



SSI Launches New Policy Program

SSI launched its pioneering "Biopolitics of Risk" program last spring and co-sponsored a conference in conjunction with the University of Zambia to determine research agendas in the area of agricultural biotechnology and food security. The program complements SSI's technology transfer work by developing alternative ways to think about the ethics and politics of technology programs and their effects on poor populations.

"With new agricultural biotechnologies, there's a notion that risk is something you can calculate," said SSI Board member and project leader Dr. Jody Ranck. "With a great number of these new technologies, we're dealing with our own ignorance regarding their effects on health and ecology."

The conference was widely-attended by representatives from government ministries, academics specializing in food security, organic agriculture organizations and NGOs working with Zambian women farmers. Participants developed the following priority research agendas:

- The impact of the HIV epidemic on food security
- The impact of the Cartagena protocols on poor women farmers
- An assessment of past technologies developed through public research that have since been shelved.

Over 50% of the Zambian population is undernourished as a result of the drought and economic liberalization, and this is exacerbated by the dramatic effect of HIV/AIDS on the work force (21% of the population is infected with HIV). Our program aims to improve food security by democratizing agricultural biotechnology programs and fostering a more ethical assessment of risk in the introduction of new technologies.

New Workshop Module: Scientific Manuscript-Writing

La Ciudad del Saber, Panama City, Panama – For twelve young scientists in Latin America, an important door to research progress and infectious disease control has been opened. During the week of July 7-11, SSI conducted a first-of-its-kind scientific manuscript-writing workshop for twelve infectious disease scientists: six from the new INDICASAT research facility in Panama and six long-time SSI collaborators from other research institutions in Latin America.

With the goal of helping accomplished scientists in the developing world achieve publication of their research results, this training (funded by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation) represents a significant development in SSI's research capacity-building program. We provide trainees with the tools necessary to translate their data into publishable material and offer them close guidance through the intricacies of scientific writing. Publication in a reputable journal boosts our trainees' visibility in the scientific community, helps them gain ownership of their research, and improves their chances of competing successfully for funds. In addition, the published findings contribute to scientific knowledge and can inform and influence local and regional public health policy.

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SSI Helps to Combat Leishmaniasis in Brazil

Universidade Federal de Uberlandia, Brazil – SSI's first workshop in Brazil helped eight researchers from the *Universidade Federal de Uberlandia* (UFU) implement molecular diagnosis of leishmaniasis, a key capability in the fight to keep this emerging disease from becoming endemic in the face of rapid environmental change in the region of Uberlandia. SSI instructor Alejandro Belli led the effort to consolidate an already strong immunology and parasitology department by introducing molecular biology – the most up-to-date diagnostic technology – in the form of multiplex and other varieties of PCR.



Alejandro Belli (center) with workshop participants in Brazil

Dr. Silvio Favoreto, a researcher at UCSF, led the initiative to hold the workshop at his former laboratory by submitting a proposal to SSI. In light of the steady population increase in the region, the idea was to create molecular diagnostic capability to prepare for and protect against a continued rise in the incidence of leishmaniasis.

"Beyond making molecular diagnosis of leishmaniasis available to us, SSI made molecular biology more comprehensible," he said. "The workshop addressed an important issue in Uberlandia's public health. I see the interaction with SSI as a milestone that is changing the perspective of a whole generation of young scientists in Uberlandia."

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Success Story: SSI Instructor Alejandro Belli

It is the mid-1980s, and the country of Nicaragua is engulfed in the Contra war, which is responsible for the death of a French parasitologist conducting leishmaniasis research, along with tens of thousands of Nicaraguan citizens. Rates of leishmaniasis are high in rural areas, and growing numbers of young urban men and women are affected by the disease due to military service in the countryside. A fresh-faced Nicaraguan graduate of Loyola University in New Orleans, 24-year-old Alejandro Belli, asks the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health for a job and is given one in the brand new, \$200,000 parasitology laboratory in the Centro Nacional de Diagnóstico y Referencia (CNDR) built by the French government in response to the death of the French researcher.

Although the laboratory is equipped, the French government fails to train the Nicaraguan researchers, so they struggle to diagnose and study leishmaniasis and to respond to increasing numbers of outbreaks nationwide. In 1988, Alejandro meets Eva Harris, herself a young newcomer to Nicaragua with a strong desire to equalize conditions in developed and developing country laboratories. Together, they begin to do the work that SSI does with its workshop participants on a much larger scale today: ask and answer relevant questions, compile resources, and transfer knowledge of techniques needed to conduct up-to-date research. Their collaboration leads to the creation of AMB/ATT (SSI's predecessor, the Applied Molecular Biology/Appropriate Technology Transfer program) and SSI.

