

# **MENTORS DIRECTORY**

## **2020 SUMMER RESEARCH INTERNSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

Offered by the

**West Virginia IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence  
(WV-INBRE)**

to be held at

**The Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center  
Of West Virginia University**

**And**

**The Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine  
at Marshall University**

## Introduction

WV-INBRE is pleased to offer summer research internships to students from colleges and universities participating in the WV-INBRE program. In 2020, the internship period will be from May 26 through July 28, with the Summer Research Symposium to be held on July 28 in Morgantown, WV. Listed in this directory are faculty members at the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center and the Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine at Marshall University who have agreed to participate as mentors in the summer internship program. Mentors have submitted a description of the projects that are available to interns in their laboratories. Please review these carefully so that you are aware of what is available for summer projects.

A listing of mentors with a short description of their research and the general area of their research is presented on pages 3-6. Mentors and project descriptions begin on page 7. Listed for each mentor is an e-mail address, phone number and, where available, a website address. The websites will allow you to learn more about the mentors and their research programs.

Application forms are available on the WV-INBRE web site (<http://www.wv-inbre.net>) at a link under **2020 Summer Program**. Applications may be submitted by mail or e-mail; however, **direct electronic submission is available and its use is encouraged.**

For general questions about the summer internship and fellowship program please contact one of the following individuals who are serving as summer research program coordinators.

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WV-INBRE website: <http://www.wv-inbre.net>

**Directory of Mentors – Mentors are listed by their location; the first list contains mentors at the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center and the second list contains mentors at Marshall University**

**Mentors at the West Virginia University Health Sciences Center**

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Dr. Alexey Ivanov	1. Breast cancer cell dissemination, dormancy and reactivation at the metastatic sites in mouse xenograft model. 2. Negative control of EMT by epithelial-specific transcription factors. 3. Role of the TGF-beta pathway in partial EMT and drug resistance of triple-negative breast cancer	16
Dr. Roberta Leonardi	Regulation of CoA levels in diabetes	17
Dr. James Lewis	Neuroimaging and sensory processing of chronic headache	17
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Dr. Mohammed A. Nayeem	Assessment of genetic polymorphism in human population and in mouse models through their oxylipins profile for targeted therapy related to hypertension and cardiovascular diseases	19
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Dr. Cole Vonder Haar	Behavioral consequences of traumatic brain injury	25
Dr. Bradley Webb	Cell biology and biochemistry of intermediary metabolic enzymes	26
Dr. Zachary M. Weil	1. Energetic dysfunction in the brain following traumatic brain injury 2. Alcohol abuse after traumatic brain injury	27

