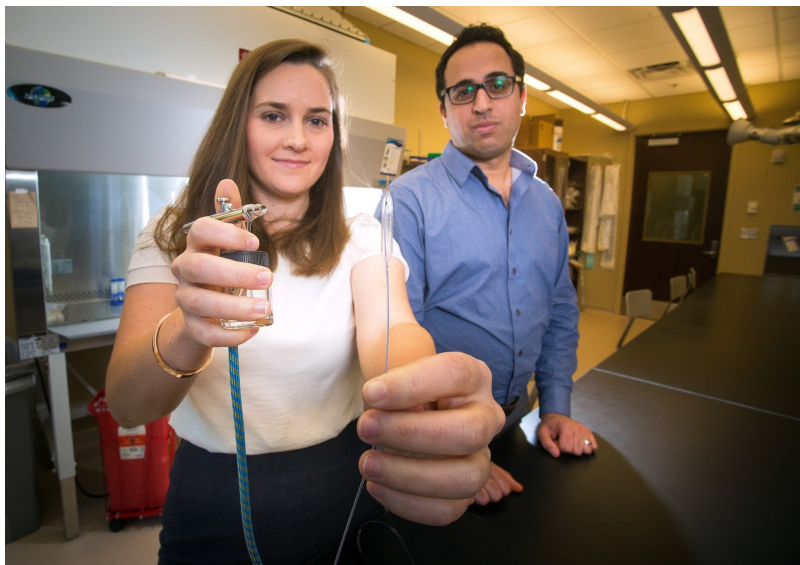


# Med School Watercooler

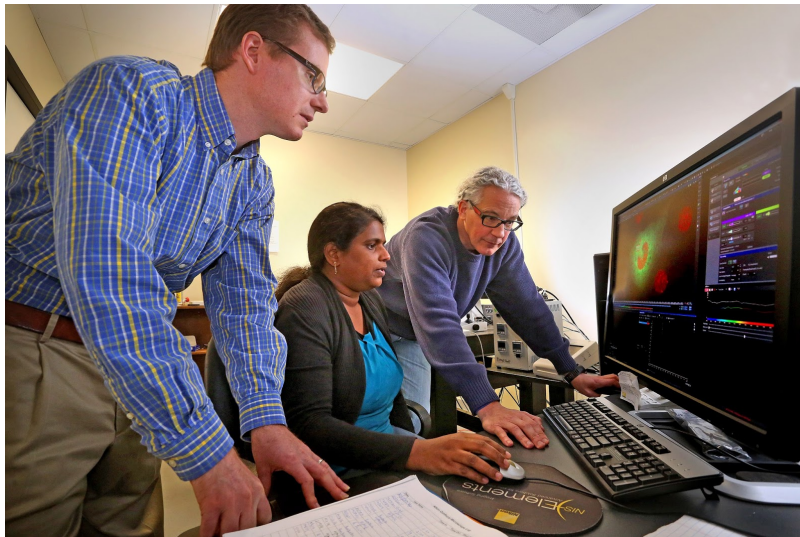
NEWS FROM FREDERICK P. WHIDDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

## Two USA Graduate Students Awarded AHA Grants



University of South Alabama graduate student Emily Turner holds a balloon catheter in a lab with her research mentor Dr. Saami Yazdani.



University of South Alabama graduate student Naga Annamdevula (center), and her mentors Dr. Silas Leavesley (left) and Dr. Thomas Rich use the confocal laser microscope in the bioimaging facility at the USA College of Medicine.

Two University of South Alabama graduate students recently were awarded highly competitive American Heart Association grants to help support their doctoral research, encouraging their work and validating a biomedical engineering track — a joint collaborative effort between the University's College of Medicine Graduate Program in Basic Medical Sciences and the College of Engineering.

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Both award winners, Emily Turner and Naga Annamdevula, are students in the biomedical engineering track.

"The rationale behind establishing the track between our two colleges was to use our graduate program as a way to mesh the analytical and mathematical strengths of faculty in the engineering disciplines with the biological strengths and insights of faculty in the basic medical science disciplines. The ultimate goal of this merger was to develop a synergistic educational environment that promoted collaboration between the various disciplines," stated Dr. Samuel J. Strada, dean of the USA College of Medicine.

The Colleges of Medicine and Engineering jointly established the Biomedical Engineering Track of the Basic Medical Sciences Ph.D. program six years ago, said Dr. Silas Leavesley, who teaches in the program. "We have just now graduated our first student through the track, Peter Favreau. Naga and Emily are both very qualified and promising doctoral students working on highly interdisciplinary biomedical engineering projects. Having both of them receive a highly competitive, nationally recognized extramural fellowship is a testament to the dynamic and interdisciplinary training environment we have been working to establish between the Colleges of Engineering and Medicine."

"We are certainly proud of Naga and Emily for their great work and success in obtaining AHA fellowships," said Dr. John Steadman, dean of the College of Engineering. "I am very pleased with the collaboration that has been established between the Colleges of Medicine and Engineering, which is now a source of many research projects and a new shared core facility."

Turner, working with research mentor Dr. Saami Yazdani, was awarded a two-year \$52,000 grant for her work on "Keratose as a Novel Drug Carrier for Drug Coated Balloons."