Flash forward to 2003. We find Alejandro in Madrid, a scientist-turned-visual-artist busy juggling several key projects for SSI along with his graphic design commitments. In the years that passed in between, Alejandro spent 11 years with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health, earning himself promotions all the way to Director of Parasitology. He and Eva worked together with a research team that was able to evidence the magnitude and distribution of leishmaniasis in a country with no research tradition and very little local information on infectious diseases. As a result, new molecular diagnostic procedures were standardized and implemented on a routine basis, a new disease manifestation of leishmaniasis was discovered and characterized, and appropriate public health measures were implemented to control it. Parallel investigations on Chagas' disease described the national seroprevalence in blood banks and produced in-house serological diagnostic kits.

In his work with SSI, Alejandro has become one of our star instructors, recently leading the successful workshop in Uberlandia, Brazil. He is currently preparing to use his visual art skills to design SSI's forthcoming scientific resource guide on compact disc, a compilation of all of SSI's teaching materials and supporting documentation.



SSI Instructor Alejandro Belli

SSI: Alejandro, what makes you such a good instructor?

"SSI asks the local investigators: 'What are the pressing health problems? What do you need to solve them?' We design everything according to the needs of the local people, so that it is truly their initiative."

AB: I think my biggest asset as an instructor is that I train people who are in a situation that I lived through; namely, conducting research under conditions of very limited resources. I think I am an example of what appropriate technology transfer can do, within the SSI philosophy. When I am teaching, I go back to this experience and help adapt techniques to the real conditions of most laboratories in our countries. A fundamental aim of our workshops is to demystify PCR and other methods as "elite" techniques and to give the potential users the knowledge to adapt the techniques to their own needs and realities.

SSI: Based on your experience, what do you think SSI is doing right?

AB: When other organizations come to Nicaragua or other developing countries, many arrive with a colonial mindset. In contrast, SSI asks the local investigators, "What are the pressing health problems? What do you need to solve them?" We design everything according to the needs of the local people, so that it is truly their initiative. We leave the capacity so our trainees can solve their own problems, and walk hand in hand with them to make sure they can eventually perform their own research projects independently. Finally, we provide the opportunity for other scientists to help in the process. SSI is a vehicle for change.

SSI: Where do you see SSI going in the future?

AB: By growing our resources — particularly our human resources in our star students and volunteers -- our team is able to do more things and expand geographically to Africa and Asia. We are also expanding technically. We started with PCR and other standard techniques. Now we're developing novel diagnostic approaches, like the ImmunoSensor. I also see many more South-South connections, which are very important. When I went to Uberlandia, Brazil, they were living exactly the same problems I experienced 10 years ago in Nicaragua. I can relate to that, communicate with the people.

SSI thanks Alejandro Belli for his tireless work and steadfast commitment to SSI's mission and programs. Alejandro is now SSI's Workshop and Graphic Design Consultant.

SSI Supports Dengue Researchers in Ecuador

In keeping with our mission to build capacity for infectious disease research in developing countries, SSI has helped the *Instituto Nacional de Higiene y Medicina Tropical* (INH) in Ecuador's major port city of Guayaquil establish a methodology for the rapid typing of dengue virus that has improved national surveillance of the disease in the country. With the objective of increasing the number and distribution of Ecuadorian scientists trained in new skills to study and prevent dengue, SSI will hold another workshop at the University in Quito in the summer of 2004.

SSI sponsored a hands-on workshop in 2002 that introduced molecular biology techniques and concepts in the molecular epidemiology of dengue and then provided the Virology Laboratory at the INH with the equipment and reagents necessary to implement the newly acquired techniques. Using reverse transcriptase-PCR, Ecuadorian scientists were able to document the introduction of dengue virus type 3 into the country, as well as demonstrate the presence of dengue in the Galapagos Islands for the first time. In 2003, SSI's Program Director Josefina Coloma returned for a site visit, bringing more equipment and material for the Virology Laboratory, providing on-site technical advice, and helping to troubleshoot laboratory techniques.

SSI helps developing country scientists build capacity for research on dengue virus because it is the most common mosquito-borne human viral disease and a major public health problem worldwide. Ecuador, like many countries in Latin America, is experiencing a surge of dengue epidemics and has seen a dramatic increase in the number of dengue hemorrhagic fever cases, particularly in the last three years. SSI will continue to support dengue research with the goal of preparing Ecuadorian scientists to respond to and help prevent epidemics.

