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28th Annual Memorial Sloan Kettering Convocation Ceremony

[Education & Training](#)

[News & Events](#)

[Open Positions](#)



Memorial Sloan Kettering President Harold Varmus, Cornell University President David Skorton, and Memorial Sloan Kettering Board Chairman Douglas Warner at the Academic Convocation ceremony.

Graduates and Award Winners Celebrated

Memorial Sloan Kettering's Academic Convocation recognizes and honors research as it is embodied in many individuals, including students who have earned their PhD degrees for work carried out in Memorial Sloan Kettering's laboratories, younger Memorial Sloan Kettering physicians, scientists, and postdoctoral research fellows, as well as established clinicians and investigators from the Center and beyond.

Welcoming guests to the Rockefeller Research Laboratories Auditorium on the late afternoon of May 10, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center President Harold Varmus touched on the theme of the 28th annual Academic Convocation when he spoke of a speech he was in the process of writing for the memorial service of a man named Calvin Plimpton who, in the early 1960s, left a promising career as an academic at Columbia Medical School to become the president of Amherst, a small, liberal arts college in Massachusetts where Dr. Varmus was then an undergraduate. "At the time, it seemed a very odd move for someone who was in the middle of a medical career," Dr. Varmus observed. "But I think that today all of us notice that, for a variety of reasons, medicine and biological science are playing increasingly prominent roles in the broader world." He went on to point out current public concerns from healthcare to stem cell research and from abortion policy to the teaching of evolution in public schools. "Science and medicine are much closer to the heart of the country and public policy," Dr. Varmus concluded, "and this general theme is reflected in our choice of speaker today."

Through his intellect and drive, Joe had an enormous impact on the philosophy of the lab and on our research. His research focused on how proteins are transported from their site of synthesis in cells; he had great success in this work.

The speaker to whom he referred was David J. Skorton, 12th president of Cornell University, who was awarded the Memorial Sloan Kettering Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Biomedical Research and delivered the Convocation address. A cardiologist, administrator, biomedical researcher, musician, national leader in research ethics, and advocate for the arts and humanities, Dr. Skorton has focused his research on congenital heart disease in adolescents and adults, cardiac imaging, and computer image processing. In his address, entitled Rediscovering the "Endless Frontier," he called for a renewed national commitment to basic science research.

"Today, the opportunities for discovery are more promising than ever before, and our nation's health and well-being, its global competitiveness, and its stature as a world leader depend on a robust and well-funded basic research enterprise centered within America's research institutions," Dr. Skorton said. "It's time to reassert strongly the need for bipartisan support for basic research as a key to our collective futures and to draw on the combined influence of industry, colleges, universities, and the public at large in making the case for a renewed, long term national commitment to research."

JK's ability and intellect has now led an area of ligation chemistry — essentially, how you put broken ends of DNA back together — into lots of different arenas, and he is poised with skills that will allow him to lead in an area of his choice.

The awards presented at Convocation to those within the Memorial Sloan Kettering community include the Frank Lappin Horsfall, Jr. Awards, which recognize outstanding research publications by graduate students; the Louise and Allston Boyer Young Investigator Awards in Clinical and Basic Research honoring Memorial Sloan Kettering physicians and scientists under the age of 40 who have demonstrated great promise and accomplishment in clinical and laboratory investigations; the Research Fellow Awards, which acknowledge the work of Sloan Kettering Institute postdoctoral fellows; the Willet F. Whitmore Award for Clinical Excellence, presented each year to a clinician whose talent and dedication reflect the standards set by Dr. Whitmore during his more than 46 years at the Center; and the Geoffrey Beene Graduate Fellowships, presented — for the first time this year — to two outstanding graduate students.



Memorial Hospital Physician-in-Chief Robert Wittes (right) presented the Willet F. Whitmore Award for Clinical Excellence to Memorial Sloan Kettering medical oncologist Robert Motzer.

Two additional awards, the C. Chester Stock Award Lectureship and the Katharine Berkan Judd Award, are presented to investigators working outside the Center. [A complete list of all award and PhD recipients appears below.]

This year, 16 students received their PhD degrees from Weill Graduate School of Medical Sciences, an academic partnership between the Weill Medical College of Cornell University and the Sloan Kettering Institute. Introduced by Dr. Varmus and Sloan Kettering Institute Director Thomas J. Kelly, the graduates and their research accomplishments were described by their faculty mentors.

