Dear Colleagues and Friends:

As you know, the High-Council of Moroccan American Medical & Biology Doctors (HC-MAMBD) was created a year ago on June 6, 2008. On this occasion of our Council’s First Anniversary, I would like to thank all of you for your confidence, dedication, and perseverance.

We can all be proud of the great achievements that we realized during the past year and we have to work even harder to achieve more for our community, our beloved country Morocco, the scientific community, and the humanity at large. We will celebrate this First Anniversary during our First Social Meeting in Orlando, FL.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all of you for the job well done and I encourage myself and you all to keep up the good work.

Our Council was born a year ago surrounded by a small family and started to grow little by little. No wonder that many prominent MDs, Associate Professors, Professors, and Grad Students from the US, Morocco, and Europe joined the Council in past year and many more are joining us continuously.

Long Live to our Council and see you in Orlando, FL August 1st.

Dr. Allal Boutajangout

Adnane Boualem,1 Mohamed Fergany,1 Ronan Fernandez,1 Christelle Troaedic,1 Antoine Martin,1 Halima Morin,2 Marie-Agnes Sari,3 Fabrice Collin,3 Jonathan M. Flowers,4 Michel Pitrat,5 Michael D. Purugganan,4 Catherine Dogimont,5 Abdelhafid Bendahmane1*

Andromonoecy is a widespread sexual system in angiosperms characterized by plants carrying both male and bisexual flowers. In melon, this sexual form is controlled by the identity of the alleles at the andromonoecious (a) locus. Cloning of the a gene reveals that andromonoecy results from a mutation in the active site of 1-aminocyclopropane-1-carboxylic acid synthase. Expression of the active enzyme inhibits the development of the male organs and is not required for carpel development. A causal single-nucleotide polymorphism associated with andromonoecy was identified, which suggests that the a allele has been under recent positive selection and may be linked to the evolution of this sexual system.
A Genome-Wide Gene Expression Signature of Environmental Geography in Leukocytes of Moroccan Amazighs

This article was published in PLoS Genetics by the Council’s member Yourself Idaghdour and his collaborators. Youssef is a Fulbright Scholar and a PhD Student at NCSU. Congratulations Yourself!

A Genome-Wide Gene Expression Signature of Environmental Geography in Leukocytes of Moroccan Amazighs

Yourself Idaghdour1, John D. Storey2, Sami J. Jadal-lah2, Greg Gibson1,4*

1 North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, United States of America, 2 Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, United States of America, 3 HRH Prince Sultan International Foundation for Conservation and Development of Wildlife, Agadir, Morocco, 4 University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

doi:10.1371/journal.pgen.1000052

Abstract:

The different environments that humans experience are likely to impact physiology and disease susceptibility. In order to estimate the magnitude of the impact of environment on transcript abundance, we examined gene expression in peripheral blood leukocyte samples from 46 desert nomadic, mountain agrarian and coastal urban Moroccan Amazigh individuals. Despite great expression heterogeneity in humans, as much as one third of the leukocyte transcriptome was found to be associated with differences among regions. Genome-wide polymorphism analysis indicates that genetic differentiation in the total sample is limited and is unlikely to explain the expression divergence. Methylation profiling of 1,505 CpG sites suggests limited contribution of methylation to the observed differences in gene expression. Genetic network analysis further implies that specific aspects of immune function are strongly affected by regional factors and may influence susceptibility to respiratory and inflammatory disease. Our results show a strong genome-wide gene expression signature of regional population differences that presumably include lifestyle, geography, and biotic factors, implying that these can play at least as great a role as genetic divergence in modulating gene expression variation in humans.

Yourself Idaghdour’s Biography:

Yourself Idaghdour was born on February 11, 1975 and raised in the heart of the Souss region in southern Morocco. He received a BS in Biology from the University of Ibn Zohr, Agadir, Morocco in 1997 and joined an international wildlife conservation research institution. He developed an interest in the emerging field of conservation genetics and volunteered to help save the last wild population of bald ibis in the world in the Souss Massa National Park. Yourself took his ambitions further and pursued a Masters degree in Molecular Genetics at the University of Leicester in the UK where he was awarded his degree with a summa cum laude distinction and received the Amersham-Pharmacia Biotech prize for the best performance of the year at the school of biological sciences in 2002. Yourself moved back to Morocco and worked on various genetic projects. In 2005, he was awarded a PhD Fulbright Scholarship and joined North Carolina State University, NC, USA. He recently completed a project investigating the effects of the environment on disease susceptibility patterns and how genes are expressed. He conducted fieldwork in Morocco in the last two years, sampling from Bedouin nomads in the Sahara desert, urban dwellers living in the city of Agadir, and isolated rural villagers in Atlas mountains. The project was featured in several newspapers, TV and radio stations including an interview with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) radio station in Washington DC.

