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MEDIA RELEASE

Human Genomics class gets up close and personal

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Students in Simon Fraser University professor Ryan Morin's Human Genomics class are getting a sound understanding of genetics and their own personal genetic makeup, thanks to DNA testing kits supplied to each student.

Morin orders the 23andMe personal genetic testing kit for students who are interested in exploring their personal genetic makeup. The Faculty of Science covers the cost, which is \$179 per student. After signing a Terms and Conditions agreement, students spend up to 20 minutes filling a test tube with saliva. Once done, they simply affix the cap on the test tube and mail it to the U.S. for analysis.

The 23andMe personal genetic testing kit provides information about ancestry, drug sensitivity and Mendelian diseases—heritable conditions dependent on the relationship between dominant and recessive genes, such as cystic fibrosis, male-pattern baldness, Tay-Sachs disease and Huntington's disease.

Morin reminds students that the test is not conclusive, however, since most diseases and human genetic traits follow a complex pattern of inheritance that can be affected by environmental factors.

"Results simply represent a possibility or a higher/lower probability of developing disease relative to other members of the population," says Morin.

While the class awaits test results, Morin tasks students with learning how to prepare and analyze the types of data they'll need for predicting their genetic risks based on their raw 23andMe data.

"What an enlightening and valuable course," says student Rebecca Wiens. "I found out that I had a variant that contributed to a higher incidence of abnormal clotting. Since one of my grandparents died of multi-infarct (vascular) dementia, this is an indicator that I need to be aware of medication and habits that may increase my chance of clotting to ensure that I don't succumb to the same fate."

Multiple research groups have since contacted Wiens asking to use her information and unique family history to supplement their studies.

Former student Bruno Grande says, "I would recommend this course to anyone who would be interested in knowing more about what DNA actually is and what it does. Human Genomics achieves this superbly not only by covering a genome relevant to us all—our own—but it does so in an engaging way by allowing students to apply the knowledge they've acquired in class to their own DNA."

Grande received some interesting results as well. "My results showed that my maternal lineage (my mom's mom's mom, and

so on) are most likely Native American, which I found pretty cool to know.”

Morin has taught Human Genomics 462, using the kits, for two semesters and has received positive feedback.

“I find this style of teaching great for engaging students in what genomics is, instead of using the old show-and-tell method. Students get way more out of material when there is a personal angle involved and their excitement goes way up. I love teaching this course—any way to get the student engaged is worth the investment.”

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