

# Meet a New ASP Member

Dr. Michael Tims, Academic Director for Herbal Medicine, Maryland University of Integrative Health, Laurel, Maryland, is our featured new ASP member. Dr. Tims, former ASP member and student poster award winner, is rejoining the ASP after a hiatus and shares with us his vision for his director position, his scientific passions and background, and his double life as an author, soccer fan, and oenophile.

By Dr. Dan Kulakowski

## How did you hear about the ASP?

ASP member Dr. Joe Betz was my co-advisor on my doctoral work while he was at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Silver Spring, Maryland. (Dr. Betz is currently at the Office of Dietary Supplements at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.) I was previously a member of the ASP; I won a student award for my poster on developing an analytical method for detecting goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*) adulteration back around 2000!

## Why did you join ASP?

I come from an herbalist tradition and, in the science realm, am an interdisciplinary chemical ecologist. At one point, the society had grown too much towards the grind and find side of the equation, and I no longer saw a place for my ideas. Outgoing ASP President Edward Kennelly recently talked me into rejoining. I met him when he was a postdoctoral fellow in the same FDA laboratories where I was a doctoral student.

## Do you belong to any other scientific societies?

I am a member of the American Herbalist Guild and International Society for Chemical Ecology.

## What are your current research interests in pharmacognosy?

I am Academic Director for the herbal programs at Maryland University of Integrative Health. I am focused on my role in institutional leadership and growing the herbal program, so I have less time for research. I still remain interested in exploring ecological influences in secondary metabolite formation in medicinal plants. I also use botanical pharmacognosy approaches with our students to develop good manufacturing practice methods suitable for smaller herbal product companies.

## What is your scientific background?

As part of my doctoral work, I initially explored the role of lectins as signaling molecules in American mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*) to initiate the intercalation of mistletoe and host plant vascular structures. My final project focused on understanding the chemical ecology of goldenseal rhizosphere and its effect on soil fungi. During this time I collaborated with the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN/FDA) to develop thin-layer chromatography methods for isolating pyrrolizidine alkaloids in comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) and to provide assessment of heavy metals present in imported Chinese herbal products. I also co-developed HerbMed, a web-based herbal database providing access to scientific data on the use and safety of herbal medicine.

I then did a National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Standards and Technology postdoctoral fellowship, where I



developed enzymatic extraction methods and performed certification measurements of green tea (*Camellia sinensis*) Standard Reference Materials (SRMs) in leaf powder, leaf powder extract, and finished product forms. I also worked on the development of analytical methods for the simultaneous separation and detection of a full spectrum of secondary metabolites found in kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*), soy (*Glycine max*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*).

## What would you like to achieve through your membership?

I wish to develop collaborations with other programs to benefit my program and to continue to learn about medicinal plants in a multi-disciplinary environment.

## What do you like doing in your spare time?

I enjoy my family, including two Labrador retrievers, exercise, hiking, and gardening. I am a voracious reader with a passion for contemporary poetry and noir detective fiction. I am a published poet, and my book, *The Acoustic Properties of Ancient People*, has recently been accepted by Finishing Line Press. As a futbol (soccer) fanatic, I follow the exploits of the US Men's National Team, DC United and FC Barcelona. I am also on a lifelong quest to taste great Cabernet Sauvignons, Bordeaux, Rhone wines and Pinot Noirs.

## What are you currently reading?

I am reading *An Obvious Fact* (Craig Johnson), *Fatal Pursuit* (Martin Walker), *The Other Side of Silence* (Philip Kerr), *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Robin Wall Kimmerer), and *Herbal Drugs and Phytopharmaceuticals* (Ed. Max Wichtl).

## What is your favorite organism (to study, or for general interest)?

I am fascinated by plant symbionts that have medicinal value, among them *Pedicularis canadensis*, *Phoradendron leucarpum*, and *Monotropa uniflora*. ■