

Med School Watercooler

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

Friday, March 15, 2024

It's a match! Class of 2024 celebrates residency placements

The Class of 2024 entered the Frederick P. Whiddon College of Medicine at the height of the pandemic – their early medical school milestones marked by masks and social distancing.

In the summer of 2020, the class met at the local Taco Mama to get to know one another before their official orientation two weeks later. Among those in attendance were Taylor Coe, of Birmingham, and Ben Yockers, of Daphne. The two bonded over their affinity for fishing, sports and Thai food.

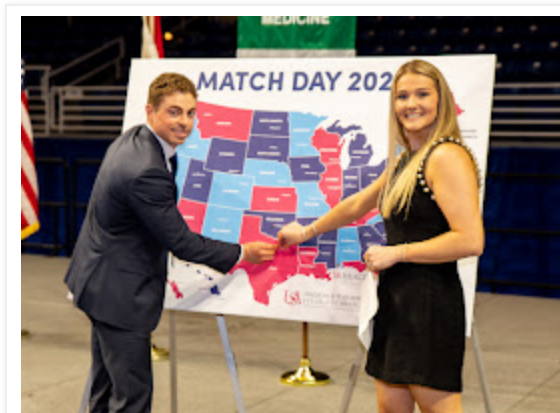
"We soon became the best of friends and were inseparable," Coe said of their relationship.

Today, 74 members of the Class of 2024, including Coe and Yockers, gathered at the USA Mitchell Center for Match Day, the annual event in which future physicians across North America simultaneously learn where they will be completing their residency training.

The couple – now engaged – will spend the next five years at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, where Coe matched in obstetrics and gynecology and Yockers matched in general surgery. But first, they will celebrate their wedding next month, followed by a honeymoon in Thailand.

"The couples match process has definitely been stressful, but we are thankful to have had each other for support throughout the application and interview process," Coe said. "We both agreed that we wanted to end up in the same city no matter what, so we applied to all the same places."

Yockers chose the Whiddon College of Medicine for medical school because "South felt like home." His mother, anesthesiologist Teresa Cusa, M.D., graduated from the Whiddon College of Medicine in 1992.



Ben Yockers and Taylor Coe participated in the match process as a couple. They matched at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

"The faculty and students felt truly invested in me as a person as much as a future physician," he said. "I have learned so much and met so many amazing people during my time here. I would not be where I am today without the guidance this program provided to me."



Zara Ijaz matched at Houston Methodist Hospital.

Zara Ijaz also didn't have to look far to find inspiration to pursue a medical career. Between her father – chief medical officer at USA Health Providence – and her brother in residency at University of Florida Health – she's grown up with it.

"Growing up, he often took me with him to Mostellar Medical Center, where I'd eagerly explore exam rooms, medical equipment and offices while he tended to his

patients," she said of her father, Ijaz Iqbal, M.D. "I like to see that time as the beginning of my journey to becoming the first female physician in my family."

Her brother, Zohaib, graduated from the Whiddon College of Medicine in 2022. "Choosing to continue my education here was an easy decision, and I couldn't have thought of a more fitting place to do so," Ijaz said.

Today, Ijaz matched in internal medicine at Houston Methodist Hospital, her first choice. Though her interests have changed over the years, she ultimately followed her family in pursuing internal medicine, but that wasn't the only reason she chose the field.

"Apart from the familial influence, I chose this field of medicine due to its integrative nature, the opportunity to manage a vast array of medical conditions, and the ability to truly care for the entire patient," Ijaz said.

Tiara Dean took part in USA's DREAM pipeline program during the summer of 2019, which she described as an invaluable experience that helped her with test prep for the medical school entrance exam and, more importantly, introduced her to a medical school environment.

Dean said the Whiddon College of Medicine's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts aligned with her own values and aspirations to promote equity and justice within the medical field.



Tiara Dean matched at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Jacksonville, Florida.

"I made the decision to dual apply into both family medicine and obstetrics and gynecology to maximize my opportunity of pursuing my passion of providing equitable women's health," she said. "After learning about the inflated maternal mortality rate among African American women, my passion became an

obsession. I believe that through pursuing this career path, I am marrying my two loves of both medicine and social action.”

Dean matched in family medicine at St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Jacksonville, Florida.

Her medical school experience has given her the confidence to tackle new challenges, she said, adding “I am prepared to apply the same work ethic, dedication, and resilience that have guided me thus far to my residency training, ensuring that I continue to learn, grow, and provide the best possible care to my patients.”



Jelani Bender went through the military match process and matched at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University.

While most medical students go through the [National Resident Matching Program](#) and find out their matches on Match Day, students in the military and certain specialties learn their residency placements earlier.

Jelani Bender received an email from the U.S. Army last December with the news that he matched in emergency medicine at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University.

Growing up in Birmingham in a family with a strong military background,

Bender always considered continuing his family’s history of service, as his father is a U.S. Army colonel. However, it was shadowing his mother, a nuclear medicine cardiologist, that sparked his passion for medicine.

“I am proud to follow in her footsteps as a physician while also honoring my father’s legacy as an Army officer,” he said.

Bender’s path to the Whiddon College of Medicine began with a recommendation from the late Johnson Haynes, M.D., who served as a professor of internal medicine and assistant dean of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Bender was drawn to the sense of community he felt when visiting the medical school.

