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Undergraduates recognized for chemistry work

DALLAS – Nov. 17, 2006 – Livia Vastag, a senior at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vt., has won the inaugural Frank and Sara McKnight Prize in Undergraduate Chemistry at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Ms. Vastag was awarded the \$2,000 top prize for her work, titled “Mechanism and Kinetics of Oxidation of Guanosine Derivatives by Pt(IV) Complexes.”

The \$1,000 second place award went to Sheel Dodani, a senior at UT Dallas, for her work on “The Synthesis and Properties of Tunable Redox-Active para Wurster’s Crowns.”

Valeriy Shubinetz of the University of Chicago received third place, and \$500, for his research project, “Gold-catalyzed Cycloisomerization to Enable the Practical Approach to Pleuromutilin Antibiotics.”

The McKnight Prize was instituted by Dr. Steven McKnight, chairman of UT Southwestern’s Department of Biochemistry, in honor of his parents, “because they have been the best parents imaginable,” he said. It is intended to promote undergraduate research in chemistry through recognition of outstanding accomplishment.

More than 100 undergraduates representing 85 universities and colleges from 28 states took part in the competition.

Twelve finalists traveled to New Braunfels in mid-November for the biochemistry department’s annual retreat to give poster presentations on their work. Winners were chosen both for the significance of their work and the quality of their presentation.

The other finalists were:

- Erin Anderson, Illinois Wesleyan University;
- Keriann Backus, Brown University;
- Marian Laughery, Washington State University;
- Daniel Le, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo;
- Michelle Leibrand, University of San Diego and the Scripps Research Institute;

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- Theresa Liang, University of California, Berkeley;
- Becky Peterson, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point;
- Carlyn Tan, Northwestern University; and
- Buck Taylor, Willamette University.

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About UT Southwestern Medical Center

UT Southwestern Medical Center, one of the premier medical centers in the nation, integrates pioneering biomedical research with exceptional clinical care and education. Its more than 1,400 full-time faculty members – including four active Nobel Prize winners, more than any other medical school in the world – are responsible for groundbreaking medical advances and are committed to translating science-driven research quickly to new clinical treatments. UT Southwestern physicians provide medical care in 40 specialties to nearly 89,000 hospitalized patients and oversee 2.1 million outpatient visits a year.

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