

IDIS

newsletter



College of
Veterinary Medicine
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS

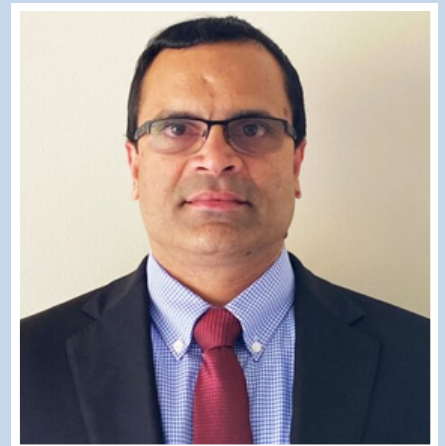
Melinda Brindley was promoted this academic year to **Director of Graduate Studies**. Her academic role includes guiding graduate students through admissions and program requirements, advising students and serving as the main point of contact for graduate student questions and concerns within the department. Thank you Dr. Peterson, for doing this work for such a long time!



Melinda Brindley:
promoted to Professor



Chester Joyner:
promoted to Associate
Professor, tenured



Binu Velayudhan:
promoted to Professor,
tenured

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES

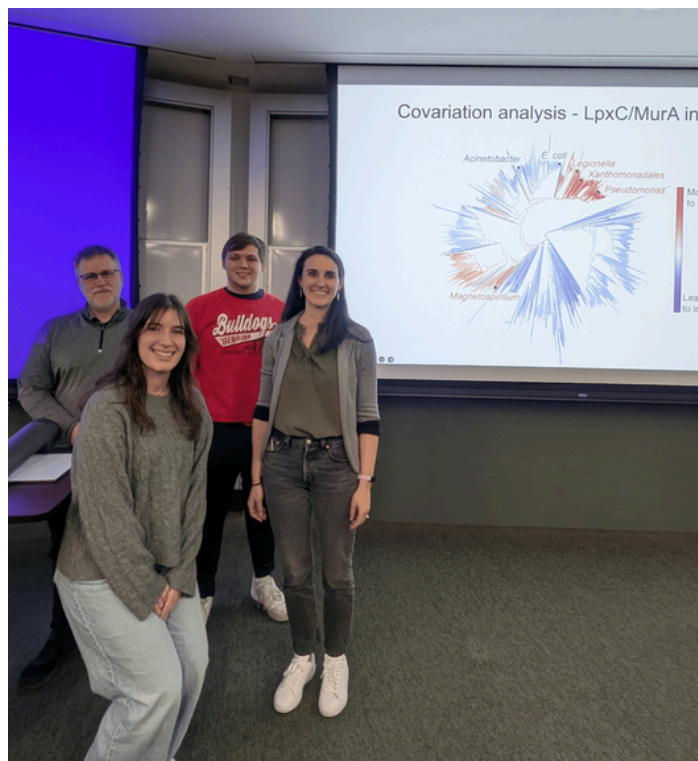
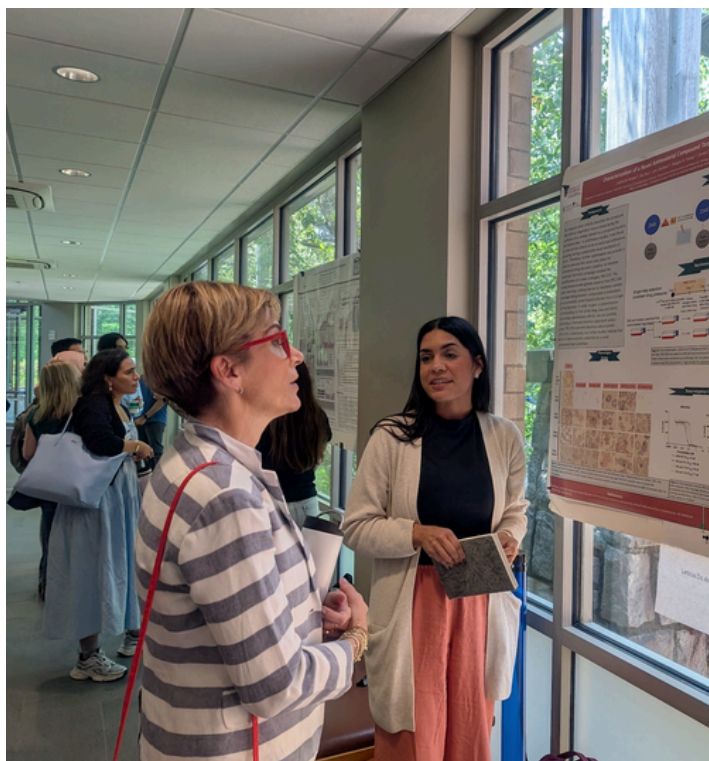
I have been the Director of Graduate Studies since July 2024. I joined UGA in 2014. Over the past 12 years, the Department of Infectious Diseases has grown significantly.