Justin's research focused on a class of molecule called spiroketals that are found in a variety of biologically natural products. He developed a brand-new approach to synthesizing these molecules and in the process discovered a truly novel chemical reaction. His molecules are now being tested against a wide range of biological targets.

Before reading the Memorial Sloan Kettering Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Biomedical Research citation for Dr. Skorton, Chairman of the Boards of Overseers and Managers Douglas A. Warner III noted that he wished "to say to all those who have been recognized during the course of this Convocation how grateful we are for the invaluable contributions you make to our collective efforts in research, training, and in patient care."

Dr. Varmus closed the proceedings by echoing Dr. Skorton's "rallying call to support university presidents who are leading the charge on the restoration of basic science budgets."

A reception for guests and honorees followed in the Laurance S. Rockefeller Board Room.

Amy developed innovative approaches and models to test the model for how T cells develop in the thymus, and in so doing she proved that the model is wrong. Thanks to Amy, we're now on the right path.

Awards

Frank Lappin Horsfall, Jr. Fellowships
Vasilena Gocheva
Jaclyn C. Greimann

Geoffrey Beene Graduate Fellowships
Sindy N. Escobar Alvarez
Hyung-song Nam

Louise and Allston Boyer Young Investigator Awards

Boyer Clinical Research Award
David B. Solit, MD

Boyer Basic Research Award
Xuejun Jiang, PhD

Research Fellow Awards
Stéphane Larochelle, PhD
Katerina Abigail Politi, PhD

C. Chester Stock Award Lectureship
Napoleone Ferrara, MD
Genentech Fellow, Genentech, Inc.

Willet F. Whitmore Award for Clinical Excellence
Robert J. Motzer, MD

Katharine Berkan Judd Award Lectureship
Nahum Sonenberg, PhD
McGill University

The Memorial Sloan Kettering Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Biomedical Research
David J. Skorton
President, Cornell University

PhD Recipients

Charanjit Arora
*Protein-Protein
Interactions among
Meiotic Double-
Strand Break
Proteins in *S.
cerevisiae**

Maria A. Barna
*Molecular and
Cellular
Mechanisms
Controlling
Vertebrate Skeletal
Patterning*

Maryana I. Breitman
*Biochemical
Characterization of
COPI and its
Interactions with
ARF1 G-Protein*

Mario N. Chamorro
*Characterization of
Different Aspects of
Wnt Signaling in
Human and Mouse
Tumors*



Harold Varmus congratulates the winners of the Geoffrey Beene Graduate Fellowships Hyung-song Nam (far left) and Sindy Escobar Alvarez.

Terence Peter Gade
Integrated Imaging of Drug Delivery: A Molecular Imaging Approach to the Optimization of Cancer Therapy

Gaorav Gupta
Breast Cancer Metastasis to the Lungs: From Genes to Mechanisms

Hyojin Lee
Directed Differentiation and Functional Characterization of Embryonic Stem Cell-Derived Motoneurons

Joseph Douglas Mancias
Conserved Transport Signals for Exiting the Endoplasmic Reticulum in COPII-Coated Vesicles

Jayakrishnan Nandakumar
Discrimination of RNA Versus DNA by an RNA Ligase and Distinct Modes of Substrate Recognition by DNA Ligases

Kathryn Elizabeth O'Reilly
*Integration of mTOR and IGF-1 Signaling: Feedback Upregulation of Survival Pathways
in Human Cancer Cells*

Justin Stephen Potuzak
Stereocontrolled Synthesis of Spiroketal Using Novel Kinetic Cyclization Reactions

Andrew Steven Rakeman
The Role of NAP1-Mediated Cell Migration during Morphogenesis and Axis Specification in the Mouse

Jale Refik-Rogers
The Role of Cyclin B3 in Mammalian Gametogenesis

Lucas L. Sjulson

Two Photon Imaging of a Genetically Encodable Voltage Sensor

Amy L. Stolzer

Direct Visualization of T Cell Development and Lineage Commitment in the Thymus

Rajeshwari Rajan Valiathan

Functional Interactions of HIV-1 Gag with the Cellular Endocytic Pathway

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[Overview](#)

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[Research labs](#)

[Core facilities & resources](#)

▾ Education & Training

[Overview](#)

[Postdoctoral training](#)

[Gerstner Sloan Kettering Graduate School](#)

[Joint graduate programs](#)

[Programs for college & high school students](#)

▾ News & Events

[Overview](#)

[Seminars & events](#)

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