### **WVU Mentor Listing According to Area of Research**

**Biochemistry:** Webb

**Bioinformatics:** Hu

**Cancer Research:** DeVreis; Du; Hazlehurst; Ivanov; Lockman; Rojanasakul

**Cardiovascular Research:** Brown; Chantler; Hollander; Nayeem; Nurkiewicz; Olfert

**Diabetes:** Leonardi

**Drug Development:** Benedito; Geldenhuys

**GI Research:** Rajendran

**Inflammation:** Brown

**Immunology:** Robinson

**Nanotechnology:** Geldenhuys; Rojanasakul

**Neuroscience Research:** Brefczynski-Lewis; Brown; Engler-Chiurazzi; Geldenhuys;

Hileman; Lewis; Nelson; Vonder Haar; Weil

**Pharmacology Research:** Geldenhuys

**Pulmonary Research:** Hussain; Nurkiewicz; Rojanasakul

**Reproductive Biology Research:** Goodman; Hileman

**RNA Splicing:** Robart

## Mentors at Marshall University

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Dr. Lydia Bogomolnaya	1. Identification of natural functions of drug efflux pumps during infection 2. Defining the role of secreted DUF1471-containing proteins in adaptation of bacteria to different environments	29
Dr. Piyali Dasgupta	1. Anti-cancer activity of nicotinic antagonists in lung cancer 2. Capsaicin and small cell lung cancer	30
Dr. Richard Egleton	Opioid regulation of brain development	31
Dr. Lawrence Grover	Central nervous system consequences of prenatal opioid exposure	32
Dr. Brandon Henderson	Examining the effect of flavors on vaping-related behaviors	32
Dr. Jung Han Kim	Genetics of obesity and type 2 diabetes	33
Dr. Emine C. Koc	1, Detection of changes in MRP expression in ovarian cancer 2. Regulation of protein synthesis in mitochondria by acetylation in ovarian cancer	34
Dr. Isabel Larre	1. Na/K-ATPase differentially regulates the expression and trafficking of claudin isoforms 2. Analyze TJ properties in renal nephron segments derived from animal models of salt-sensitive hypertension	35
Dr. Wei Li	1. Examine the mechanistic role of thymidine phosphorylase in thrombosis 2. Examine the mechanistic role of thymidine phosphorylase in obesity and atherogenesis	36
Dr. Sandrine V. Pierre	1. Cardioprotection by Na <sup>+</sup> /K <sup>+</sup> -ATPase ligands in acute myocardial infarction. 2. Role of α1 Na/K-ATPase in adverse cardiac remodeling and heart failure	37
Dr. Gary Rankin	Kidney and liver toxicology	38
Dr. W. Christopher Risher	1. Synapse growth and maturation 2. Mechanism by which gabapentin and opioids interact	39
Dr. Louise Risher	How adolescent binge drinking influences brain function	40
Dr. Boyd Rorabaugh	Impact of Methamphetamine on the Ischemic Heart	40
Dr. Travis Salisbury	Environmental pollutants and breast cancer	41
Dr. Nalini Santanam	1. Non-opioid analgesics and pain 2. Epigenetics and cancer risk	41
Dr. Yevgeniy Shakirov	1. Genetic and epigenetic architecture of natural telomere length variation 2. Analysis of the interplay between telomere biology and ribosome biogenesis	42
Dr. Vincent Sollars	What are the processes that enable a normal cell to start misbehaving and become cancerous?	43
Dr. Monica Valentovic	1. Reducing serious cancer chemotherapy side effects 2. Potential role of e-vape flavoring agents in renal impairment 3. Mechanisms exploring the link between obesity and cancer 4. Examination of the mechanism of renal damage by an antiviral agent used in treating HIV and hepatitis	44
Dr. Yanling Yan	The molecular mechanisms of renal sodium (Na) handling, blood pressure regulation, and cardiac remodeling	45
Dr. Hongwei Yu	1. Cystic Fibrosis Biofilms; 2. Testing antimicrobials; 3. SFB probiotics; 4 New biopolymer development	46

## **Marshall University Mentor Listing According to Area of Research**

**Addiction:** Egleton; Grover; Henderson; C. Risher; L. Risher; Rorabaugh

**Bioinformatics:** Shakirov

**Cancer Research:** Dasgupta; Koc; Salisbury; Santanam; Sollars; Valentovic

**Cardiovascular Research:** Li; Pierre; Rorabaugh; Yan

**Diabetes:** Kim

**Drug Action and Metabolism:** Santanam; Valentovic

**GI Research:** Arthur

**Genetic Research:** Shakirov; Kim

**Infectious Diseases:** Bogomolnaya; Yu

**Neuroscience/Sensory Research:** Egleton; Grover; C. Risher; L. Risher

**Obesity Research:** Arthur; Kim

**Renal Research:** Larre; Rankin; Valentovic; Yan

**Toxicology Research:** Rankin; Valentovic

## **I. At The West Virginia University Health Sciences Center**

### **Vagner A. Benedito, Ph.D.**

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### **Understanding the biosynthesis regulation of the antimalarial medicine, artemisinin in *Artemisia annua* L. through genomics, transcriptomics and metabolomics**

**Introduction and rationale:** *Artemisia annua* L. (Asteraceae family) is a medicinal herb native to temperate Asia and the main commercial source of the *anti-malarial drug artemisinin*, which is a sesquiterpene lactone compound used in standard treatments. Given its complex chemical structure, artemisinin is difficult to synthesize *ex vivo*, which leads to great global shortage and high cost. Therefore, to improve artemisinin yield, it is essential to understand the physiology and genetic regulation *in planta*. **Research goal and objectives:** *The main goal of our research is to understand the genetic regulation of artemisinin biosynthesis pathway. At WVU, we have a unique germplasm collection of A. annua accessions differing in yields of artemisinin and its immediate precursors. Our hypothesis is that artemisinin is a byproduct of oxidative stress as a result of oxidation of precursor metabolites.* Biochemical and physiological parameters are being analyzed along with expression levels of known terpenoid biosynthesis genes to understand how abiotic stress regulates artemisinin biosynthesis. We are assessing whether abiotic stresses applied to the roots of clones with high precursor production will lead to higher yields of artemisinin. The genome sequence of *Artemisia annua* was published recently and we are taking advantage of this information to understand meaningful natural genetic variation and genomic rearrangements leading to increased artemisinin biosynthesis and accumulation.

### **Julie Brefczynski-Lewis, Ph.D.**

Research Assistant Professor  
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Stress related to difficult personal encounters is very pervasive yet poorly understood. Such stress over time can lead to physical (e.g. cardiovascular) and mental health (e.g. depression/anxiety) issues. Compassion training is a simple and inexpensive way to help decrease the stressful reactions from difficult personal encounters. The project for the summer will be to examine brain responses (using PET (Positron Emission Tomography)) and heart rate variability and cortisol/alpha amylase responses to aversive stimuli (such as pictures of disliked political figures and narratives). The physiological and neural responses to stressful stimuli will be measured before and after compassion meditation or relaxation meditation training (active control) that participant access using a Smartphone app.

This project will provide opportunities to learn:

- how to work with human participants,
- how to do measure neural response to stimuli using PET
- how to combine physiological, behavioral, and neural measures.