One of the most rewarding aspects of serving as Director of Graduate Studies has been the opportunity to help strengthen and shape our graduate program while working closely with our students. I've especially enjoyed mentoring students throughout their graduate careers and supporting their professional development. The role has also allowed me to interact with many outstanding students whom I might not otherwise have gotten to know through serving on their dissertation committees. Building those broader connections across the program and contributing to an environment where students can thrive has been particularly meaningful and one of the highlights of my time as Director of Graduate Studies.

If the department had additional resources to invest in the graduate program, I would prioritize initiatives that directly benefit our students. I would establish small grants to support student-driven research, increase professional development activities, expand funding to help students present their work at national and international conferences, and provide assistance with graduate student fees. These investments would not only enhance students' training and professional growth but also strengthen the visibility and impact of our graduate program (To donate, see page 28).



I am excited to continue strengthening our graduate program by working with our faculty to provide an outstanding mentoring environment and helping our students achieve success in both their research and professional development. I also look forward to celebrating the accomplishments of our graduating students as they move on to the next stages of their careers.



One of my goals is to build a strong and engaged alumni network that benefits both our graduates and our current students. I hope our alumni will remain connected to the department by sharing their career experiences through our Career in Focus seminar series, serving as mentors, and providing students with insights into the diverse career paths available after graduate school. By fostering these connections, we can create a lasting community that supports professional growth well beyond graduation.

Melinda Brindley, Director of Graduate Studies

FACULTY PROMOTIONS



We are pleased to announce **Dr. Chet Joyner** as the new head of the **Comparative Biomedical Sciences (CBS) Program**. Dr. Joyner is an Associate Professor in the Department of Infectious Diseases, Assistant Director of the Center for Vaccines and Immunology, and a member of the Center for Tropical and Emerging Global Diseases. His expertise spans immunology, parasitology, malaria pathogenesis, and host immune responses. Through his innovative research program focused on *Plasmodium vivax* and vaccine development, Dr. Joyner has demonstrated a strong commitment to graduate education and student monitoring. We are excited to have him join the Graduate Affairs leadership team and look forward to the contributions he will make to our graduate programs at the College of Veterinary Medicine.