Council’s Publications Team
The Council’s Vice—President, Dr. Abdelmajid Kassem, Is Tenured and Promoted to Full Professor!

Dr. Abdelmajid Kassem, the Council’s VP, was tenured and promoted to full professorship at the Department of Natural Sciences, Fayetteville State University after only five years in Academia.

Dr. Kassem spent two years as Assistant Professor (2004-2006) of Plant Biology at Kean University, NJ, and three years as Associate Professor of Plant Biology (2006-2009) at Fayetteville State University, NC.

Indeed, this is a great achievement that is rare to achieve in this short period of time. Congratulations Professor!

Dr. Kassem serves as a member of the Editorial Board of “Journal of Biotech Research”, an Advisory Board member for Scientific Journals International (SJI), and an Associate Editor of “Journal of Forestry, Horticulture, and Soil Science”.

Dr. Abdelmajid Kassem received several awards this academic year including the Department of Natural Sciences “Research & Publications Award” and “Excellence in Undergrad Research Mentorship Award”.

These awards were presented to him at the College of Arts and Sciences Award Ceremony held at Fayetteville State University on April 27, 2009.

Dr. Kassem, his students, and colleagues published the following article:


Dr. Kassem is serving the Moroccan scientific community since 2004. He served as President (2004-2006) and Vice-President (2006-2008) of the Moroccan American Society for Life Sciences (MASLS or Biomatec US). He was chair of the Organizing Committee of the New Jersey 2006 Meeting and an active member of the Organizing Committee of the MA 2008 Meeting. Dr. Kassem resigned as MASLS’ VP after his term ended in May 2008 and co-founded the HC-MAMBD in June 2008 with Dr. Allal Boutajangout.

Congratulations Professor!

Council’s Publications Team

“Awards Presented to Dr. Abdelmajid Kassem during the College of Arts and Sciences Award Ceremony held at Fayetteville State University on April 27, 2009.”

“Of course, I am happy to receive these Awards which are the fruits of my hard work and dedication to research and education” Said Dr. Kassem.
Dr. Khalid Meksem, an HC—MAMBD Board member and an Associate Professor at the Department of Plant, Soil, and Agricultural Systems, was promoted to Full Professor on April 2009 after only 4 years at the Associate Professor level which is a rare achievement compared to many colleagues and institutions’ averages.

Moreover, Prof. Meksem received the Department of Plant, Soil, and Agricultural Systems “Teacher of The Year Award” in 2007-2008.

Prof. Meksem also received over $1.2 million in research funds from USDA, IL Soybean Association, and United Soybean Board.

Prof. Meksem holds three patents in developing Soybean germplasm resistant to both sudden death syndrome (SDS) and soybean cyst nematode (SCN), and “Plant Derived Resistant Genes”.

Prof. Meksem serves as an Associate Editor of “International Journal of Plant Genomics” since 2006 and as Co-Editor in Chief of the “Journal Plant Genome and Systems Biology” from 2007 to 2008.

Prof. Meksem published over 42 peer-reviewed articles in high impact journals including the following most recent articles:


Congratulations Professor and Keep Up the Good Work!

Council’s Publications Team

“These Awards make you happy because they encourage you to achieve more and go several steps beyond your full potential” said Dr. Meksem.
To study in the USA is a dream for millions of students across the world including Moroccan students. In this article, I will give you pertinent information on how to study in the US with a full scholarship from an expert who took the challenge, studied, and received his PhD in the US. First, let me talk about Undergraduate Studies (BA, BS, and other undergrad degrees):

To be admitted by a community college (2 years colleges that award an Associate degree which is equivalent to a DEUG), a 4–years college, or a university, you need the following as an international student:

A TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) score of no less than 200/300 (computer format), or no less than 520 (paper format). This test can be taken in Morocco, mostly in Casablanca and Rabat. Please visit the ETS website for more information (www.ets.org).

A transcript (relevat de notes) from your high school (Lycee) with a relatively good GPA (une bonne moyenne generale)

Proof of ability to pay your tuition (frais de scolarite).

A complete Application (un dossier complet) that you can download from the institution’s (Community College, 4-years College or university) website.

Once your application is complete, the institution will issue you an I-20 form that you present to the US Consulate in Morocco to receive a student visa (an F1 visa). If you are married, your spouse can obtain an F2 visa. You cannot receive your I-20 form without paying at least one semester of coursework.