**Candice M. Brown, Ph.D.**

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**Brain and immune system interactions in neurological disease**

Communication between the brain and the immune system is essential in human health and disease. Research in my laboratory is focused on brain-immune interactions that affect levels of brain inflammation, also known as neuroinflammation, in mouse models of neurological disorders such as ischemic stroke and Alzheimer's disease. In addition, my laboratory also studies the role of sepsis as a comorbidity in these two disorders. Current studies are focused on understanding the role of tissue nonspecific alkaline phosphatase – a ubiquitous enzyme whose physiological function(s) in the brain are poorly understood – in neuroinflammation. We integrate our studies on tissue nonspecific alkaline phosphatase with the study of sex differences in order to better understand how male brains and female brains respond differently in ischemic stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

INBRE summer students will have the opportunity to engage in projects aimed at understanding how the tissue nonspecific alkaline phosphatase enzyme which is localized in brain endothelial cells protects the brain during ischemic stroke and Alzheimer's disease. S/he will interact with graduate students, lab staff members, and the WVU neuroscience community. Skills and techniques to be learned during the internship may include: 1) tissue sectioning, immunohistochemistry, and imaging of mouse and human brain tissues; 2) handling and husbandry of transgenic mouse models; 3) animal behavior testing; 4) small animal surgical procedures, and 5) training in standard molecular biology techniques, including PCR and quantitative RT-PCR.

**Dr. Paul Chantler**

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**Cardiovascular responses to disease states**

INBRE program participants will work in conjunction with laboratory personnel on current projects. Current pre-clinical research is examining: 1) how chronic stress impacts cerebrovascular function and health as a pathway to dementia; 2) how adipose tissue regulates vascular dysfunction; and 3) how E-Cig exposure affects vascular dysfunction. INBRE participants will interact with graduate students and staff members to answer research questions, using both invasive and non-invasive approaches to examining cardiovascular function.



## **Dr. A. Courtney DeVries**

Professor

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John T & June R Chambers Chair of Oncology Research

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### **Affective Consequences of Breast Cancer and Chemotherapy**

Among women, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer type with an estimated 265,000 new diagnoses this year in the United States. Breast cancer survivors frequently display alterations in metabolism and sleep, elevated mood disorders (anxiety and depression), and increased cognitive disturbances. However, determining the underlying causes of these deficits has proven to be difficult, as very few studies have examined the effects of breast cancer and cancer treatment independently. Our research group studies the physiological and behavioral effects of breast cancer and chemotherapy. Summer interns and fellows would have the opportunity to assist with current projects in the lab which include: 1) the effects of breast cancer on sleep and metabolism 2) the effects of chemotherapy on depressive-like behavior and cognitive function. 3) the effects of social enrichment on tumor development and depressive-like behavior following chemotherapy administration.

## **Dr. Wei Du**

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Osborn program MBRCC

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### **Immunometabolic regulation of leukemic-niche-donor cell interaction**

Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML) has a 5-year survival rate of 25%. Thus, clinical evidence continues to support the need to identify novel targets and therapeutics for the treatment of this deadly disease. Experimental evidence has clearly shown that interaction of the leukemic cell with the tumor microenvironment (TME) contributes to *de novo* drug resistance and likely failure to eliminate minimal residual disease (MRD). It is currently less clear what the impact of TME-induced expansion of regulatory T cells (Tregs) in mediating MRD following standard of care treatment and bone marrow (BM) transplant. We will utilize a model of Fanconi anemia (FA), a cancer-prone disease with extremely high incidence of myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) and AML, to determine the role of the TME in the expansion of the Treg population, relapse and progression of AML.

### **Hematopoietic stem cell polarity in bone marrow failure and leukemia**

Stem cell and gene therapies through hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) is the only definite treatment for various hematological malignancies, including FA. However, three major hurdles have been hampering scientific and clinical advance in the blood cancer HSCT field: 1) ineffective mobilization of patient stem cells; 2) hypersensitivity of recipient patients to pre-conditioning regimens; and 3) inefficient delivery of donor stem cells to the BM of cancer patients. Therefore, there is a great need to develop novel pre-conditioning agents that can optimize homing and entry of HSCs into recipient BM niche with minimal toxicity. The project will examine the mechanistic link between stem cell polarity, and HSC renewal and engraftment defects. Further, an innovative xenotransplant model will be employed to determine the potential of targeting stem-niche interaction in stem cell and gene therapies.

**Elizabeth B. Engler-Chiurazzi, Ph.D.**

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My general research program is aimed at assessing the convergence of the immune and central nervous systems on their impact for brain function and mental health.

Potential students' projects in my lab:

1. Test several antidepressants in a specific strain of mice to determine the extent to which this strain has a treatment-resistant depressive-like phenotype.
2. Characterize another strain of mouse that is deficient in the same part of the immune system as the first strain for depressive-like endpoints.
3. Administer various types of immunoglobulins to immune deficient mice to determine the potential to ameliorate the depressive like phenotype I have observed.

