fundraiser was led by two of our graduate students: Michael Rosario (left), a first year graduate student working in Dr. Karin Schon’s laboratory who is originally from St. Croix, and Alan Espinal (right), a first-year Masters student in the Vesalius program who is originally from Puerto Rico. Over two weeks, the department collected over $200 to be donated to the 21 US Virgin Islands Relief Fund (21usvhurricanehelp.com) and Unidos por Puerto Rico (www.unidosporpuertorico.com/en/). Michael and Dr. Afifi spent nearly ten years as a member of the Anatomy and Neurobiology Department. She began as technician in Dr. Jean-Jacques Soghomonian’s laboratory, where she developed an interest in pursuing a Masters and PhD. For her graduate research, she worked with Drs. Jarrett Rushmore and Antoni Valero-Cabre to understand the functional and anatomical correlates of visuospatial recovery in perilesional cortex using Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation.

Dr. Afifi’s favorite memories of the department were “simply the times we gathered together as a department. Whether it was a holiday party, department retreat, or graduate student outing, I always felt among my friends and family.”

“In hindsight, I believe the culture of the Anatomy and Neurobiology Department is special and it’s certainly rare to find this camaraderie in academic environments”

To students preparing to graduate from the department, Dr. Afifi offers the following advice: “the Anatomy and Neurobiology Department fosters the growth of outstanding and highly-trained educators; thus, students have to utilize their graduate years to build confidence and expertise teaching across various subjects. The skills gained in teaching will ultimately enhance their research presentations as well.”

To all our alumni, would you like to be featured in our next issue or do you have updates to share? Please contact us at anatneuronews@gmail.com

Alan wish to thank all those in the department who donated, and especially Dr. Schon, Dr. Jennie Luebke, and Melissa Kelly for supporting the fundraiser and helping to raise awareness. While the departmental fundraiser has closed, Puerto Rico and the USVI are still in need of help and support. For more information about contributing, please contact Alan Espinal at opajpr@bu.edu.
IN MEMORIAM: DONALD SIWEK, PHD

Dr. Donald Siwek, Research Assistant Professor in our department and Associate Director of the Program in Forensic Anthropology, passed away unexpectedly on December 11, 2017 at age 63. Dr. Siwek entered the Department of Anatomy & Neurobiology in 1981 and received his PhD in 1989. He taught anatomical sciences for more than 25 years for the Biomedical Forensic Sciences, Forensic Anthropology, and Bioimaging Graduate Medical Sciences programs. His research interests included comparative anatomy and histology. Previous administrative responsibilities included serving as the Database Manager for the BU Alzheimer’s Disease Center from 1996-2001 and as Associate Director of the Laboratory for Sleep and Cognition from 2001-2005. In addition, Dr. Siwek was a research health scientist at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, Mass., from 1992-2001.

The Anatomy and Neurobiology community remembers Dr. Siwek fondly for his enthusiasm about anatomy, commitment to his students, love of teaching, and penchant for irreverent humor. Below is a collection of thoughts, stories, and anecdotes from current and former students, faculty, and staff.

Don was an incredibly generous individual, a loyal colleague and friend. I met Don while he was still a graduate student, and saw him often when I visited the lab of Dr. Deepak Pandya, where Don conducted his research. Don always had a story to tell, with enthusiasm and marvel, about a new discovery, a new paper, or new software that he found. He was generous about sharing information and delighted in the exchange. His honesty and incredible sense of humor carried him through the ups and downs of his professional life. He was distinguished for his passion for teaching, especially Gross Anatomy, following in the tradition of legendary teachers in the department, like Professor Giuseppina Raviola and Professor Bill McNary. Don motivated and challenged students in all courses he taught.

Every department should have a person like Don. His enthusiasm overflowed as he proudly showed his forensic lab and expounded on the intricacies of forensic discoveries. He succeeded in moving the forensic program forward.

I will remember Don for his selfless demeanor, generosity, and readiness to help students and colleagues alike in any way he could. Above all, Don stood out for his dedication to his family. I remember the joy he exuded at the birth of his daughter Kelsey, as he remarked ‘she makes me smile’, and later his son Max. We will sorely miss him.

-Helen Barbas, PhD
Some of my favorite memories of Don were the times when he would walk past my office then suddenly turn around, come in, and say, "Want to see something cool?" He was constantly showing me interesting animal bones he had collected, amazing 3D models he had created, or new anatomy apps or models he had discovered. I loved his curious and fascinated mind and really miss that about him.

As anyone who participates in the medical gross course practical exam grading knows, that grading session can take many hours. Don and Rick always made the time go faster with their ongoing witty banter, making the grading session one of ridiculous stories, jokes, and puns. They also made it their habit to tell stories about their early days in the department, be it fond memories of anatomy faculty who are no longer with us like Drs. McNary and Raviola, or recounting hilarious stories about Don’s mishaps when he was a graduate student in the department. I know most of what I do about the history of the department because of these stories. I have a feeling that I will think of and miss Don every time we have one of those grading sessions for a long time to come.