SEMINARS

Fall 2025

Piyush Padhi: University of Georgia

Julie Fox: NIH

Jesus Valenzuela: NIAID

Megan Patrice Brock: University of Georgia

Hind Azami: University of Georgia

Eldin Talundzic

Kyla Ost: University of Colorado

Amy Bei: Yale School of Public Health

Emily Rosowski: Clemson University School of Health Research

Richard Bucala: Yale School of Medicine

Ania Majewska: University of Georgia

Spring 2026

Katherine Hummels: University of Georgia

Jorge Vidal: University of Mississippi Medical Center

Cynthia Nau Cornelissen: Georgia State University

Tatum Mortimer: University of Georgia

Jeff Hogan: University of Georgia

Cheryl Day: Emory University School of Medicine

Katelyn Walzer: Clemson University

David Morgens: Louisiana State University

Jeremy Boss: Emory University School of Medicine

Julie Thompson: CDC

Petros Karakousis: Johns Hopkins University School of
Medicine

Robert Cox: Georgia State University

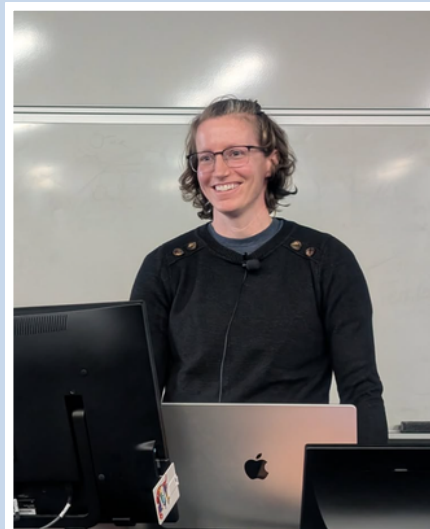
PhD DEFENSES

Fall 2025

Victoria Mendiola
Kayla Adcock
Grace Vick



Daniel Wychrij



Caitlin Williams

Spring 2026

Caitlin Williams
Mark Phillips
Anna McCormick
Wendy Cuevas
Taylor Chapman
Daniel Wychrij



Summer 2026

Kwadwo Oworae
Caroline Piotrowski
Justin Shepard
Rose Miller
Sarah Hosking



Taylor Chapman

FACULTY AWARDS

Years of Service Recognition

Three IDIS faculty members were awarded for 10 years of service at UGA. They are listed below:

**Eric Harvill
Ashutosh Pathak
Clare Ryan**

Leadership in Curriculum Design

The Award for Leadership in Curriculum Design at the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine is an internal faculty honor recognizing outstanding contributions to educational program development and veterinary student instruction. The two instructors listed below showed exceptional vision, administration and execution in shaping the veterinary college's academic courses.

**Cassan Pulaski
Clare Ryan**

Charles Dobbins Service Award

The Charles Dobbins Award is given to a person who has distinguished themselves in a lifetime of service and greatly impacted both the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine and the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association. The recipient of this year's award is listed below.

Binu Velayudhan

NOTABLE RESEARCH

IDIS PR Intern Kaitlyn Bouman organized interviews with two important researchers affiliated with the Department of Infectious Diseases.

Dr. Ashutosh Pathak shared his research on malaria and how the *Plasmodium* parasite grows in human blood cells, and how his research matters for malaria vaccines and treatment. He was recently awarded a grant by the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, outlined in the Awards section, that will enable him to continue his research.

Dr. Grazieli Maboni shared about her research on an emerging bacterium, *Castellaniella*, previously thought to be harmless, that affects species such as hens, dogs and pigs. Her research is in determining the effects, scope and eventual treatment of the disease this bacterium causes.

Read more about their research below. If you'd like to see your work featured, email us at cvmidis@uga.edu.

NOTABLE RESEARCH

Dr. Ashutosh Pathak's Research in Malaria



UGA professor Ashutosh Pathak's research is all about malaria and the human red blood cell.

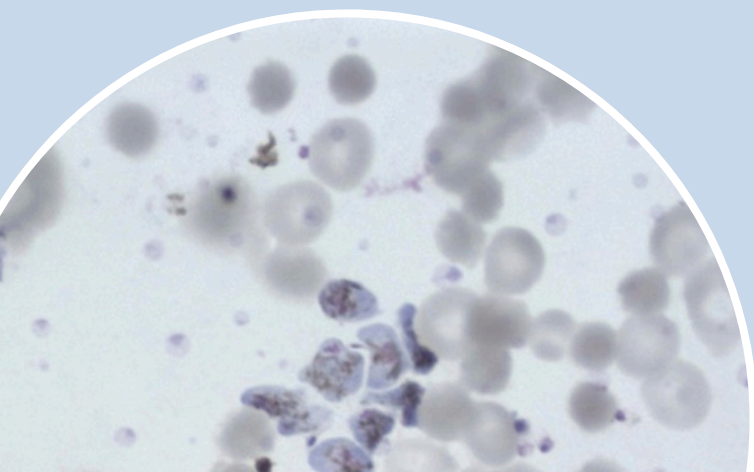
In order for the parasite that causes malaria, *Plasmodium*, to grow in a human body after a mosquito bite, the parasites must travel to the liver and multiply, where they mature and enter the bloodstream to multiply inside red blood cells.

Pathak's research focuses on why the parasite that causes malaria grows more successfully in some models' red blood cells than others.