**Werner J. Geldenhuys, B.Pharm., Ph.D.**

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**Discovery of compounds to treat Parkinson's disease**

Parkinson's disease is an age-related neurodegenerative disease which affects the motor skills of patients. Unfortunately no drugs are currently available to slow down the disease progression, and there is a great need to discover these types of compounds. In this study we will be screening a library of compounds which consist of FDA approved and novel compounds identified through computer aided drug design techniques in several enzyme and *C. elegans* models. Once the compounds are identified which show promise, we will test them for neuroprotective activity. During the period of the study, students will learn how to screen compounds for biological activity in a high throughput manner as well as how to utilize models of Parkinson's disease to screen for phenotypic improvement afforded by the compounds. The student will learn more about the drug discovery process and how new drugs are found and characterized.

**Deliver of therapeutic proteins using nanoparticles**

Parkinson's disease is an age-related neurodegenerative disease which affects the motor skills of patients. Unfortunately no drugs are currently available to slow down the disease progression, and there is a great need to discover these types of compounds. In Parkinson's disease there are some mitochondrial proteins which we have found can be used to restore the damaged mitochondria seen in the disease. In this project we will work on developing a nanoparticle drug delivery system to deliver a therapeutic protein to the brain using several cell culture models. This project will introduce the student to the art of nanoparticle drug delivery formulation using biological therapeutic proteins as disease modifiers.

## **Dr. Robert Goodman**

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The following project is available in my laboratory:

### **Are neurons that respond to kisspeptin or NKB critical for pulsatile LH secretion in ewes?**

Kisspeptin and neurokinin B (NKB) are neurotransmitters found in specific neurons and are critical for normal reproductive function in humans because mutations in their receptors produce infertility due to low release of gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). GnRH stimulates secretion of LH and FSH (which stimulate gonadal function) from the anterior pituitary and is the primary means by which the brain controls reproductive function. One important feature of GnRH release is that it occurs in episodes, not continuously. Kisspeptin acts directly on GnRH neurons to stimulate GnRH secretion and is essential for this pulsatile pattern of GnRH secretion. In contrast, NKB does not directly act on GnRH neurons, but is still necessary for GnRH pulses. Receptors for kisspeptin and NKB are also found on non-GnRH neurons in a region of the brain that drives GnRH secretion during each pulse. To test the role of these non-GnRH neurons, we plan to lesion these neurons and determine the effects of these lesions on episodic GnRH secretion, using LH as an index of GnRH release. The student or faculty member will have the opportunity to assist with this study, work on other ongoing experiments, and learn the following techniques: 1) surgical removal of the ovaries and neurosurgical procedures for targeting specific areas of the brain, 2) injection of substances into the brain, 3) blood collection and processing, 4) radioimmunoassay procedures for measuring hormone levels in the blood, 4) and immunocytochemical procedures for identifying proteins (e.g., receptors for NKB) in tissue slices.

## **Dr. Lori Hazlehurst**

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### **Development of novel therapeutic strategies for tumors that reside or home to bone**

**Background:** It is clear that tumors that reside in the bone marrow such as multiple myeloma or tumors that metastasize to the bone such as lung, breast and prostate are difficult to treat with standard of care chemotherapeutic agents. We propose this is due in part to the identification of targets using unicellular models which do not account for the cross talk between the tumor and the tumor microenvironment in mediating disease progression and drug sensitivity. Our laboratory previously showed that tumor cell lines and primary patient specimens adhered to fibronectin are resistant to multiple structural and mechanistically diverse anti-cancer agents which we coined CAM-DR or cell adhesion mediated drug resistance. Moreover, tumor cells co-cultured with bone marrow stroma show increased resistance to standard of care agents. The goal of our laboratory is to define novel targets in the context of the bone marrow microenvironment and pursue the development of inhibitors that will either reverse CAM-DR or take advantage of vulnerabilities that occur due to cross talk between the tumor and bone marrow microenvironment.

**Project:** The incoming INBRE student would work with other students and post-docs in the laboratory and focus on determining whether: MTI-101 which targets a CD44/Alpha 4 integrin-IP3R-SOC signaling circuit is a viable strategy for inducing calcium overload and necrotic cell death in tumor cells residing in the bone marrow. Students that join the laboratory will learn cell culture, calcium flux measurement, standard genetic and pharmacological approaches for inhibiting mediators of calcium flux as well as exposure to analyzing microarray data, high throughput screening and in vivo drug testing.

**Dr. Stan Hileman**

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The process of puberty can be defined as the process whereby an individual gains the capacity for reproduction. This process is dependent upon changes in the release of gonadotropin releasing-hormone (GnRH) from the hypothalamus of the brain. Prior to puberty, GnRH release is minimal and the reproductive system is largely quiescent. As the time of puberty approaches, GnRH secretion increases, eliciting a corresponding increase in the release of luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone from the anterior pituitary gland that causes follicular maturation and, eventually, the first ovulation. The neural mechanisms underlying the pubertal increase in GnRH secretion are not completely understood, but may involve a set of neurons in the arcuate nucleus of the hypothalamus that coexpress kisspeptin, neurokinin B, and dynorphin, thus termed KNDy neurons. Kisspeptin and neurokinin B are critical for puberty onset in humans and have been shown to stimulate LH secretion in a number of species. The aim of our current project is to define the role of the KNDy peptides in puberty using female sheep as the model animal. Since puberty is a process dependent upon sufficient nutrition, we have recently started looking at the relationship amongs KNDy peptides and neurons involved in regulating food intake, namely agouti-related peptide and proopiomelanocortin neurons with the arcuate nucleus of the hypothalamus. This is accomplished through in vivo pharmacology as well as immunohistochemical and immunofluorescent approaches.

