

Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, December 8, 2023

USA breaks ground on \$200 million Whiddon College of Medicine building

The University of South Alabama broke ground Friday, Dec. 8, on a new 250,000-square-foot Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building that will allow the University to graduate more physicians and accelerate research and innovation. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and other supporters attended the event on South's campus.

The \$200 million facility, set to be completed in 2026, will round out a medical education hub on campus that includes the College of Nursing, the Pat Capps Covey College of Allied Health Professions, the Health Simulation Building and the Charles M. Baugh Biomedical Library. When the new building opens, more than 500,000 square feet of campus facilities will be dedicated to healthcare education and research.

"This facility will offer our future students the most advanced learning and research opportunities anywhere in the country," said USA President Jo Bonner. "It will transform medicine to the unique needs of our community while educating and training the next generation of providers."

The new Whiddon College of Medicine building will provide state-of-the-art laboratory spaces that will create flexibility and efficiency for research today and in the future. It will also allow for expanding the class size of first-year medical students from 80 to 100, with the capability of increasing to 120 in the future, at the same time the nation faces a projected shortage of healthcare providers.

"This is an investment in the future of healthcare to meet the needs of Alabamians," said John Marymont, M.D., M.B.A., dean of the Whiddon College of Medicine and vice president for medical affairs. "By national metrics, this medical school produces high-quality physicians that stay in the state, helping meet the needs in primary care as well as in rural and underserved areas at an affordable cost."

The Whiddon College of Medicine at the University of South Alabama is one of 158 accredited M.D.-granting institutions in the United States, and one of only two in the state. More than 1,139 of its graduates are practicing medicine in Alabama. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Whiddon College of Medicine consistently ranks in the top tier nationally for graduates practicing in underserved areas.

Key stakeholders have responded to help invest in the state's healthcare. In one of his final acts as an Alabama U.S. senator, Richard Shelby set aside \$60 million in federal appropriations for the new facility. The USA Foundation contributed \$30 million, while the State of Alabama has given \$50 million in support of the project.

"Alabama proudly recognizes the value of the Whiddon College of Medicine, and by breaking ground on this state-of-the-art facility, we are further positioning one of our state's premier institutions to connect our people with the care they need," said Gov. Kay Ivey. "From larger cohorts to greater research capabilities, this new facility will take an already excellent program to the next level."

Many others have also recognized the critical need to build a new College of Medicine. The City of Mobile will give \$10 million, and Mobile County has pledged \$5 million. Alabama Power, The Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, the Bedsole Foundation, the Daniel Foundation and others also have given transformational gifts.

"We made a call for support to provide a building to match the quality of our students' education," Bonner said. "Their action shows that they understand the critical value an academic health system brings to its local community and throughout the state."

The University has set an additional \$30 million philanthropic goal to see the project through to completion. Gifts may be pledged over five years and recognized through naming opportunities in perpetuity.

Shortly after the University of South Alabama was established in 1963, President Frederick P. Whiddon began discussions with community and state leaders about creating a medical school in Mobile. In 1973, this vision became a reality, and the charter class was admitted to the USA College of Medicine. One year later, the Medical Sciences Building was completed as the home of the Whiddon College of Medicine.

The University of South Alabama and USA Health have more than 11,000 employees, making it one of the largest employers in the region.

Other donors include:

- Dr. and Mrs. Charles Rodning
- Dr. J.B. Craven
- USA Medical Alumni Association
- Gerber Taylor
- Dr. and Mrs. Steven Stokes
- Dr. Glenn Wilson
- The Sullivan Family
- The Family of Dr. C. William Daniels

[View more photos from the groundbreaking ceremony on Flickr.](#)