This question is of great importance for the effectiveness of malaria vaccines and future research. The end goal of Pathak's malaria research is to engineer a drug that works on the *Plasmodium* parasite when it is both very strong and very weak, depending on how it grows in those red blood cells.

"If you think of future applications... we can say, okay... these people are going to be more heavily infected, so we give them this drug, and these people aren't going to be this infected so we can give them this drug."

"The common link between ... the mosquito and the human in this case, is actually the RBCs (red blood cells) in the human..."



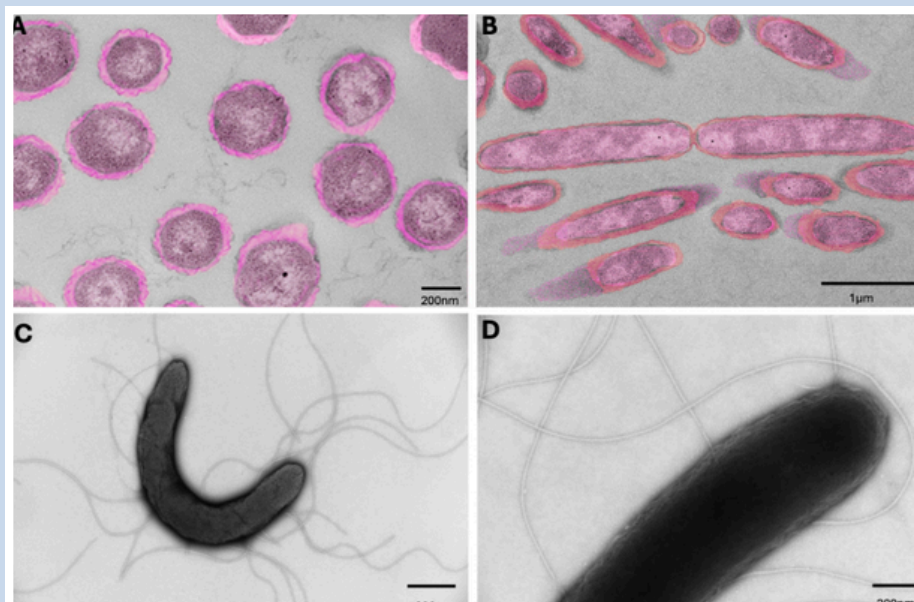
NOTABLE RESEARCH

UGA Professor Shares Exclusive Research on Emerging Bacteria

Dr. Grazieli Maboni has devoted her research to Castellaniella, an emerging pathogen previously thought harmless.

Dr. Grazieli Maboni, a researcher at the University of Georgia, along with her associates, PhD student Isabel Luo and Dr. Jenny Nicholds, has found that the bacterium *Castellaniella ginsengisoli*, previously thought to be harmless, is an emerging pathogen and a growing concern in animals. *Castellaniella* has previously been found in soil but has been determined to be the cause of death in poultry and dogs, and most recently, sickness in pigs.

Dr. Maboni's research began when she set out to prove that *Castellaniella* is not only a harmless environmental bacterium, but also an emerging pathogen capable of fatal outcomes in broiler breeder hens and other animals. When a team of researchers from Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine found the bacteria causing a pneumonia-like illness in dogs, Dr. Maboni's hypothesis gained strength: that the bacterium was not only an emerging pathogen but, as she calls it, an "emerging diagnosis."



Castallaniella under a microscope

NOTABLE RESEARCH

“I believe in the importance of proper lab diagnostics,” said Dr. Maboni. “I think there is a good possibility of misdiagnoses of *Castellaniella* in the past because we didn’t have the right lab tools to diagnose it.”

Dr. Maboni believes that *Castellaniella* has been an inconspicuous cause of veterinary illnesses since before its recent discovery. Some *Castellaniella* cases resemble fowl cholera in chickens, which can be treated with penicillin. In dogs, pneumonia can be treated with amoxicillin. These treatments may fail against *Castellaniella* because it likely has a natural resistance to penicillins, as recently reported by Dr. Maboni’s group.

Developing better diagnostic tools is the first step toward properly diagnosing and subsequently treating it. Dr. Maboni’s team is currently developing a tool to do just that: a molecular DNA detection tool that would test for the bacteria in different samples, which is the first of its kind developed to test for this pathogen.