I have to say here that it is extremely rare, or almost impossible, to receive a scholarship while pursuing your undergraduate degree. It is also almost impossible to work and pay for your living and tuition here in the US.

For Graduate Studies (MA, MS, PhD, and other grad degrees): You will need the following:

A TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Language) score of no less than 213/300 (computer format), or no less than 550 (paper format). This test can be taken in Morocco, mostly in Casablanca and Rabat.

A GRE (Graduate Record Examination) score. Most universities accept a score of 1400 or higher. This exam can also be taken in Morocco like the TOEFL. Please visit the ETS website for more information (www.ets.org).

A transcript (relevat de notes) from your university with a very good GPA. Most Masters degrees Programs (universities) accept a GPA of at least 3.0/5 (soit une moyenne de 12/20). However, certain Masters and most PhD programs require a higher GPA of 3.5 and above (14/20).

You can obtain a translation of your Moroccan educational credentials into the US system by applying at the Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (www.ece.org).

Three letters of recommendation in English! Ask your professors to write high quality recommendation letters specifically for the university and program you are applying for and not just a general letter like most Moroccan Professors write, unfortunately.

Here, you can apply directly to the University asking for a full scholarship, Teaching Assistantship, or Research Assistantship. These are competitive and many students across the world are competing for these scholarships. To maximize your chances, your academic achievements must be outstanding:

A higher GPA. Many US students graduate with a 4.0 GPA which is extremely hard to beat by Moroccan graduates because of the Moroccan Educational System!

Excellent recommendation letters

Connections, connections, connections! Yes, if you know somebody in a US university who can help you get a scholarship, why not ask him or her.

An alternative to asking for a scholarship is to pay for your own tuition, of course if you are rich and can afford it!

Once your application is complete, the institution will issue you an I-20 form that you present to the US Consulate in Morocco to receive a student visa (an F1 visa). If you are married, your spouse can obtain an F2 visa. Your I-20 will be issued to you if you are granted a scholarship or assistantship.

There are other exchange programs that allow you to come and study in the US such as the Fulbright Scholar Program; however these are not detailed here. Please visit the Council for International Exchange of Scholars for more information on such programs (http://www.cies.org).

There are more than 8000 universities and colleges in the US and most of these can be accessed via this website: (http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/) or other websites that you can obtain by a simple search engine.

I hope that this information is helpful to our fellow Moroccan students and the council is ready to answer specific questions regarding studies in the US. Please contact me at <kassem2k@yahoo.com>.

Abdelmajid Kassem
Council’s Publications Team
The Following Articles Were Published Recently by the Council’s Members:


Karnabi E, Qu Y, Mancarella S, Yue Y, Wadgaonkar R, **Boutjdir M**. Silencing of Cav1.2 gene in neonatal cardiomyocytes by lentiviral delivered shRNA. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun. 2009 Jul 10;384(4):409-14.*

Mancarella S, Yue Y, Karnabi E, Qu Y, El Sherif N, **Boutjdir M**. Impaired Calcium Homeostasis is Associated with Atrial Fibrillation in the alpha1D L-Type Ca2 Channel KO Mouse. *Am J Physiol Heart Circ Physiol. 2008 Nov;295(5):H2017-24*


Chahine M, Qu Y, Mancarella S, **Boutjdir M**. Protein kinase C activation inhibits alpha1D L-type Ca channel: a single-channel analysis. *Pflugers Arch. 2008 Feb;455(5):913-9.*

Congratulations Members! Keep Up the Good Work!
Council’s Publications Team

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Dr. Nadia Rachdaoui, a Council’s Board Member relocated to New Jersey along with her family. Nadia is expecting a baby in September! We are waiting for the new council’s member!
The Council's President (Dr. Boutajangout) Participated in Inaugurating A Health Center in Khemiset, Morocco

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Noureddine Hamamouch, the current Council's Secretary and a postdoc at North Carolina State University (NCSU) recently visited Morocco and conducted several important and beneficial activities to Moroccan undergraduate and graduate students, and faculty members.

Noureddine presented his work, done at the Department of Plant Pathology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, at the University Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Dhar El Mehraz, Fes, Morocco. The title of his presentation was:

“Application of Biotechnology for Disease Management: Different Pathogens Demand Different Strategies.”

Noureddine had also fruitful discussion with faculty members about the challenges facing research activities at the university, the possibilities for research collaboration with his Lab at NCSU. In Addition, Noureddine met with undergrad and grad students (MS and PhD), discussed with them their research projects, and gave them detailed information about how to apply for graduate studies in the US.