-Ann Zumwalt, PhD

Don was a true original; one of those rare and extremely likeable people with an effortless knack for saying and doing things that become an indelible memory for others by virtue of being unique. He was the definition of an outside-the-box thinker; a most admirable trait that I found inspiring. I was lucky to have known Don since I was a young PhD student in the department and he was a postdoctoral fellow; 30 years-ago now. I still vividly remember Don as an instructor in the Gross Anatomy lab where students found him to be so interesting and compelling. During the head and neck part of the course he taught me and my fellow students what he said should be our “mantra” over the next month or so - a way in which to remember the names of the 12 cranial nerves. His pointers -offered up with humor and clarity- helped me pass the Gross Anatomy exams and they have stayed with me ever since. There was just something so appealing and memorable about the way Don was able to convey information. He was an educator par excellence in a department of many outstanding educators. One way in which this excellence manifested itself was through his use of imaginative didactic materials and approaches. He learned and incorporated the latest technology- using, for example, a 3D printer to create large anatomically precise versions of otherwise hard-to-visualize small parts of the skull. Yet he was also so knowledgeable and appreciative of older materials, such as the collection of remarkable 3D images of the brain that required an old-fashioned ViewMaster to see. Among the most delightful few hours I can remember were spent with Don as he showed a small group of us these images with tremendous knowledge and enthusiasm. My memories of Don are all fond ones- I truly loved to bump in to him and spend a few minutes chatting, because I knew that we would share a good laugh and I would typically learn something really unexpected and new. He was unique, gifted, warm, generous and tremendously witty. I will miss him very much and will always remember him fondly.

-Jennie Luebke, PhD
IN MEMORIAM: DR. DON SIWEK

Dr. Siwek was not only a great professor, but he was a good friend. When I was in graduate school, he took the opportunity to provide mentorship to me even though we weren’t officially “assigned” to each other. His advice contributed to what I consider a wonderful career (so far). I had the privilege to visit the Department last Fall to give a talk and to help teach in an Anatomy lab. One of the first people I saw was Dr. Siwek. He was so kind to point out to the students he was teaching how proud he was of me. That meant a lot to me, and was reflective of how great a mentor he was. I was saddened to hear of his passing, but also glad to hear that he’s no longer suffering. His legacy lives on in me, and how I mentor students today.

-Jonathan Wisco, PhD Anatomy and Neurobiology, 2002

I met Dr. Siwek when I visited the BUMC campus in February 2009 to talk with the faculty of a brand new Master’s program in Forensic Anthropology that I had applied to. He was energetic and excited about all the research projects that the inaugural class and those after us would be doing. When I met him again when I started the program that September he had the same energy and enthusiasm. He was just as excited to be learning more about forensic anthropology as our cohort was. That was something he did; he threw himself at any topic that interested him and learned as much as he could about it. I’ve never met anyone else with his curiosity and dedication to pursuing his interests.

Over the two years I was at BUMC, he was my lifeline in the program. He was my advisor, my major professor, a confidante, and an advocate. He was critical to the process of developing and executing my thesis research. He was an extraordinary anatomy and osteology professor who I always think of and am inspired by now that I teach anatomy and forensic anthropology courses of my own.

We talked about a lot of things to fill the silence while I cut my biopsy samples or standing in cold taking notes about decomposing pigs; We talked about “Shameless” and Gene Wilder, about musical theatre and Japanese language, about maggots and decomposition. Every time I walked into his office there was a new animal skeleton and we talked about comparative anatomy.

I asked him to be my hooder when I graduated and I keep a picture of that moment in my office.

While we had kept in touch over the years, I had the opportunity to visit him for the first time after graduating in 2015 when I was in Boston for a conference. I was wondering if we would still get along so well. I don’t know what I was worried about; it was as if I had never left. He was still my professor, still encouraged me to follow my interests no matter where they led me, still rooted for me. He was my friend.

Don Siwek was my friend and while I will never have to chance to hear one of his jokes or share his infectious enthusiasm again, I will never forget the impact he had on my life both academically and personally. I will always think of him when I hear the Grateful Dead or when I have a particularly bad bout of Imposter Syndrome and remember his reassurances.

I’ll miss you, Dr. Siwek.

-Corinne Tandy, MS Forensic Anthropology, 2011

It is a real challenge to capture in words what a profound impact Dr. Siwek has had on me as a young person and developing professional. To say that he single handedly inspired, challenged, and molded decades worth of aspiring graduate students and clinicians is a gross understatement. He was the kind of man that brought humanity and heart back to science - whether that context involved studying post mortem changes with forensics students or gross anatomy with medical students. He cared deeply about the students in his charge. In addition to his zeal for intellectual and academic pursuits, he cared about students’ mental and overall wellness. He was an advocate, educator, and friend for all those around him. He will be sorely missed by all those lucky enough to have made his acquaintance.