The second half of the battle is arguably the most important. To establish *Castellaniella* as a pathogen, it must fulfill Koch’s postulates. In 1884, Robert Koch and Friedrich Loeffler developed a set of criteria to link a microbe to a disease, and they are still in use today. Many established pathogens do not meet all the postulates, but *Castellaniella* fulfills them in chickens, as demonstrated by Dr. Maboni’s recent experiments. The postulates are as follows: the microbe must be present in diseased individuals but not in healthy ones; researchers must be able to isolate the microbe from the diseased individual and grow it alone in culture; the newly grown microbe must cause the same sickness when given to a new host; and the bacteria must be the same when re-isolated from the new host.

(CONT'D.)



It is unlikely that *Castellaniella* is transmissible from poultry or dogs to humans, but it is difficult to predict its impact until scientists have fully developed diagnostic tools and can diagnose and raise awareness about this pathogen. Dr. Maboni's group is the only medical team currently researching this pathogen, and to continue their research, they need funding.

“The next step in our research is to figure out how to properly treat *Castellaniella*,” said Dr. Maboni. The group is currently seeking funding to step up to preclinical research.

To read the studies Dr. Maboni's group has published on *Castellaniella*, visit this [link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D3yX8uY_c7JClu8J8cl-EWP-mucHhYWY?usp=sharing):

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1D3yX8uY_c7JClu8J8cl-EWP-mucHhYWY?usp=sharing

2026 RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

The 18th annual 2026 IDIS Science Symposium was held on August 7. The symposium was a success, with 12 students giving presentations of their research and 12 presenting posters. A “State of the Research Enterprise” talk was given by Christopher King, UGA Interim Vice President for Research; Kenna Berg gave the Sidney A. Edwin Graduate Scholarship Presentation; the 3MT presentation was given by Emily Gilbertson; and a faculty panel with Clare Ryan, David Morgens and Chet Joyner discussed reasons to choose academia as a career.

Presentation and poster winners are outlined below, as well as photos of the event.



Poster Winners

1st: Saniya Sabnis

2nd: Ross Law

3rd: Annabella
Castiglione

Oral Presentation Winners

1st: Joseph Dainis

2nd: Maiya Callender

3rd: Isabel YiChen





UNDERGRADUATE INSTRUCTION

A **Minor in Infectious Diseases** is great for students pursuing a career in infectious diseases, looking to do research or who simply want to explore an interesting field. For the minor program, students must complete IDIS 3100, 3 credit hours of IDIS-approved electives and a research credit. See the flyer below for a detailed overview of requirements and to see elective options.

For students who may not want to commit to a minor or who have a general interest in infectious disease, the **Certificate** program includes 6-8 hours of required courses and at least 6 hours of various elective courses. Find out more by scanning the QR code below.