This is a concrete example of activities conducted by the Council’s members to help our fellow Moroccans in their research projects, explain to them how the American educational system works, and give them the opportunity to explore it. Thank you Noureddine for the job well done!

Council’s Publications Team
Overview:
Under the Patronage of HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, Wife of HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Ruler of Dubai, the Arab Science & Technology Foundation (ASTF) is pleased to inform you that it is organizing with the cooperation of the Dubai Business Women Council and in collaboration with the UNESCO/ISESCO and number of elite selected international and Arabic scientific entities its first forthcoming Conference on: "Arab Women in Science and Technology: Empowerment for the Development of the Arab World" 28th–30th September 2009 - Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Objectives:
- Identify the current status of Arab Women Researchers in the Arab world.
- Recognize the important role of Arab Women in S & T.
- Establish a main infrastructure/mechanism for electronic collaborations between women in science and technology, and fully utilize them to reach all development goals.
- Form active teams to develop new projects and identify specific activities that will fully implement these projects.

Date & Venue:
28-30 September 2009 – Dubai – United Arab Emirates

For applying and registering please visit the conference site at: www.astf.net/womenrdi
For more information kindly contact the conference team on: womenrdi@astf.net;
Conference Tel: 00971 508054017
Tel: 00971 65050551
Fax: 00971 65050553

Registration Fees
Registration fees is 150 $ or 500 Dhs

Source: AST Website
Council’s Publications Team
A college physics professor was explaining a particularly complicated concept to his class when a pre-med student interrupted him. "Why do we have to learn this stuff?" one young man blurted out. "To save lives," the professor responded before continuing the lecture. A few minutes later the student spoke up again. "So how does physics save lives?"

The professor stared at the student for a long time without saying a word. Finally the professor continued. "Physics saves lives," he said, "because it keeps certain people out of medical school."

In a recent meeting of its Board of Directors, the Council changed its policy on membership dues. The membership is now free for our Moroccan fellows residing in Morocco: MDs, PhDs, and Students alike. However, other scientists in the US, Canada, Europe, and other parts of the world, the membership dues are symbolic and details can be found in the council’s website:
Visit: http://www.hc-mambd.org/ and click on membership.

In this issue of The HC—MAMBD Newsletter (Volume 1, Issue 2), we would like to welcome all the members who joined us in the past year and a special thanks to these new members who joined us recently:

- Mohamed Boutjdir, PhD, Professor, SUNY Downstate Medical Center, NY
- Yourself Idaghdour, PhD Student
- Abderrazak Kitsy, Master Student, Fayetteville State University, NC
- Khaled Ouertani, Master Student, Fayetteville State University, NC
- Said Zakini, MD, Marrakech, Morocco
- Abdelali Barakat, Research Associate, Penn State University, PA
- Faouzi Bekkaoui, Associate Director of Research, National Research Council of Canada, Canada
- Aicha Saadane, Sr. Scientist, Case Western Reserve University, OH

A complete list of new members is still in preparation and will be published soon online.

Council’s Publications Team

The Council Welcomes Its New Members

Our New Student Members

Yourself Idaghdour: Fulbright Scholar and PhD Student, NC State University, Raleigh, NC.

Abderrazak Kitsy (left) & Khaled Ouertani (right), Master Students, Fayetteville State University, NC, USA. Abderrazak and Khaled work under the supervision of Prof. Abdelamjid Kassem.
The Council Welcomes Prof. Mohamed Boutjdir as a Member

Dr. Boutjdir is a Professor at the Department of Medicine at NYU School of Medicine, the Associate Chief of staff for Research & Development at the VA New York Harbor healthcare system and a Professor at the Departments of Medicine, Anatomy & Cell Biology, and Pharmacology & Physiology at SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

In 2002, Dr. Boutjdir has been Knighted by His Majesty, the King of Morocco, Mohamed VI, with Wissam Al Arch (the order of the Throne, Grade Chevalier de l’Ordre du Trone). Dr. Boutjdir served two terms as the President of the Moroccan Association of Researchers and Scholars (MARS) based in the USA.

Dr. Boutjdir’s research interest is in Cardiovascular Diseases both at the translational and Clinical levels. At the translational level his work focused on Congenital Heart Block (CHB) which is a heart conduction defect that affects fetuses and infants born to mothers with autoimmune diseases. The ultimate goal of this research program is to understand the electrophysiological mechanisms of CHB and develop novel therapeutic approaches, which may reverse or prevent CHB through fundamental and translational observations at the bench. In addition, his research interest expands to the pathophysiology of central nervous system control of cardiac function through complex signaling cascades. At the clinical level, the cardiovascular health disparities center of excellence aims at reducing disparities from cardiovascular disease in minorities and new immigrant populations in New York City through clinical and community research, community education and outreach, and medical fellowship training. Several clinical research projects are being conducted from acute myocardial infarction, metabolic syndrome/diabetes to cardiac arrhythmias.

