Scott H. Williamson

May 15, 1975 — March 14, 2008

Dr. Scott Williamson, Assistant Professor of Biological Statistics and Computational Biology, passed away on Friday, March 14, 2008 after a year-long battle with glioblastoma. A rising star in the field of population genetics, Scott was best known for his work on using diffusion models for inference of natural selection and demographic history from genetic data. He will be fondly remembered by all who worked with him for his brilliance, humble nature, and kindness of spirit.

Scott was born in Lawrence, Kansas, the son of Brad and Carol Williamson. He was a natural athlete and scholar and seemed to excel effortlessly in whatever academic field or sport he tried. From an early age, his parents and grandparents instilled in him a love of the natural world, and along with his sister, Erica, spent an idyllic youth hiking and camping in his native state. His fondness and encyclopedic knowledge of natural history was reminiscent of the founders of the field of evolutionary biology and provided exceptional training for his career as an academic biologist.

A gifted mathematician, Scott excelled as an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of Kansas, where he worked with Maria Orive, John Kelly, and Richard Prum, among others. His Ph.D. thesis under Orive, focused on developing novel approaches for rigorous inference of evolutionary forces from DNA sequence data. His breadth of study was quite remarkable and ranged from mathematical modeling of bird feather formation and pigmentation to inference of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) population dynamics to identifying signatures of natural selection from DNA sequence data.

In 2003, he joined the newly formed Department of Biological Statistics and Computational Biology at Cornell as a post-doctoral researcher working with Carlos D. Bustamante and Rasmus Nielsen. Here, Scott found an invigorating and collaborative environment that allowed him to blossom into one of the most productive young evolutionary geneticists of his generation. He worked tirelessly to tackle difficult problems including modeling the joint impact of natural selection and population size change on patterns of genetic diversity, developing population genetic theories of domestication, and scouring the human genome for statistical signatures of recent adaptive evolution in our species. In 2006, he chose to stay at Cornell as an Assistant Professor after fielding job offers from throughout the country. During his graduate career and time at Cornell, he authored and co-authored nearly 20 scholarly articles including papers in *Nature, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (USA*), *Proceedings*

of the Royal Society B, Genetics, Molecular Biology and Evolution, and the *Public Library of Sciences – Genetics.* Scott's work also caught the imagination of the popular press, and his research was featured in both *Discover* magazine (Top 100 Science Stories of the Year 2007) and the *New York Times*. Tragically, during his first year as a faculty member, he was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor that would ultimately take his life. Scott fought bravely and strongly making frequent trips to Rochester and Duke University where he was treated.

Although many of us knew Scott as a scientist and educator, he considered his most important role that of a husband and father. A doting partner and parent, Scott adored his wife, Shannon, and two young daughters, Emma and Claire. The Williamsons lived in Trumansburg, and loved their small village on Lake Cayuga. In the tradition of his parents, Scott and Shannon spent many hours with their daughters enjoying the natural beauty of the region, and traveled to the mountains and seas of the East coast.

Scott Williamson was a scholar, a father, a husband, and a great friend. He will be missed by all who knew him, and remembered fondly for having made our lives better.

Carlos D. Bustamante, Chairperson; Charles F. Aquadro, Andrew Clark