**Dr. John Hollander**

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**Cardiovascular Research** (This project is appropriate for faculty and/or students)

INBRE program participants will work in conjunction with laboratory personnel on projects examining metabolic aspects of cardiac diseases. Projects in the laboratory focus specifically on understanding the role played by proteins thought to be protective against the development of heart failure during diabetes mellitus as well as the genetic regulation of these proteins. Our studies have a tremendous impact on Appalachia. The goal of these studies is to provide insight into the mechanism of action of these proteins and genes, with the goal of designing therapeutics to treat cardiac disease states. Our experimentation involves both basic research and analyses in patient populations.

INBRE participants will interact with graduate students and staff members to answer research questions, using a multidisciplinary approach that includes genetic modification of the heart in both cell and animal models as well as analyses in patient samples. Training will be provided to the participants, which includes molecular cloning, whole heart physiology, RNA, DNA, and protein manipulation, bioinformatics as well as biochemical analyses.

**Dr. Gangqing (Michael) Hu**

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**Bioinformatics and Epigenome Biology**

Dr. Hu's laboratory combines computational and experimental techniques to understand epigenetic gene regulation in cancer and immune systems. The epigenome of an eukaryotic cell consists of chemical changes to DNA sequence and histone proteins wrapped by the DNA, also known as chromatin. Chromatin modifying enzymes, transcription factors, and transcription machinery collectively modulate the epigenome, which instructs gene expression program. The overarching goal of the lab is to decode the function and regulation of epigenome of immune cells during cell fate decision and cell activation, and epigenetic mechanisms of drug resistance of cancer cells. The research programs will help to define the effects that microenvironment can have on the epigenome of immune cells and cancer cells, and thereby affect their functions, providing implications in human diseases such as autoimmune diseases and cancers.

Projects: 1) an integrative database to chart the epigenomic landscapes of multiple myeloma by collecting and processing public high-throughput sequencing data and 2) computational annotate the expression and regulation of long intergenic non-coding RNA associated to drug resistance of multiple myeloma in the bone marrow microenvironment. During the internship, the trainees will learn basic concepts on the biology of epigenetic regulation and receive hands-on experience on the processing and integrating high-throughput genomic sequencing data.

## **Salik Hussain DVM, PhD**

Assistant Professor

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We are interested in elucidating the role of environmental exposures in aggravation and/or susceptibility to chronic pulmonary disorders such as asthma and interstitial lung diseases. Lung diseases are among top five causes of global mortality (WHO). Almost 15% of the US population suffer from lung inflammatory diseases e.g., asthma affects 1-18% of global population (approximately 300 million individuals), including over 25 million people in the United States. Global asthma patient number is expected to reach 400 million by 2020 and asthma is implicated in one of every 250 deaths worldwide. Environmental and occupational agents (ground level ozone, particulate matter, nanomaterials) significantly impact the development as well as exacerbations of the respiratory disorders. The over-arching goal of our research is to identify novel therapeutic targets to treat pulmonary disorders. We elucidate cellular and molecular pathways implicated in pulmonary disease susceptibility by studying patient samples, in vitro and in vivo rodent models of pulmonary disease to elucidate molecular pathways.

### **Techniques:**

- In vitro Organoid Cultures (air-Liquid Interface cultures, 3D Alveolar cultures)
- Lung Physiology Measurements (state of the art lung function measurements)
- Translational Studies (human clinical samples)
- Rodent Models (disease, transgenic, cell type specific gene deletions).

### **Available Projects:**

- Role of Alveolar Progenitor/Stem cells in Lung regeneration after Acute Injury
- Role of Mitochondrial NOD-Like Receptors in Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis
- Early life/Childhood Asthma (Environmental Exposures x susceptible gene interactions)

## Alexey Ivanov, Ph.D.

Research Assistant Professor

Department of Biochemistry and Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center,

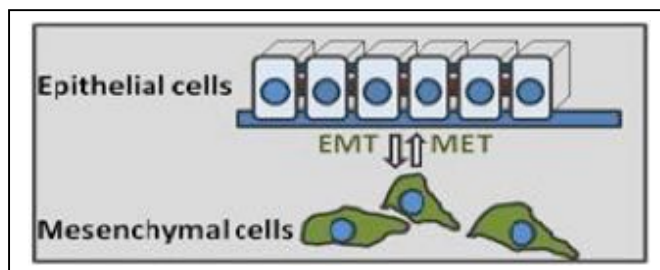
West Virginia University Cancer Institute

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### Description of Research

Vast majority of human tumors are of epithelial origin, e.g. they derive from cells normally highly organized in specialized epithelial layers. At the same time, most cancer-related deaths occur due to tumor recurrence and spread to distant organs (metastasis), which are tightly linked to acquisition by cancer cells of mesenchymal properties such as increased motility, invasion and resistance to chemotherapy. The metastasis stage of cancer is associated with epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition (EMT). Normally acting only during early embryonic development, the EMT program is hijacked by cancer cells during evolution of individual tumors. EMT is activated by a handful of transcription factors referred to as the EMT master regulators, such as Snail and ZEB.

