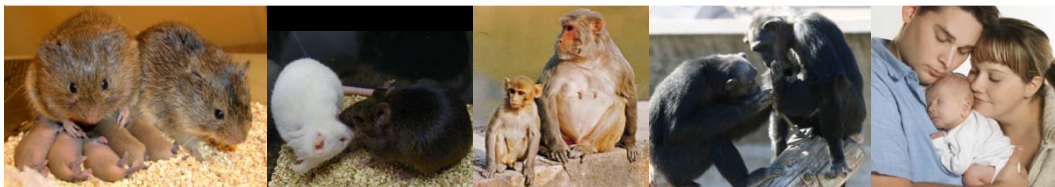




CTSN graduate student Kara Kittelberger receives NIH fellowship to study brain mechanisms underlying generation of affiliative behavior



Kara Kittelberger, a graduate student in Dr. Larry Young's lab in the CTSN at Emory University, was recently awarded an NRSA Fellowship from the National Institutes of Mental Health. Her three-year project will focus on brain mechanisms underlying the regulation of oxytocin release in the generation of affiliative behavior and the formation of monogamous pair bonds. Numerous psychiatric disorders, most notably autism spectrum disorders and schizophrenia, are marked by symptoms of social cognitive deficits. Currently, no known drug treatments are available to combat social deficits characteristic of these psychiatric diseases. The oxytocin system plays a well-known role in social behavior in both humans and model animals, including the monogamous prairie vole. The recent discovery of a novel mechanism of stimulating central oxytocin release through the use of a peripherally administrable melanocortin receptor agonist, will enable peripheral stimulation of oxytocin release within the brain and promote prosocial behavior in the prairie vole. Understanding how oxytocin release can be regulated by different neuropeptide systems will enable the development of effective pharmacotherapies able to modulate and enhance oxytocin signaling to ultimately boost social cognition. This may lead to new translational therapies able to ameliorate social cognitive deficits characteristic of multiple psychiatric disorders.



*Promoting Discovery
and Healing of the
Social Brain*
