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2022 SEA Symposium Abstract

SUNY Old Westbury

Old Westbury NY

Corresponding Faculty Member: Jillian Nissen (nissenj@oldwestbury.edu)

Investigating gene functions in the F1 cluster phage Akhila

Soban Choudhry, Fatima Bhalli, Sharay Grosvenor, Leilany Melenciano, Farhaneh Moosavi, Deep Patel, Tamahina Pierrot, Rebeca Reinoso, Joselyn Sale, Shania Sargeant, Kyle Torrance, Nicole Vasquez, Robert Bednarczyk, Fernando Nieto, Jillian Nissen

SUNY Old Westbury is a part of the 10th Cohort of the HHMI SEA-PHAGES program, and recently joined the 3rd cohort of the SEA-GENES project in 2021. The phage Akhila was isolated in Fall 2019 as part of the phage discovery component that was integrated into the honors section of Basic Biosciences I Laboratory (BS2401). As this section was switched to a remote format in Fall 2020, students in this course instead annotated Akhila’s genome as a part of the SEA-PHAGES Bioinformatics project. Akhila has a Siphoviridae morphotype with a temperate life cycle. It was sequenced at the University of Pittsburgh Bacteriophage Institute using Illumina sequencing with a shotgun coverage of 1484. It has 56,251 base pairs and 62.1% GC content. It belongs to the F1 cluster of Mycobacterium smegmatis mc2155 phages. The final annotation of this phage identified 99 genes, 37 with assigned functions, and 62 with no known function. As the GENES program serves to investigate the function of these phage genes, 58 have been amplified from phage DNA, 36 of which have assigned functions, and 22 with no known function. All 58 have undergone isothermal assembly into the pExTra backbone, and chemical transformation of E. coli with these plasmids along with clone verification is currently underway. By the end of this semester, we intend to perform cytotoxicity and defense assays in M. smegmatis to determine the role of these genes in the phage life cycle.