

# Program promotes greater diversity in molecular sciences

by Melissa Marino

Undergraduates from nearby colleges and universities got an inside look at Vanderbilt graduate programs during an open house held last week.

More than 170 prospective students and their faculty mentors representing nearly 40 institutions congregated on the Vanderbilt campus for a full day of poster sessions, scientific and informational presentations, and guided tours through Vanderbilt laboratories.

A major goal of the program is recruiting underrepresented minority students into molecular science graduate programs, said Jens Meiler, Ph.D., assistant professor of Chemistry, Pharmacology and Biomedical Informatics, and organizer of the program.

"The open house reaches out and recruits students from nearby universities, in particular institutions with a history

of serving groups underrepresented in science," Meiler said. About 40 percent of open house guests were minorities.

Minority enrollment at Vanderbilt has been growing. According to the Vanderbilt Enhancing Diversity in Graduate Education (VU-EDGE) office, Vanderbilt saw an overall 8 percent increase in the number of self-reported minority applicants last year, with a 15 percent increase in women applicants to science and engineering programs and 17 percent and 24 percent increases in the College of Arts and Sciences and Medical School graduate programs, respectively.

With the increased focus on minority recruitment in the molecular and chemical sciences, the team hopes to continue this progress and open the world of graduate research to more underrepresented populations.

Meiler said that the open



Neil Brake

Prospective graduate students toured several centers and laboratories this weekend to get a first-hand look at the cutting-edge technologies available through Vanderbilt graduate research programs. Here they visit with Walter Chazin, Ph.D., right.

house drew 50 preliminary graduate program applications and about 50 more for Vanderbilt's undergraduate summer research programs.

"It really was a huge success," said Meiler. "Our guests had an overwhelmingly positive impression about the dynamic, interdisciplinary and engaging Vanderbilt community."

One group even returned to

the NMR facility later that day for a special tour. Markus Voehler, chemist and tour guide for the facility added, "It is quite a joy to see such enthusiastic young students."

This year's event was sponsored by the Center in Molecular Toxicology, Center for Structural Biology, Vanderbilt Institute for Chemical Biology, the department of Chemistry, and the

Biomedical Research, Education & Training office. Programs including Molecular Toxicology, Molecular Biophysics, Chemical and Physical Biology, the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program, Integrative Training in Therapeutic Discovery, and the Chemistry-Biology Interface Training Program helped organize the open house. □