NEW PROGRAMS

Career in Focus

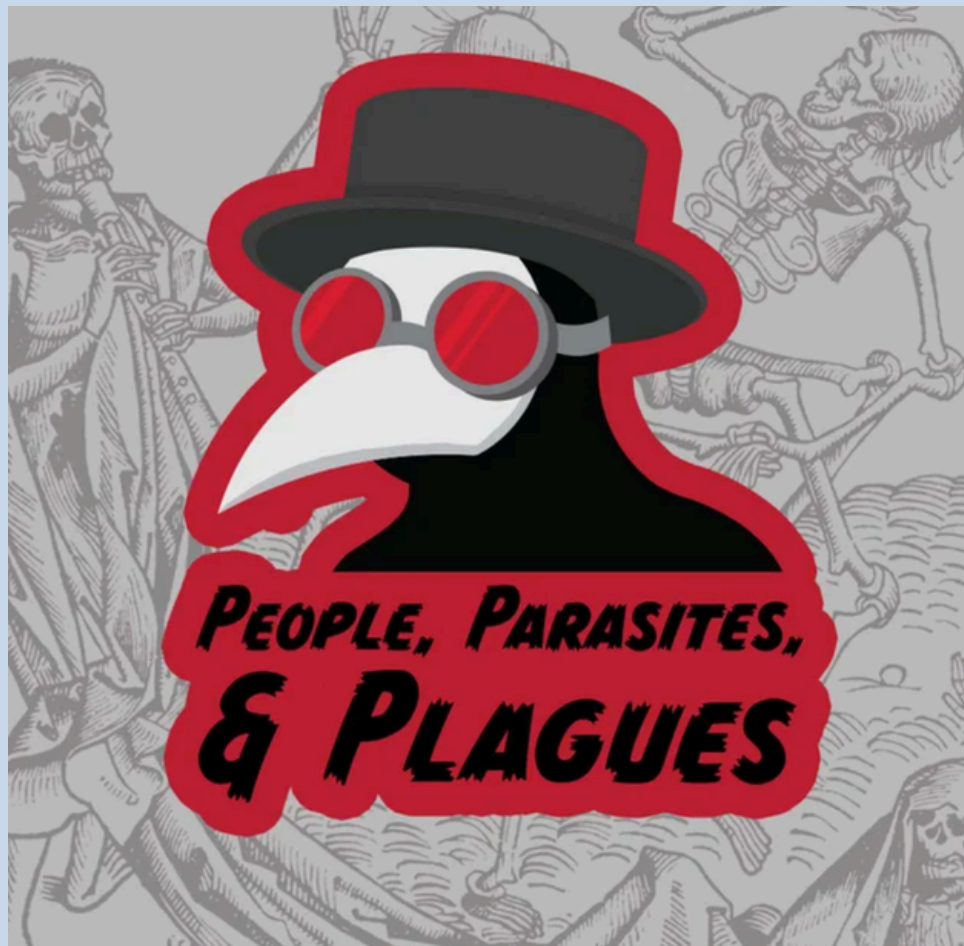
Career in Focus began this fall semester, giving current graduate students in the Department of Infectious Diseases the opportunity to hear from past students with careers in science. They speak about how they obtained their jobs and about their experiences.

A few Career in Focus speakers this year included:

Dr. Nicole Acuff
Dr. Harrison Bergeron
Maria Lay

IDIS Student Social Hour

Bring your brain and share your ideas with peers in Infectious Disease! Started this year, IDIS Social Hour is a time for sharing what you care about and learning about other fields. Alumni are welcome!



People, Parasites, and Plagues is a podcast aimed at delivering information about the fascinating pathogens among us from the impressive professionals who study them. Join our hosts Dr. David Peterson and Dr. Kim Klonowski, two infectious disease researchers from the University of Georgia, as they explore the past, present, and future of science. Tune in every other week for a new and enlightening episode as we unpack the details surrounding some of Earth's most perplexing diseases.

DONATE

Give to IDIS!

Support the Students Who Will Shape Tomorrow's Discoveries

As an IDIS alumnus/faculty member, you understand the value of exceptional mentorship, hands-on research, and a vibrant scholarly community. Your support helps ensure that today's graduate students have access to the same transformative opportunities.

Gifts to the Department of Infectious Diseases provide resources for student education, research training, conference travel, and community-building events that enrich the graduate student experience.

Together, we can strengthen the legacy of excellence that has made IDIS a leader in infectious disease research and education.

Give to IDIS and help future scientists succeed.



REACH OUT TO US!

We would love to hear from you!

Please send us updates at:

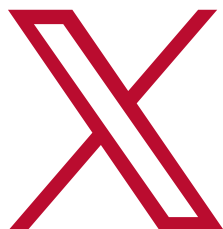


cvmidis@uga.edu

Fill out the form [here](#) or below to get emails from IDIS.

<https://tinyurl.com/tmbekhke>

Follow us on social media!



[Check out our website!](#)

2025-26 IDIS INTERNS

Madeline Cannon

PR Intern

March 2025–April 2026

Maddie is a recent graduate from the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication with a B.A. in Public Relations and is now pursuing an M.A. in Integrated Advertising and Public Relations. She is involved with Talking Dog Agency and served as the Public Relations Intern for IDIS over the past year.



Kaitlyn Bouman

PR Intern

February 2026–Present

Kaitlyn is a current UGA senior studying PR and English, but she loves to learn about science, too. Her experience includes Talking Dog at UGA and an internship with The Wilbert Group. She will graduate in May of 2027 with a B.A. in Public Relations.