“Over the past four years, my professors, classmates and the entire college have become like family to me,” Bender said. “I am incredibly grateful and blessed for the opportunity to have started my medical journey at the Whiddon College of Medicine.”

Kimberly Waggener celebrated her early match in urology with her husband and family. She had learned in February that she would train at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The Madison, Alabama, native said she became interested in urology during her first year in medical school.

“I loved embryology and anatomy of the urinary and reproductive systems,” Waggener said. “When I first shadowed (USA Health urologist) Dr. Lorie Fleck, I fell completely in love with the specialty. I valued the humility and trust between patients and their urologists when discussing sensitive topics, the emphasis on quality-of-life care, and the ability to use my hands to help others.”

Waggener joins an increasing number of female graduates matching into urology, a field that has long been dominated by male physicians. The American Urological Association reports that women accounted for about 11.6% of all practicing urologists in 2023, compared with 7.7% in 2014. "I'm incredibly grateful to join the small percentage of women practicing urology," she said.



Kimberly Waggener early matched in urology at Wake Forest University.

Waggener chose the Whiddon College of Medicine in part because of the healthcare her family received from USA Health during challenging times. "When it came time to choose a medical school, I was confident in the training I would receive and the type of doctor I could become," she said. "I believe our students are trained exceptionally well, and I feel prepared to take this next step."

[Watch the recorded livestream on YouTube.](#)

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

[View the full Match Day results.](#)



Posted by Med School Watercooler at 3:57 PM



Meet a Med Student: Emily Hartsell

Emily Hartsell

Age: 32

Class: 2026

Hometown: Huntsville, Alabama

Undergraduate education: B.S. in biological sciences/chemistry, University of Alabama at Huntsville

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

The best thing about South is the sense of community. I'm grateful for the lifelong friendships I've made with my fellow students and for the mentorship of faculty who support my research and academic goals.

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

I won the Center for Clinical and Translational Science/TL1 training award, which is a grant that supports my full-time research in the Department of Pharmacology this year. Our lab is taking a multi-omics approach to developing precision medicine approaches to the treatment of sepsis.

I'm also vice president of the Pathology Interest Group (PAIG) and serve as a social chair for the Class of 2026.

What are your interests and hobbies?

I enjoy being outdoors, going to group fitness classes with my friends, planning social events, and reading science fiction.

What is something unique about you?

I've worked summer jobs in Denali and the Grand Canyon.



Posted by Med School Watercooler at 2:46 PM



Internal medicine residents hone nonverbal skills with unlikely subjects



Adriana Reyes, M.D., participates in a hands-on workshop that pairs internal medicine residents with horses.

USA Health residents have been spending quality time outside to focus on how to better communicate with their patients. Future physicians and horses may make an unlikely match, but at medical schools across the United States, it's not an uncommon one.

Medicine and Horsemanship – the Department of Internal Medicine's newest hands-on workshop – pairs resident physicians with horses to help increase their awareness of nonverbal communication and apply those lessons in working with their patients.

Haris Manan, M.D., was quick to recognize the significance.

"The bond between a rider and a horse underscores the importance of effective communication, trust, and mutual understanding – principles that resonate profoundly in patient-doctor relationships," he said. "Just as with horses, patients respond to a calm and confident demeanor."

Similar seminars are offered through medical schools across the U.S., often as a response to a commonly cited complaint in multiple studies – lack of effective communication between doctors and patients.

During the seminar, Leena Patel, M.D., experienced how horses responded to even subtle movements, such as not stepping back when the horse approaches, which would signal its dominance, or standing straight and tall when walking the horse backwards, which establishes the handler's position of leadership, even if the handler is shorter.

"As a physician, it reminded me that I am constantly observed as I observe the patient. That even when I am just looking at my watch for whatever Teams notification I got, I can appear as if I'm less interested or not fully invested,"

Patel said. "It's just a good reminder of how subtle things, such as eye contact, posture, and hand/leg movements can influence someone's perception of you."

According to a study published in the journal PLOS ONE, horses are good teachers when it comes to honing nonverbal communication skills because of their wide range of facial expressions, 17 to be exact.

Because horses and humans display similar facial emotions when expressing fear, surprise and sadness, equine-assisted training helps students better understand how to establish trust and respect with patients.



Haris Manan, M.D., works with a horse during the seminar.

Residents appreciated being able to get outside out of their typical stressful environment, but they especially valued their program to give them the opportunity to hone important skills in a new way.

"This activity not only boosted my overall wellness, but also allowed us to refine our nonverbal communication skills and understand nonverbal clues, which can impact our overall interactions with patients," said Anas Khouri, M.D. "These are skills that we need as much as clinical skills to be successful physicians and I am glad that our program recognizes and cultivates these aspects of our development."

Posted by [Med School Watercooler](#) at [2:00 PM](#)



Thursday, March 14, 2024

USA Research Mixer set for April 3



The Research and Creative Activities Committee of the Faculty Senate in collaboration with the Office of Research and Economic Development are hosting a USA Research Mixer. The event is set for Wednesday, April 3, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Strada Patient Care Center conference room 1101.

The mixer is designed to foster collaboration among researchers in the community. The event is a chance for attendees to broaden their networks and

discover the exciting research projects others are working on.

Medical students, doctoral students, faculty and staff from the Whiddon College of Medicine are invited to attend. Hors d'oeuvres will be served.

Please [RSVP on the Google form](#) by Monday, April 1.