All the Buzz About SSI

The New York Times' September 30 article: "A Conversation with Eva Harris: How the Simple Side of High-Tech Makes the Developing World Better," featured in the Science Times section, generated quite a buzz about SSI's work. As a result of the article, SSI has received numerous offers from volunteers with a variety of skills, several large donations, and invitations for important speaking engagements.

The article explored SSI's low-cost approach to PCR and knowledge-based technology transfer, along with Eva's personal passion for making technology accessible worldwide and for expressing the political aspects of biology. A follow-up piece in the November 11 *New York Times'* science section noted Eva's take on the internationalization of science and the challenge in science over the next 25 years to make exciting scientific breakthroughs truly relevant to developing as well as developed countries. If you have not yet seen these articles, please visit SSI's web site or write to SSI for copies.

In 2003, SSI was highlighted in these lectures:

- "Building Partnerships: Scientific Capacity-Building in Developing Countries," Harvard Medical School, May 5
- "Field Studies of Viral Diseases: From the Bench to the Field and Back," American Society for Virology 22nd Annual Meeting, July 14
- "Scientific Capacity Building and Sustainable Technology Transfer in Resource-Poor Environments," Wellcome Trust Genomics & Diagnostics Meeting, October 7

ImmunoSensor to Begin Field Trials

SSI continues to work to bring the ImmunoSensor diagnostic technology out of the laboratory and into the hands of health workers and scientists in the developing world who need an inexpensive and portable point-of-care immunological assay. With the support of the venture philanthropist Acumen Fund, a multidisciplinary team at UC Berkeley has developed different serological assays for diagnosis of dengue infections, filed a patent, and signed a development agreement for the platform technology with UC Berkeley's Office of Technology Licensing.

The ImmunoSensor is thus far capable of performing as well or better than a benchmark ELISA assay. The first field trials of the dengue prototype will be conducted in Nicaragua in March 2004. Additional funding has been obtained for development of HIV/AIDS diagnostic tests and viral load assays using the ImmunoSensor platform.

Interest in the ImmunoSensor continues to grow among the global public health community. The Gates Foundation and NIH incorporated a concept paper co-authored by Eva Harris into their joint Grand Challenges in Global Health (Grand Challenge No. 14) which encourages development of technologies that allow individual point-of-care diagnosis and monitoring of infectious diseases. In September, SSI hired David Kaisel to lead the business development of the ImmunoSensor and Samantha Hammond to coordinate the field work in Nicaragua. (Please read more about David on page 4.)

Panama

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Students worked one-on-one with infectious disease experts from their fields of research, which all cited as the key to the workshop's success. Instructors are currently reviewing eight draft manuscripts on topics ranging from HIV and TB among women in Guatemala to immune characterization of leishmaniasis in Nicaragua.

The workshop was greatly acclaimed by the participants, who came from six Latin American countries. One reported in August: "After one month, everything is fresh in our minds. We have organized a writing club that meets every Thursday morning to follow up on the articles we are writing and to organize materials for our own workshop."

It also engendered a good deal of interest on the part of international agencies such as the Pan American Health Organization, the Network for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases in Central America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Fogarty International Center at NIH. SSI will conduct two Manuscript-Writing Workshops in 2004 in Paraguay and Honduras.

2003 Accomplishments and Updates

Despite the fact that 2003 was another slow year for non-profit organization funding, SSI exceeded its projected goals in all program areas. With continued support from the foundations and individual donors listed below, SSI conducted more workshops than in any other year since its foundation in 1998. We also hired two new staff members, doubled the value of material aid donations over last year, funded five research projects in Egypt, and added an international policy program.

Workshop Program:

- Developed entirely new Manuscript-Writing Workshop module and conducted the first workshop of its kind (see page 1)
- Conducted 4 Peer Training Workshops: dengue in Panamá and Ecuador; leishmaniasis in Brazil and Panamá (see pages 2 and 5)

Small Grants Program:

- Awarded 5 grants to Hepatitis C researchers in Egypt (page 3)

Material Aid Program:

- Joined forces with Harvard School of Public Health to collect used equipment, create an online inventory catalogue with pictures, and send equipment to Guatemala, El Salvador, Paraguay and Ecuador
- Contributed to creating a full-scope laboratory at the *Universidade Federal de Uberlandia*, Brazil
- Helped implement the molecular biology laboratory at the *Instituto Nacional de Higiene y Medicina Tropical* in Ecuador

Networking/Project Initiation:

- Initiated the collaboration of our Panamanian trainees with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health to study leishmaniasis