The goals of our research are to identify transcriptional network involved in activation of EMT during cancer metastasis. This knowledge will help to develop future therapeutic approaches in treating cancer and prevention of metastasis.



### Available projects:

#### 1. Breast cancer cell dissemination, dormancy and reactivation at the metastatic sites in mouse xenograft model.

Cancer cell dissemination can occur before primary breast tumor diagnosis. Most disseminated cells stay dormant for years and are resistant to therapy. Tumor recurrence from these reactivated cells accounts for metastatic outgrowth and subsequent patient death. The goal of this project is to understand the mechanisms of tumor cell dormancy using a mouse xenograft model.

#### 2. Negative control of EMT by epithelial-specific transcription factors.

EMT promotes cancer cell invasion, metastasis and drug resistance. Primary breast tumors largely maintain inherent epithelial status. However, cancer cells on the tumor periphery are believed to undergo partial EMT and disseminate to distant organs. The goal of this project is to define the roles of several transcription factors responsible for the maintenance of the epithelial state in suppression of EMT.

#### 3. Role of the TGF-beta pathway in partial EMT and drug resistance of triple-negative breast cancer.

Transforming growth factor beta (TGF-beta) acts as a tumor suppressor at the early stages of cancer development. Cancer cells evolve various mechanisms to overcome TGF-beta inhibitory effects, including silencing and mutation of TGF-beta receptors or silencing and deletion of TGF-beta target genes involved in growth suppression. The latter mechanism is often observed in triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC). TNBC cells show increased TGF-beta signaling leading to partial EMT and resistance to certain drug therapies. The goal of this project is to investigate if pharmacological inhibition of the TGF-beta pathway combined with standard cancer therapy will improve drug response in vitro.

### Former WV-INBRE summer research interns in the lab

<u>Year</u>	<u>Name &amp; college</u>	<u>Current position</u>
2019	Jessica Johnson, Fairmont State University	still in school
2018	Emily Means, WV Wesleyan College	Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine
2015	Brandon Trinh, Bethany College	environmental hazardous waste management
2013	Morgan Johnson, Shepherd University	earned MD at WVU School of Medicine
2012	Anna Alappat, Shepherd University	earned MD at WVU School of Medicine
2009	Icel Cavis, Shepherd University	FBI Forensics Lab, Quantico, VA



## **Roberta Leonardi, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor

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Coenzyme A (CoA) is an essential and universally distributed cofactor that acts as the major acyl group carrier in the cell. Free CoA and acyl-CoAs are involved in hundreds of metabolic reactions, and are among a selected number of small molecules that have the ability to act as global regulators of cellular metabolism. Consistent with this key function, CoA levels are at the same time tightly regulated and flexible, so that the available supply is sufficiently adaptive to metabolic challenges such as fasting or a high fat diet. Regulation of CoA levels occurs through coordination of synthesis and degradation. In the liver, modulation of the amount of CoA contributes to the metabolic flexibility of this organ and to its ability to maintain glucose homeostasis during a fast. Conversely, in diabetic mice, hepatic CoA levels are abnormally high and unresponsive to changes in the nutritional state.

Not much is known about CoA degradation. The goal of our research is to establish the importance of two recently discovered CoA-degrading enzymes, Nudt7 and Nudt19, in the regulation of CoA levels and glucose homeostasis. In particular, we are interested in studying these enzymes in the context of diabetes and other metabolic diseases using a combination of biochemistry, animal studies and metabolomics.

## **James W. Lewis, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor

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**Description of Research (2019-2020):** Neuroimaging and sensory processing of chronic headache.

### **Lewis laboratory activities:**

Our lab generally studies mechanisms of sensory and multisensory perception, and understanding how this ties in with brain networks mediating cognition and language processing. We primarily use 3 Tesla functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), but also evoked response potential (ERP) methods. Recent clinical-research projects include (1) mapping chronic pain in specific types of headache sufferers, with the goal of identifying where (or how) in the brain the sense of headache pain is mediated. Advances in this field could lead to novel techniques to relieve chronic pain. A second front (2) is mapping the brains of epilepsy patients with heterotopic masses of brain tissue—which may be causally related to their seizure disorder. A third (3) is examining resting state functional connectivity (rsfMRI) data from different clinical populations. We primarily use computational approaches and methods for studying brain function, and thus applicants with a solid background in computer sciences or engineering are preferred.

Potential projects include:

- (1) Identifying and mapping brain networks mediating chronic headache pain using fMRI.
- (2) Mapping the function(s) of extra brain masses in epilepsy patients.
- (3) Examining difference in resting-state functional connectivity patterns in different clinical populations, including autism spectrum disorder and patients receiving transcutaneous electrical neural stimulation (TENS) as a treatment therapy.

