

# Med School Watercooler

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

Thursday, September 21, 2023

## Distinguished Scientists Seminar returns Sept. 28

The first Distinguished Scientists Seminar (DSS) for the fall 2023 semester will feature Michael D. L. Johnson, Ph.D., an associate professor of immunobiology at the University of Arizona.

Johnson's seminar, "Using Copper Toxicity to Exploit a Microbial Achilles' Heel," is set for Thursday, Sept. 28, at 4 p.m. in the first-floor auditorium of the Medical Sciences Building. Students and faculty are invited to attend the lecture, hosted by the Department of Microbiology and Immunology.



Michael D. L. Johnson, Ph.D.

Among his accomplishments, Johnson has been a participant in the National Institute of General Medical Sciences Director's Early Career Investigator Lecture series. In 2020, he was chosen as one of the "100 Black Scientists in America" by Cell Press, and in 2022, he was awarded the American Society for Microbiology Award for advancement of a diverse community of microbiologists. Johnson is well-known for his diversity, equality, and inclusion efforts and has a large following on social media, including on X, the social platform formerly known as Twitter, where he can be found at @blacksciblog.

Johnson's lab group focuses on the study of metals in biological systems. Specifically, he examines the role of these vital metals as nutrients and sensing mechanisms for bacteria. The overall understanding of how bacteria interact with metals during host infections is critical to defining pathogenesis mechanisms. Recent work from the Johnson lab focused on using a copper-dependent antibiotic against multiple upper respiratory tract pathogens and pneumococcal hypersensitivity to copper and macrophage-mediated clearance. Research on these topics have been published in the American Society for Microbiology journals.



He also serves as the associate dean of basic science and graduate studies for the University of Arizona College of Medicine – Tucson and the director of graduate studies for the Industrial Microbial Track in the University of Arizona Applied Bioscience Program.

[Learn more about the DSS program and view the fall schedule of seminars.](#)

## Meet a Med Student: Caroline Howell

**Caroline Howell**

**Age:** 23

**Class:** 2026

**Hometown:** Mobile, Alabama

**Undergraduate education:** B.S. in biomedical sciences, University of South Alabama

**What do you enjoy most about being a medical student at the Whiddon College of Medicine?**

I love being challenged. Here, I am able to achieve goals and learn from my mistakes, which allow me to grow and become the best version of myself. I have so enjoyed developing

confidence during my time as a medical student, confidence to pursue big dreams with hard work, integrity, and perseverance. Being surrounded by peers who are driven, compassionate, and supportive makes the journey so much more fun. I can honestly say that medical school, so far, has been one of the most exciting and rewarding chapters of my life.

**Are you involved in any research, organizations or other initiatives at the Whiddon College of Medicine?**

Medical Student Summer Research Program, Christian Medical Ministry of South Alabama, Dermatology and Oncology Interest Groups, Admissions Ambassadors, Student Curriculum Subcommittee

**What are your interests and hobbies?**

I play the ukulele, attend CrossFit twice a week, and have been baking since I was 12 years old on the quest for the perfect chocolate chip cookie. And lately, I am all about pickleball!

**What is something unique about you?**

I was just selected as this year's graduate homecoming maid. Go Jags!



Wednesday, September 20, 2023

Newly created endowment recognizes Omar for dedication, generosity, scholarship



Christopher Malozzi, D.O., associate professor of internal medicine, presents a check to Bassam Omar, M.D., Ph.D., professor of internal medicine, to establish an endowment in Omar's honor.

Among the lengthy list of achievements Bassam Omar, M.D., Ph.D., FACC, cardiologist, director of the cardiovascular diseases fellowship, and professor of internal medicine, has accumulated over the years, some have been noticed and even appreciated, but never officially recognized. That is, until now.

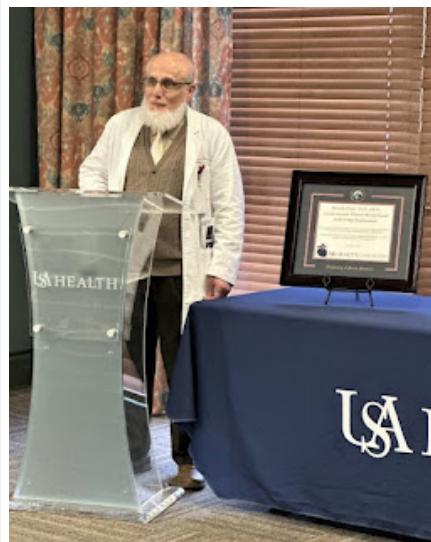
Christopher Malozzi, D.O., cardiologist and associate professor of internal medicine, knew of Omar's generosity with his time and knowledge from his days as a cardiovascular disease fellow at the Whiddon College of Medicine.

With the help of Kelly McCarron, associate vice president for medical affairs, USA Health Development, Malozzi discovered the possibility of creating a named endowment to honor his longtime mentor, colleague and friend. In March, Omar was presented with a check and certificate recognizing the establishment of the fund created in appreciation of his years of education, scholarship and dedication.

The creation of the endowment in Omar's name helps express not only Malozzi's thanks, but also that of the graduates of the cardiovascular disease fellowship whom Omar has trained, mentored and championed over the years.

"During his tenure, he has graduated 24 fellows, me included," Malozzi said. "Over nearly 20 years of stewardship of cardiovascular education at USA, Dr. Omar's dedication is unrivaled. He has given of his time, his money and his knowledge to produce the best cardiology education experience for his trainees.

"Over the years there have been countless examples of his dedication," Malozzi said. "He has provided extra lectures and materials for board prep, and meals and snacks for hungry fellows. He renovated a call room, provided babysitting services for fellows in need, promoted all our scholarly endeavors and helped us all achieve more than we could have ever imagined."



Bassam Omar, M.D., Ph.D., speaks at the endowment presentation.

The cardiovascular disease fellowship, one of the Whiddon College of Medicine's longest-tenured fellowship programs, counts among its graduates many who have gone on to successful careers in the field. Some have built practices in Mobile, and others have established thriving practices nationally and internationally.

"This is a big surprise, absolutely, and it's wonderful, a wonderful thought," the soft-spoken Omar said after the presentation. "The success is really the success of the program here and everyone else that contributes to it. We have been through a lot of changes, and I am very appreciative of my colleagues."

The endowment will provide funding for cardiovascular research and scholarly activities that promote the educational research missions of the Whiddon College of Medicine, the Department of Internal Medicine, and the division of cardiology. It will also provide a means for current and future fellows and graduates to give back to the program responsible for their invaluable training and successful careers.

Omar graduated from medical school at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. In 1989, he arrived at USA as a research associate in the department of biochemistry, where he completed his Ph.D. before leaving in 1990 for a postdoctoral fellowship at the Webb-Waring Lung Institute at the University of Colorado Health Science Center in Denver.

He finished his residency in internal medicine at the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta before returning to USA for a cardiology fellowship in 1994. Upon its completion, Omar began his career at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Asheville, North Carolina, and later moved to the VA in Biloxi, Mississippi.

In 2002, he was recruited back to USA as a part-time faculty member and joined the division of cardiology full time in 2004. He oversaw the cardiovascular disease fellowship in 2004 as an assistant director, then was promoted to program director in 2009.

To support the Cardiovascular Research and Teaching Fund, visit [giving.usahealthsystem.com/cardiovasrt](http://giving.usahealthsystem.com/cardiovasrt).