Updates:

- **New staff:** In September, David Kaisel and Rebecca Hekman joined SSI. David comes to SSI with an MBA and an MPH and a history in product design and marketing in Silicon Valley as well as years of developing country work with *Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors Without Borders*. At SSI, he coordinates the commercial development of the ImmunoSensor. He will oversee the ImmunoSensor business plan and spearhead market and needs analysis, as well as develop partnerships with potential manufacturers and distributors in the developing world. Rebecca joins us from Hesperian Foundation, with a BA in political economy in developing countries. She provides excellent administrative, technical, and writing support to SSI.
- **New Program:** We launched the "Biopolitics of Risk" program to rethink the ethics and consequences of implementing new technologies in developing countries.
- **Web site:** Look for the new site at the same address, www.ssilink.org, early next year!
- **New Office:** SSI has moved to a wonderful new office in the Flood Building! Please note our new address on the back page.
- **Board of Directors:** Juliane Mittman has been appointed to the position of Board Secretary.

SSI Thanks

Our Volunteers, who have given freely of their time:

Accounting: Ted Savetnick, CPA. **Legal services:** Fred Dorey (Cooley Godward, LLP), Judith A. Hasko. **Scientific translation:** Carolina Alonso, Gustavo Arrizabalaga, Steffi Becht Kellam, Frederick Boehm, Ana Gervassi, Ippolytos Kalofonos, Audrey Rosales, Katherine Schroeder, Debbie Silvera, Laura Uribe. **Material Aid:** Nina Boedekker, Maria DaCosta, Elizabeth Daniels, Hugh Douglas, Rossana Herrera, Kyra Naumoff, Craig Nishida, Ken Pine, Mike Reddy, Peter Walter, Robert Watson, Nicole Whitehurst, Eileen Wong, Justin Yarrow. **Website design:** Mike Armstrong, Markus Roskothen. **Graphic Design:** Alejandro Belli, Richard Goodwin. **Computer support:** Daniel Ceballos, Mark Cronander. **Scientific consultants:** Irene Bosch, Steffi Becht Kellam, Frederick Bohem, Dheyanira Calahorrano, David Corry, Julie Deardorff, Kathy DeReimer, Wayne Enanoria, Joel Ernst, Sabine Ernst, Brendan Flannery, Serene Forte, Matthias Frank, Reuben Granich, Alison Graves, Edmundo Grisard, Jane Grogan, Palmira Guevara, Gabriel Guzmán, Paul Hamel, Morgan Jenkins, Clay Johnston, Roger Kaspar, Farrah Kheradmand, James Larrick, Bryan Lewis, Leslie Louie, Sumi Mehta, Robert Metcalf, Wayne Mitchell, Mary Kate Morris, George Newport, Cristián Orrego, Jorge Osorio, Nancy Padian, Rebeca M. Plank, Ellen Prager, Nancy P. Raven, Betzabé Rodriguez, Katherine Schroeder, Katherine Sturm-Ramirez, Jose de la Torre, Sonya Wakil Thompson, Neli Ulrich, Fernando Valle, CC Wang, Ana Maria Xet-Mull, Joe Zunt. **Organizational Consulting/Support:** Nina Agabian, Richard Cash, Davida Coady, Don Comb, Julie Deardorff, Lori Fries, Jim Healy, Theresa Hoenes, Nap Hosang, Peter Rosset, Lynn Serdar, Vasu Sunkara, Julia Walsh.

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SSI Volunteer Spotlight: Rossana Herrera

Rossana Herrera is one of our best and longest-term volunteers at SSI. A molecular geneticist from the University of Los Andes in Bogotá, she arrived in the US from Colombia in 1993. Rossana began working as a volunteer in the laboratory of Dr. Joel Palefsky at UCSF in order to keep in touch with the scientific community and learn the latest scientific developments. Shortly thereafter, she was hired as a full-time research assistant. She continues to work on the diagnosis and pathogenesis of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

Rossana, a long-time friend of SSI's Scientific Director Maria Elena Peñaranda, became involved with SSI in May of 2000. Having grown up and worked in Colombia, Rossana understands the difficulty of conducting scientific research in developing countries. She was astonished by the waste of perfectly functional equipment and material that occurs routinely in the US. Rossana quickly became a great advocate of SSI's Material Aid Program, collect-



Rossana Herrera in Cairo

"For new researchers in developing countries, it is very difficult to get started. SSI provides the training and resources so that these scientists can take off and achieve a lot."

ing used equipment and laboratory supplies diligently from her laboratory and other laboratories at UCSF. She offers her time and vehicle for collection and transport of donated materials around the Bay Area and has also contributed to workshop organization. Rossana accompanied SSI's team to Egypt and helped with the 2002 workshop.