**Dr. Paul R. Lockman**

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**Significance and Translational Relevance**

Brain metastases pose a life threatening problem for women with advanced metastatic breast cancer. Of women who have been diagnosed with disseminated breast cancer, ~10-16% will develop symptomatic brain metastases and at least 20-30% will have micrometastatic lesions present at autopsy. Once lesions are established in the central nervous system, only one in five women survive one year. We have recently shown that chemotherapeutics do not reach effective concentrations in ~90% of CNS metastases. Therefore, our lab is working on ways to prevent the formation of metastases in brain.

**Project Information**

Our lab uses cutting edge microscopy to identify single breast cancer cells that can invade into brain tissue. Once the cells are found we have techniques that can remove the individual cancer cell. Once the cell is collected the goal of the project is to identify if there is a DNA signature that allows the cancer cell to get into brain (>99% of breast cancer cells do not enter into brain tissue). Once that signature is identified it is hoped we will find a molecular target that can be blocked by a drug, which should reduce penetration of the cancer cells into brain. It is hoped this project will be a first step in the prevention of brain metastases of breast cancer.

**Skills and or Experiences the student will be exposed to**

1. Cell culture of human and mouse cells
2. Fluorescent microscopy – to potentially include multi-photon imaging
3. Bioluminescence imaging of cancer cells in living animals.
4. Laser micro-dissection of cells in tissue
5. RNA amplification
6. Microarray data

## **Mohammed A. Nayeem, MSc, PhD.**

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Center for Basic and Translational Stroke Research  
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<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Nayeem+MA>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/myncbi/mohammed.nayeem.1/bibliography/45750663/public/?sort=date&direction=ascending>

<https://scholar.google.ru/citations?user=SYQwJY0AAAAJ&hl=ru>

**Assessment of genetic polymorphism in human population (WV) and in mouse models through their oxylipins profile for targeted therapy related to hypertension and cardiovascular diseases:** INBRE program participants will work with our laboratory staff (postdoctoral fellows, graduate student & technician) on projects including NIH funded project to understand the mechanisms involve in cardiovascular diseases including hypertension in humans having genetic variations (genetic polymorphisms) in CYP2J2, sEH and A<sub>2A</sub>AR genes. The goal of this research project is to investigate the role plasma oxylipins, and to use oxylipins profile as a possible biomarker for human hypertension (HTN), which can be identified before clinical signs develop. In addition, we will investigate the mechanisms underlying the differential plasma oxylipins profile and their role in blood pressure (BP) response in HTN patients vs. age matched controls, mouse models (profiling oxylipins from plasma, heart & kidneys) of increased (Pro-HTN) vs. decreased (Resistant to HTN) susceptibility to HTN. Our lab research focuses on understanding the role of plasma oxylipins (5,6-, 8,9-, 11,12- and 14,15-EETs; 5,6-, 8,9-, 11,12- and 14,15-DHETs; 5-, 8-, 9-, 11-, 12-, 15-, 19- and 20-HETEs; 9,10- and 12,13-EpOMEs; 9,10- and 12,13-DiHOMEs; 9- and 13-HODEs; 6K-PG-F<sub>1α</sub>, PG-F<sub>2α</sub>, TxB<sub>2</sub>, PGD<sub>2</sub>, PGE<sub>2</sub>, 8isoPGF<sub>2α</sub>, PGB<sub>2</sub>, 10,11-EpHep, 19,20-EpDPE, 17,18-EpETE, etc.) in human pre-HTN, HTN and CVDs cases related to endothelial dysfunction due to aging and polymorphisms in adenosine A<sub>2A</sub> receptor (A<sub>2A</sub>AR) and enzymes involved in epoxyeicosanoid synthesis and metabolism (CYP2J2 and soluble epoxide hydrolase, sEH) in humans. Our long-term goal is to identify the possible targets leading to the development of novel drugs to treat clinical problems of cardiovascular diseases including pre-hypertension, hypertension, salt-sensitive hypertension, coronary artery disease, heart failure, cardiac arrest, cardiac death, heart attack, etc., associated with the defect in the enzymes and receptors (CYP2J2, sEH, A<sub>2A</sub>AR) in humans who have genetic variants that may possibly act similar to our genetically engineered mice. INBRE participants will interact with our lab staff (postdoctoral fellows, graduate student & technician) and learn the techniques to measure the cardiovascular response in vitro and in vivo.

## **Dr. Randy J. Nelson**

Professor and Chair  
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Hazel Ruby McQuain Chair for Neurological Research  
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### **Circadian Rhythm Disruption and Health**

Circadian rhythms are endogenous biological rhythms of about 24 hours and are a fundamental characteristic of life. Although life evolved over the past 3-4 billion years under bright days and dark nights, humans have been able to interrupt this natural light-dark cycle for the past 130 years or so with bright light at night. Our research group studies the effects of these disrupted circadian rhythms on several parameters including immune function, neuroinflammation, metabolism, pain, sleep, and mood. Summer interns and fellows would have the opportunity to assist with current projects in the lab which include: 1) the effects of light at night on metabolism, cognition, and pain sensitivity, and 2) the effects circadian disruption on neuroinflammation associated with cardiac or cancer development and treatments.

