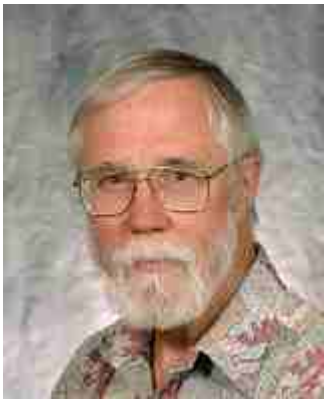
Meet John C. Crabbe, Ph.D.



John C. Crabbe, Ph.D. is a professor of behavioral neuroscienceat Oregon Health & Science University, a senior research career scientist at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center, and the director of the Portland Alcohol Research Center. Dr. Crabbe recently won the RSA Seixas Award at the Research Society on Alcoholism's annual meeting in June 2012 in San Francisco, California.

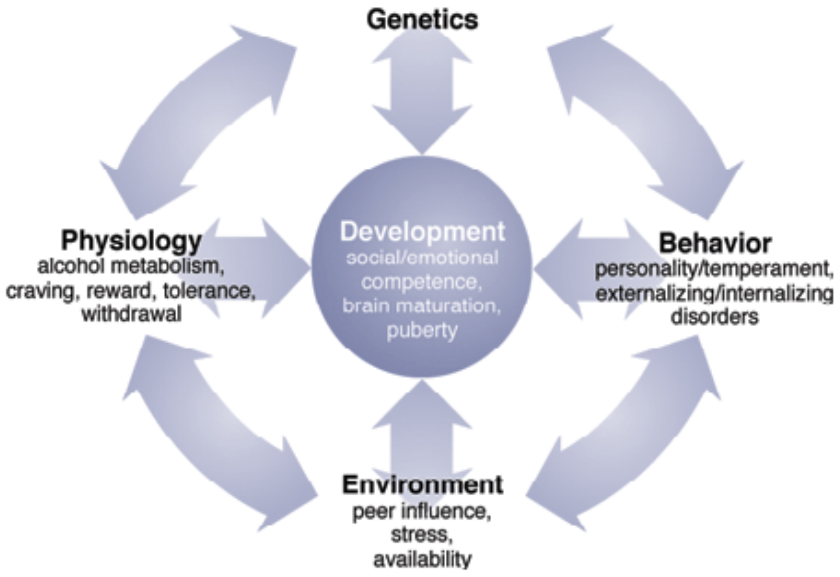
Writer Sherry Wasilow interviewed Dr. Crabbe from his office at the Portland VA.

SW: How did you begin your work in the field of alcohol studies?

JC: I started graduate school in social psychology, but became intrigued with a new Behavior Genetics Institute and joined that program. The institute's founder was studying alcohol drinking in mice. Even though I did my PhD work on learning and memory, I later began studying alcohol tolerance because it is partly learned. Before long, I had shifted my interests to studying the genetics of alcohol's effects in mice, where they remain today.

SW: What day-to-day applications do you think your research has for both clinicians and non-clinicians?

JC: We know that about half an individual's risk of developing alcohol dependence is genetic, and half is due to environmental circumstances such as peers, friends, family, life stressors, etc.



(http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh283/images/genetics.gif) In mice, we can model both the genetic and the environmental factors. We can also explore the brain changes that are important in ways we obviously cannot in human subjects.

Both mouse brain biology and genetics are pretty similar to humans, so what we learn in mice is directly applicable to humans (http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arcr343/325-335.htm). Thus, if we can find a brain chemical pathway that is disrupted in mice that like to drink alcohol too much, we can try to develop a specific drug targeting that pathway that can then be tested to see whether it helps alcoholic patients reduce their drinking.

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SW: What would you like to see happen in the addiction-research field?

JC: Probably the most important thing is to ensure that there is a steady stream of young scientists entering this field at the beginnings of their research careers. This is a very complicated area, and the most important findings are going to come quite a few years from now, when those young scientists have matured and are making their most important findings.

SW: What advice do you have for people now entering addiction research?

JC: My advice to young scientists is the same, regardless of what specific problems they are addressing. This is a really exciting time in alcohol research, and there are many difficult problems remaining to be solved. Figure out what excites you the most, and then be sure to develop the relevant skills to attack that area with all your energy. But do not forget to take care of your personal life, because a happy scientist is a productive scientist.

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SW: What does your recent award – the 2012 Seixas Award – mean to you on a personal level?

JC: It was a very great honor to be recognized by my scientific peers. The daily business of doing scientific research makes it really hard to develop a realistic perspective on the lasting value of one's own work.

Website:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/education/schools/school-of-medicine/departments/basic-science-departments/behn/people/crabbe.cfm