"The work is aimed at providing a better alternative to treat peripheral artery disease, which is clogging of the arteries in the legs," Dr. Yazdani said. "While stents work great for clogged arteries of the heart, they don't have a good track record for diseased and clogged arteries in the legs, requiring patients to have repeat procedures as often as every six months."

Turner and Dr. Yazdani's project builds on current technology of drug-coated balloons, but looks for a better version of what's on the market today.

"Our preliminary tests show that we have a novel excipient or drug carrier (keratose - a form of keratin) that is capable of sustaining long-term drug release," Turner said. They hope their new excipient will lead to improved treatment of peripheral artery disease and, therefore, an improved outcome for patients.

"This work interests me because it has a clear translation to improving clinical treatments and ultimately patient care, moving from benchtop to bedside," Turner said.

"I love waking up every day and being part of a new endeavor — answering research questions and discovering things that have never been studied before," she said.

A native of Ocean Springs, Miss., Turner earned an undergraduate degree in science and technology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, then came to USA for graduate work because of the variety of options offered.

Like his graduate student, Dr. Yazdani appreciates USA for his research and teaching because of the excellent opportunity to combine his interests in engineering and medicine.

Annamdevula, working with research mentor Dr. Silas Leavesley and co-mentor Dr. Thomas Rich, also was awarded a two-year \$52,000 grant for her work titled "Spatial distribution of PDE4 isoforms regulates cAMP compartmentalization and endothelial barrier permeability in PMVECs."

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"The major focus of my research is to study the role of Phosphodiesterases in regulating cAMP signal specificity and thus maintain the endothelial permeability," Annamdevula said. "Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. A key characteristic of ARDS is disruption of the endothelial barrier of the blood vessel leading to pulmonary edema."

But measuring the factors that regulate permeability has proven to be a complex problem, she said. Her research is based on a five-dimensional imaging process, accounting for x, y and z spatial components, a time component and a hyperspectral component.

The work is satisfying, she said, because it helps "untangle the concepts that can be clinically translated and will be used to better understand the disease progress and treatment and improve the quality of living."

Again, the collaboration between colleges is key to her work. "My research is half engineering and half biological science," Annamdevula said. Working with her mentors, and in collaboration with the College of Medicine, "provided us more insight toward the biological approaches."

Annamdevula is a native of Rajahmundry, India. She earned a bachelor's in technology degree in India. She earned a master's in chemical engineering at USA, working with Dr. Leavesley, a time she describes as "the best research period that I had in my life," and inspiring her to continue studies toward a Ph.D. in USA's Basic Medical Sciences Program.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [3:25 PM](#) No comments:

## January Med School Café - 'Cosmetic and Reconstructive Breast Surgery'



The January Med School Café lecture will feature Dr. Ron Brooks, assistant professor of surgery at the University of South Alabama College of Medicine and a plastic surgeon with USA Physicians Group.

His lecture, titled "Cosmetic and Reconstructive Breast Surgery," will be held on Jan. 29, 2016, at the USA Faculty Club on USA's main campus. Lunch will be served at 11:30 a.m., and the presentation begins at noon. Dr. Brooks will discuss breast augmentations, breast lifts, breast reduction and breast reconstruction in the setting of breast cancer.

Dr. Brooks earned his medical degree from Indiana University in Indianapolis. He completed his surgery residency at New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York. He then completed a plastic surgery fellowship at the University of Louisville and Affiliated Hospitals, located in Louisville, Ky. In addition, he completed surgical



research at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York.

The Med School Café lecture and lunch are provided free of charge, but reservations are required. For more information or to make reservations, call Kim Partridge at (251) 460-7770 or e-mail [kepartridge@health.southalabama.edu](mailto:kepartridge@health.southalabama.edu).

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [12:35 PM](#) 2 comments:

## Carla Watlington Recognized for Customer Service



Carla Watlington, clinical nurse III at USA Stanton Road Clinic, recently was presented an Employee Recognition Award for her outstanding customer service skills.

*"Carla continues to exceed work expectations. The clinic routinely receives compliments from patients regarding Carla's care. She takes policy changes in stride and aids in the success of their implementation."*

*-Excerpt taken from a nomination form*

To learn more about the USA Physicians Group Customer Service Recognition Program and to print a nomination form, [click here](#).

Posted by Med School Watercooler at [12:35 PM](#) No comments:

## Alice Johnson Named Assistant Administrator for Ancillary Services

Alice Johnson was recently named assistant administrator for ancillary services at the University of South Alabama Health System. Her experience includes serving as assistant chief executive officer at Trinity Medical Center in Birmingham, Ala., from 2011 until 2015.

Johnson, who is from Mobile, received a bachelor's degree in business management from Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C. She also earned master's degrees in Health Administration and Business Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



She has been a member of the Hoover Chamber of Commerce, the Rotoract Club of Birmingham and Alabama Hospital Association Quality Task Force. Johnson served as an adjunct faculty member and a student preceptor in the Auburn University Health Services Administration Department.

She and her husband, Austen, have two young sons, Thomas and James. They attend St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Mobile.

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