Dr. Boutjdir serves in several advisory boards for cardiovascular study sections for many granting institutions such as the National Institutes of Health, the American Heart Association both local and National Centers, the Veterans Administration and serves as an expert for the March of Dimes. Dr. Boutjdir served a Chairman of the VA Cardiovascular Study section and the prestigious Middleton Award Committee, which selects and gives the highest lifetime achievement award within the VA. Dr. Boutjdir is funded by the National Institutes of Health and VA grants. Dr. Boutjdir serves as a reviewer for many National and European high impact journals such as Circulation Research, Circulation, American Journal of Cardiology, Journal of Physiology London and Cardiovascular Research. Dr. Boutjdir is also an active member of journal editorial boards.

Dr. Boutjdir serves a member of Joint Deans’ Advisory Council for both NYU School of Medicine and SUNY Downstate Medical Center. He is also a member of the Clinical Executive Board at VA NY Harbor Health Care System, NY and a member of Board of Directors for the non-profit Narrows Institute for Biomedical Research, NY. Dr. Boutjdir has also interest and plays a significant role in training and mentoring. He regularly provides research training to medical students, residents, cardiology fellows, graduate students, and Post-Doctorals. The majority of his trainees went on to become independent clinicians/scientists at prestigious institutions such as Harvard and Yale. Administratively, Dr. Boutjdir is known for his proactive leadership in establishing successful research programs with budgets over $15 million.

To be Continued on page 14.
Dr Boutjdir is regularly being invited to lecture nationally and internationally. In March 2009, he was invited for a live interview with Al-Jazira television to participate in the discussions with Dr Gunter Bloble, the 1999 Nobel Price winner and in April, 2009 he was invited to Chair a session at the 5th Annual Congress of the European Cardiac Arrhythmia Society in Paris, France. In May 2009, Dr Boutjdir has been invited by the World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa held at the Dead Sea in Amman, Jordan to participate as an expert in the science and technology sessions. Some of the questions Dr Boutjdir was asked to address include 1) how do you assess the current situation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in terms of higher education, science, research and technology, and what strategies would you propose for regional advancement in these areas? 2) What key obstacles to implementing a successful regional science and technology strategy do you perceive in the MENA region, and what is necessary to promote possibilities for regional cooperation in these areas? 3) What relevant experiences have you had in working with science and technology or relevant initiatives in the MENA region?

During the world economic forum, Dr Boutjdir had the opportunity and the privilege to meet with several Moroccan officials such as Mr. Ahmed Reda Chami, the Ministre de l'Industrie, du Commerce et des Nouvelles Technologies and the Director general for Casablanca’s Stock Market, Mr. Karim Hajji. Dr Boutjdir’s also met with Amr Mussa (see picture), the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States and with Senator, John Kerry (see picture) of Massachusetts, USA.

List of recently selected peer-reviewed publications by Dr. Boutjdir:


Chahine M, Qu Y, Mancarella S, Boutjdir M. Protein kinase C activation inhibits alpha1D L-type Ca channel: a single-channel analysis. Pflugers Arch. 2008 Feb;455(5):913-9.

Welcome Dr. Mohamed Boutjdir!

Council’s Publications Team
The Council’s Photo Gallery (Dr. Boutajangout’s Activities)
The Council’s Photo Gallery—Cont’d (MASLS NJ 2006 Meeting Photos)
Council’s Committees

Constitution & Bylaws Committee

Noureddine Hamamouch, Chair
Amina El Ayadi
Allal Boutajangout
Abdelmajid Kassem
Khalid Meksem

Meeting Organization Committee

Khalid Meksem, Co-Chair
Allal Boutajangout, Co-Chair
Amina El Ayadi
Abdelmajid Kassem
Khalid Meksem
Nadia Racdaoui

Publications Committee

Khalid Meksem, Co-Chair
Abdelmajid Kassem, Co-Chair
Allal Boutajangout
Noureddine Hamamouch
Amina El Ayadi
Nadia Racdaoui

Public Relations Committee

Amina El Ayadi, Chair
Allal Boutajangout
Abdelmajid Kassem
Noureddine Hamamouch
Khalid Meksem
Nadia Racdaoui

Membership Committee

Khalid Meksem, Chair
Allal Boutajangout
Abdelmajid Kassem
Noureddine Hamamouch
Amina El Ayadi
Nadia Racdaoui