-Karen Wiedenbeck, MS Forensic Anthropology, 2015
IN MEMORIAM: DR. DON SIWEK

I remembered that Dr. Siwek once walked past the departmental library where a group of us were studying. He saw that we were studying the skull and sat down to teach us where the optic nerve and chiasm were located in relation to the structures in the skull. We didn’t know much, and he walked us through everything. We were all so appreciative of him dropping everything he was doing to talk to a group of random students.

-Julia Lai, MA Anatomy and Neurobiology, 2015

Dr. Siwek was a great professor who would always take the time out of his busy day to help any students with questions. He always had his door open. I remember he would say “Denial is not just a river.” That cracked me up every time. Thank you so much for creating this tribute to him. He will indeed be missed by all those whose lives he came into contact with.

-Alan Damiani, MS Forensic Anthropology, 2012

Dr. Don Siwek, aka Siwek or Uncle Don, was a man who stopped at nothing to make sure he could pass as much knowledge as possible to every student he spoke to. Between his 3D printed skull anatomy, his crazy models, or half legible sketches, he always wanted his students to succeed. He’s the man who taught me everything I know about histology, taking me under his wing early last year and patiently working with me to teach me what I needed to know. Siwek didn’t ask for anything in return, nor did he really ever really ask anyone for favors. As time went on, he became one of my very good friends, that’s what happens when you work 12+ hours a day, 6 days a week in the same lab working on your master’s thesis. We used to chat about life; anything from his (seemingly) 27 golden retrievers, to current news, to his daughter Kelsey and son Max. He would always give me and Dr. Cummings updates on Kelsey in her new “big girl job” down in DC. You could tell how proud he was of her, and once again, wanted nothing but her to succeed. He was a teacher, mentor, and true friend. So thank you Dr. Siwek for making what could have been a miserable 2 years into something I’ll never forget. Rest in peace Uncle Don.

-George Farah, MA Anatomy and Neurobiology, 2017

Siwek was the first faculty to take a chance on me and my very untraditional take on forensic anthropology. He saw my passion and instead of dismissing it or telling me this wasn’t the field for me, he saw my potential and nurtured it. And despite the fact that he was not part of my committee, he continued to be my go-to guru and mentor whenever I hit a snag in my research or just needed some good old “Siwek humor” to get me through the struggles of graduate work. He was and continues to be my inspiration whenever I teach anthropology. He continually reminded us to not take life (and in our work, death and its aftermath) as something to dread but a journey to approach with curiosity, dedication and, sometimes with inappropriate humor. Siwek, you will be missed terribly by all your students!

-Sara Arias, MS Forensic Anthropology, 2012

Dr. Siwek was the first person I met at BU, and what struck me most was his enthusiasm for a fledgling Forensic Anthropology program. I soon learned that this enthusiasm extended to all things weird and wonderful about human anatomy. He was an excellent thesis adviser: to him, there was no research project that wasn’t worth exploring. Even if a project didn’t seem feasible, he would try to find a way to make it happen. I wanted to study skeletal CT scans, and after I encountered many dead ends, he found a connection in the radiology department to allow me access to scans that I would analyze for my thesis and eventually present and publish my findings. It was after his encouragement that I decided to pursue a PhD in the Anatomy and Neurobiology department. In the anatomy lab, he was always willing to demonstrate efficient dissection techniques and was the first to pursue an exploration of an anatomical variant. He made the most overwhelming anatomical concepts (e.g., the infratemporal and pterygopalatine fossae) seem approachable and even fun. He seemed to have an anecdote (or at the least, a terrible joke) about every region of the body: he would often talk about “Dunlop’s Disease” in the lab; wondering if I forgot about an important clinical correlation, I would later roll my eyes when he followed this by saying that someone “done lopped it off” with their dissection scissors. I admit that I use some of these groaners as I teach anatomy. Dr. Siwek was also a caring and thoughtful person. He met my mother briefly twice, but years later, he would frequently ask me how she was doing. His kindness, humor, encouragement, and mentorship was a significant part of my development as an anatomist and educator, and I will miss him greatly.

-Alexandra Wink, MS Forensic Anthropology, 2011; PhD Anatomy and Neurobiology, 2018
IN MEMORIAM: DR. DON SIWEK

with Sara Arias

with Tara Moore (left) and Corinne Tandy (right)

with George Farah (left) and Peter Cummings (right)

DON SIWEK
Beloved Professor
1954-2017
RECENT DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATIONS

These are just a few of many recent papers published by our faculty, post-doctoral fellows, students, and recent alumni!


