

THAT SCIENCE MOJO

David Wheeler's advisor, Guillermo Romero, an associate professor of pharmacology and chemical biology, came into the lab with good and bad news. The good news was that he was nominating Wheeler, a student in the School of Medicine's Medical Scientist Training Program, to go to a meeting. The bad news was that the application was due that day.

The "meeting" would be a week in Germany with other young researchers from around the world. Add 25 Nobel laureates to the gathering, acting as scientific elders, and include informal chats with those scientists over a beer. It was the annual Nobel Laureate Meetings at Lindau, and it sounded too good to be true.

But it was true and very good. Both Wheeler (shown above) and Pitt MD/PhD chemistry student Amir Faraji (not shown here) were chosen as 2010 Lindau Scholars. This year, Kelly Quesnelle (above), PhD candidate in molecular pharmacology in the School of Medicine, was nominated by her advisor, Jennifer Grandis, professor of otolaryngology, to attend the June meeting. She says, "I'm really excited and humbled to be chosen. I can't wait to meet [Edmond Henri] Fischer, who codiscovered the reversible nature of protein phosphorylation, which is essential to the cell signaling that I study. The other students at the meeting have shown a certain scientific mojo, too, and I am excited to meet and interact with them." Only researchers with that "mojo" are invited to attend the meeting. Thousands of applicants from about 70 countries are whittled to approximately 500 attendees.

Wheeler (who studies something about how certain proteins modulate important things that are too complex to describe here) calls the experience "life changing." He not only watched the World Cup and played chess with Nobel laureates, he also found their stories motivating and reassuring. Wheeler says, "You hear the laureates' lab stories, like how they went through five fire extinguishers to get an experiment to work. You realize they were once just like you."

—Maureen Passmore
—Photo by Cami Mesa