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A central mission of the [Vanderbilt Diabetes Center »](#) and the [Vanderbilt DRTC »](#) is training the next generation of scientists and physicians who will improve the lives of patients with diabetes. Each year the Vanderbilt Diabetes Center presents the Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes Award to recognize a graduate student and a postdoctoral fellow based on his/her diabetes-related research at Vanderbilt.

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In the M.D. post-doctoral fellow category, the 2011 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes is **Ashley Shoemaker**. Working with Roger Cone, Ph.D., in Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, her research focuses on early-onset obesity, particularly diseases that cause abnormal hypothalamic regulation of energy balance. Better understanding of the abnormalities in food intake and energy expenditure could help doctors develop new strategies for treating or preventing obesity in these patients.

In the Ph.D. post-doctoral fellow category, the 2011 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes is **Li Kang**. Working with David Wasserman, Ph.D., in Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, her work has shown that increased deposition of extracellular matrix (ECM) components contributes to insulin resistance in muscle and that treating mice with pharmacological agents that degrade ECM components reverses high-fat diet-induced muscle insulin resistance. Her research will provide new opportunities to explore therapeutics for insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.

In the graduate student category, the 2011 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes is **Leah Potter**, who recently completed her doctorate in Molecular Physiology and Biophysics. Her research, conducted under the supervision of Mark Magnuson M.D., has been focused on using fluorescence-activated cell sorting and RNA-sequencing methods to elucidate the transcriptional profiles of pancreatic progenitor cells. The knowledge gained from her studies may point to strategies for making fully functional beta cells from human embryonic stem cells.

In the graduate student category, the 2011 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes is **Jennifer Plank**, a current student in Cell and Developmental Biology. Working with Patricia Labosky, Ph.D., Jennifer studies regulators of pancreatic beta cell mass expansion. She has identified important roles for the neural crest and for the transcription factor Foxd3 in the beta cell. The findings from both of her projects can be applied to the generation of beta cells to treat patients with diabetes.