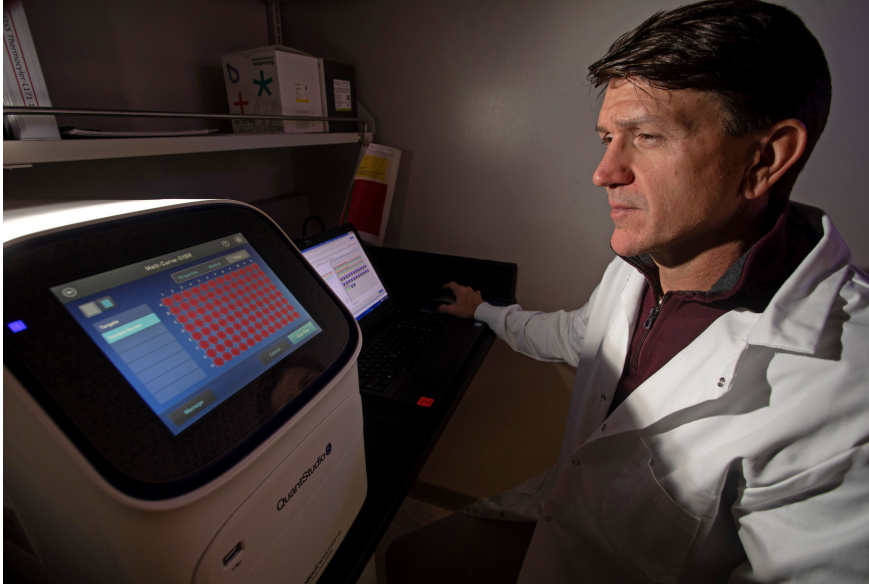
University of South Alabama leadership and supporters broke ground Friday on a new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building. Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2026.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [3:34 PM](#)



Thursday, December 7, 2023

Rayner awarded grant funding for biotechnology research center



Jonathan Rayner, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and immunology, received a grant to help fund the proposed South Alabama Biotechnology Research Center.

The University of South Alabama and scientist Jonathan Rayner, Ph.D., were named as inaugural designees of the [Innovate Alabama Network](#), a new resource to connect and foster innovation in communities, nonprofits, and higher education institutions across the state.

Rayner, an associate professor of microbiology and immunology at the Whiddon College of Medicine, and director of the Laboratory of Infectious Diseases, received a \$125,000 award to help fund the proposed South Alabama Biotechnology Research Center (SABRC).

“Mobile has the potential to serve as the biotechnology hub for the Alabama Gulf Coast,” Rayner said. “This award will go a long way in making sure that happens.”

Innovate Alabama is Alabama’s first statewide public-private partnership focused on entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation with a mission to help innovators grow roots here in Alabama.

In line with USA’s mission, the biotechnology research center will promote innovative technologies to improve human health on the Gulf Coast and around the world, Rayner said.

The center, he noted, will also provide unique learning opportunities to further prepare the area’s workforce with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to support translational research and product development. The primary objective of the center will be to solidify USA as the hub for biotechnology research and development on the Gulf Coast by officially offering contract research services in biomedical research to government and industry partners in addition to academic collaborators.

Plans call for the SABRC to be formally established using the university’s existing facilities.

To set the center apart from other contract research entities and solidify South and the region as an innovative biotechnology research center focused on arthropod-borne infectious diseases, researchers will investigate the utility of co-administering mosquito salivary gland components along with the challenge virus to reflect natural transmission and disease progression more accurately.

This research will enable other biotech programs and companies to use the foundational work and laboratories to grow biotech enterprises in the region. Rayner said he plans to use Chikungunya virus, abbreviated as CHIKV, as the model virus system to demonstrate this innovative approach.

An emerging arboviral infectious disease, CHIKV has spread globally from Africa causing significant outbreaks in tropical and subtropical regions of the world including the United States. Because of this, the virus has been designated a priority pathogen by the World Health Organization.

"Like other mosquito-borne infectious diseases," Rayner noted, "current animal models used to evaluate candidate vaccines and therapeutics ignore the immunomodulatory effects of mosquito salivary gland proteins and contributions to virus pathogenesis."

That means existing models do not accurately reflect the natural course of human infection, according to Rayner. The studies proposed at USA are expected to demonstrate proof of concept for CHIKV and to also be applicable to other mosquito-borne infectious diseases of consequence to human health such as dengue and Zika virus.