In keeping with her commitment to sharing the wealth in developed countries with those who need it in the developing world, Rossana is currently writing a grant with professors at the University of Los Andes and collecting used equipment to conduct an SSI workshop in Colombia on molecular diagnostic techniques for HPV. Cervical cancer, which can be caused by HPV, is one of the most prevalent cancers in Colombia, and its incidence is on the rise. The workshop will train researchers in up-to-date technologies for diagnosis and typing of HPV. We are deeply grateful for and inspired by Rossana's commitment and generosity to our mission and programs.

Workshop, Grants Funded in Egypt

In a continuing effort to bolster Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) research and control efforts in Egypt, a country with a 12% HCV infection rate, SSI is following up its 2002 workshop by providing funding for research projects that emerged from the workshop. We will also conduct a second workshop focused on research proposal development in January 2004.

SSI selected five projects generated in the 2002 workshop for support, for a total of \$56,800. The projects are:

- Rate and Risk Factors of Vertical Transmission of HCV in Egypt
- Early Viral Response as a Predictor of Sustained Viral Response in Patients with Chronic Hepatitis C (Genotype 4)
- Natural History of HCV in Children: Magnitude and Risk Factors of Occult Infection and Underlying Liver Disease in Egyptian Children
- Hepatocellular Carcinoma: The Magnitude of the Problem in Egypt
- HCV Genomic Sequence Variation in Chronic Liver Disease and Hepatocellular Carcinoma in Egypt

The two-week intensive course planned for January 2004 will focus in depth on issues related to research methodology, study design, epidemiology, biostatistics, and grant-writing. Participants will receive one-on-one mentoring by experienced research scientists, who will help them fine-tune their research hypotheses into a full project proposal. We will fund between five and eight of the resulting proposals.

Brazil

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The consolidation of the laboratory at the UFU could not have come at a better time, with rapid damming of the Araguari River threatening to escalate the emergence of leishmaniasis in the region by forcing the animal hosts and insect vectors of *Leishmania* out of the riverbank vegetation and closer to populated areas. Although Brazil has a strong tradition of research and several cutting-edge laboratories working on leishmaniasis, the region of Uberlandia has not received much attention from the large research institutions due to its geographic isolation and the previously low incidence of leishmaniasis.

SSI helped researchers implement several PCR protocols in the laboratory, expand access to the technique through collaborations with public health services in the region, and develop research proposals. At least one of the proposed projects will make a significant contribution to the field and to public health in the region by studying the local characteristics of *Leishmania* transmission, focusing on prevention and control measures and appropriate medical attention.

Alejandro said: "The best part is that we gave a solid team a new capacity to become even stronger. We are planting a seed in very fertile soil." SSI's strong tradition of follow-up means that "we are not just planting the seed, but we are going to help it grow."

The V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation funded this workshop.

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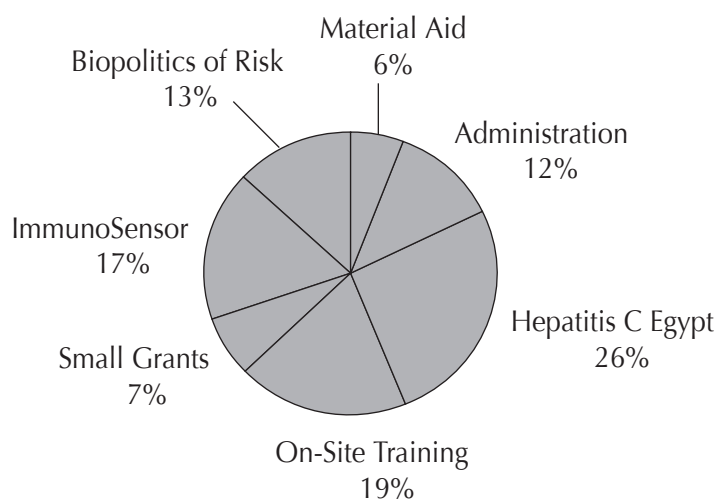
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- **New and better diagnostics** used at the national level in Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Guatemala
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- **Better surveillance of infectious diseases** in Ecuador and Paraguay

Please join us in this important work. Donate to SSI online at www.ssilink.org today.

2003-04 Operational Budget

Total Budget: \$528,000



For a complete financial report, please contact our office.

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Sustainable Sciences Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that develops scientific capacity to address public health needs worldwide.

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