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [1:59 PM](#)



Meet a Med Student: Caroline Kinchler

Caroline Kinchler

Age: 25

Class: 2025

Hometown: Scottsboro, Alabama

Undergraduate education: B.S. in biochemistry, Auburn University

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

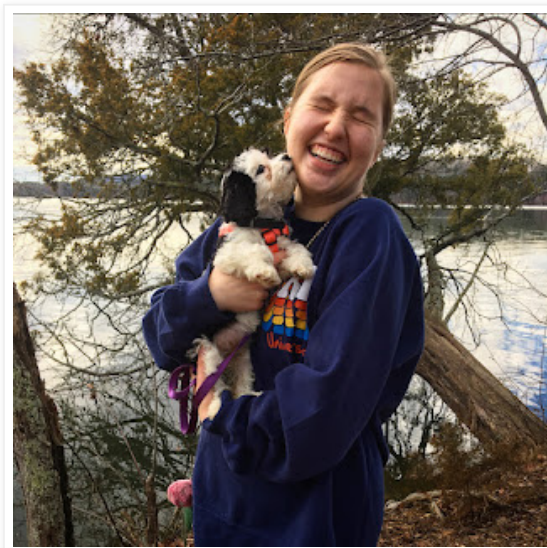
The Whiddon College of Medicine's administration, professors and students go out of their way to make sure we are taken care of as we learn and grow. They all invest so much of their time and energy into us to make sure we are prepared for taking care of patients, while also giving us amazing support and encouragement to make sure we are also taking care of our own mental and physical health. The professors look out for us, and my classmates look out for one another, and that has been so important in helping me grow as a person and as a future doctor.

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

I've been involved with research through the Summer Research Program, specifically with Dr. Caleb Butts and the other trauma surgeons at University Hospital. They looked at it as a way to get us involved with their projects, but it was also a way to shadow them and see what they do every day and explore a field of medicine that I was interested in. It was an awesome experience!

What are your interests and hobbies?

Crocheting, video games, coffee drinking



What is something unique about you?

One of my goals in life is to have a miniature Highland cow. They're so fluffy and cute!



Posted by Med School Watercooler at 1:39 PM



USA to break ground on new Whiddon COM building

The University of South Alabama will host a groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, Dec. 8, at 11 a.m. to kick off construction of the new Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine building.

The ceremony will be held in parking lot 801, south of the Health Sciences Building. A section of the parking area at lot 801 will be blocked off.

Alternate parking includes lots 802, 803 and 901. The red route JagTran shuttle will run from lot 901.

The campus community is invited to attend. In case of inclement weather, the ceremony will be relocated to the lobby of the Health Sciences Building.

The ceremony will be livestreamed on the University's Facebook page at facebook.com/theuniversityofsouthalabama.



Posted by Med School Watercooler at 12:01 PM



Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Alumnus and board-certified pediatrician joins pediatrics faculty

USA Health Pediatrics is expanding its medical practices in Mobile and Baldwin counties with the addition of Michael Strickland, M.D., a board-certified pediatrician with more than two decades of experience caring for children.

"Dr. Strickland's skills and compassionate bedside manner make him an excellent addition to our talented healthcare team," said David A. Gremse, M.D., a pediatric gastroenterologist who is professor and chair of pediatrics at USA Health. "He has a real heart for taking care of children with medically complex health issues, helping to ensure parents and caregivers feel supported as they navigate that journey."

After working in private practice in Mobile, Strickland said he made the move to USA Health to be part of an academic health system. "I love teaching – always have, even since residency, where you could pass on some knowledge to medical students," said Strickland, who will hold the academic title of associate professor of pediatrics at the Whiddon College of Medicine. "And teaching is a two-way street, so you can help mold and fashion new physicians who will ultimately be your colleagues."

Strickland received his undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama, then earned his medical degree from the Whiddon College of Medicine. He completed his pediatric residency at USA Health, where he served as pediatric chief resident. Beginning in 2016, he became an adjunct clinical faculty member for the Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine in Dothan, serving as a third-year pediatric clerkship preceptor. His medical interests include wellness and preventive medicine.



"I think, day in and day out, the most important things I do are vaccinating children and preventing deadly illnesses," he said. "I also strive to carefully follow each child's development so that any delays are noticed as early as possible to get the best therapies available early on, so a child has the best outcome possible."

A fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Strickland has served as president of the Mobile Pediatric Society. In 2014, he was named Best Pediatrician in Lagniappe's Nappie Awards.

"I love building relationships with families, and seeing families and children grow over the years," he said. "It is an absolute honor that people entrust me with the care of their children. And I take that privilege very seriously."