## **Dr. Timothy R. Nurkiewicz**

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### **Airborne Particles and Systemic Microvascular Endothelial Dysfunction**

Evidence indicates that acute exposure to airborne pollutants such as particulate matter (PM) and nanoparticles increases the risk of pulmonary and cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. This implies that PM affects extra-pulmonary tissues, as evidenced by the occurrence of cardiovascular dysfunction on high pollution days. However, the biological mechanisms by which PM evokes systemic effects remain to be defined. Despite its obvious importance in regulating the delivery of cells and molecules to all tissues, and in the etiology of most cardiovascular diseases, no research has investigated how systemic microvascular function is affected by pulmonary PM exposure. Our preliminary observations in the rat spinotrapezius muscle indicate that endothelium-dependent arteriolar dilation is significantly impaired after pulmonary particle exposure, and this impairment is associated with microvascular oxidative stress. Interestingly, this systemic microvascular effect can occur independent of pulmonary inflammation. My central hypothesis is that acute particle exposure affects peripheral microvascular function, and this effect is achieved by local reactive oxygen species production and/or altered neurogenic input to the systemic microcirculation. A fundamental understanding of these mechanisms is vital in preventing and treating the life-threatening events associated with air pollution. Our studies are further applied to the rapidly growing field of nanotoxicology. Wherein, it is acknowledged that nanotechnology has become a regular component of most every aspect of our daily lives, yet the toxicity of exposure to specific nanoparticles remains to be determined. Exposure to these nanoparticles carries just as much, if not more potential for generating profound effects on microvascular function. The student or faculty member will have the opportunity to develop surgical and experimental techniques associated with animal studies and isolated microvessels, as well as assist in exposing animals to various particle aerosols. These techniques include: inhalation exposure, animal surgery, microsurgery, intravital microscopy, in vivo measurement of oxidative stress and various micropipette-based techniques.

**Dr. Mark Olfert**

Director, Clinical and Translational Sciences PhD Program

Associate Professor

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**Title: Microvessel and vascular responses to E-cigarettes, nicotine and/or environmental stress**

INBRE program participants will work in conjunction with laboratory personnel on projects examining blood vessel responses to varied conditions, such as E-cigarettes, inhaled nicotine and/or other conditions (nano-material exposure, chronic disease states, etc.). Projects in the laboratory focus specifically on understanding the proteins and cell signaling responsible for regulating the function and formation of blood vessels in response to environment stress (e.g. inhaled toxicants, electronic cigarettes), biological stresses (e.g. exercise), and/or the loss of blood vessels in disease (e.g. obesity, heart failure, lung disease, diabetes, etc.). The goal of these studies is to provide insight into the mechanism(s) involved with the ultimate goal of designing therapeutics to treat abnormal vascular pathology. INBRE participants will interact with graduate students and staff members to answer research questions, using a multidisciplinary approach that includes genetic modification, whole animal clinical and metabolic testing, and bench top tools for DNA, RNA and protein analyses. Training provided to the participants will include whole animal physiology, basic surgical and microscopy techniques, along with molecular and biochemical analyses.

## **Dr. Vazhaikkurichi M. Rajendran**

Professor

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Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) includes Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Crohn's disease affects any part of the intestine (small and large intestine). Ulcerative colitis affects only the large intestine/colon. Both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are chronic inflammatory diseases. Ulcerative colitis that affects young adults is most prevalent in developed countries. This laboratory focuses on identifying the cause of the disease and on developing drugs for its prevention and cure.

### **Molecular Basis of Ulcerative Colitis**

Ulcerative colitis occurs as a result of inflammation of the mucosal cells that line the inner surface of the colon. This mucosal inflammation results in a reduced rate of nutrient, electrolyte and water absorption, leading to diarrhea. In addition, inflammation also reduces nutrient metabolism that produces energy needed to maintain healthy mucosal cells. An overactive immune system is one of the major reasons for mucosal inflammation in ulcerative colitis. The overactive immune reaction constantly produces free radicals (reactive oxygen species) that inhibit water absorptive processes and damage the mucosal cells.

### **Approach to Cure and Prevent Ulcerative Colitis**

To prevent ulcerative colitis, simultaneous reduction of the overactive immune system and improvement of mucosal cell health are essential. Overactive immune reactions could be controlled by supplying antioxidants. Mucosal health could be improved by supplying butyrate (a short chain fatty acid), which is the major nutrient of colonic mucosal cells. Butyrate is not present in food, but is produced from non-absorbed carbohydrates by bacteria present in the colon. Therefore, this laboratory is designing non-digestible carbohydrate (resistant starch) and free radical scavenger derivatives that, upon fermentation, deliver butyrate and an antioxidant right on target at the colon.

## **Aaron R. Robart, Ph.D.**

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### **Structure-Function Studies of RNA Splicing.**

A minuscule amount of our genome encodes exons that provide the instructions for protein synthesis. These exon sequences are interspersed non-coding DNA mainly (~70%) comprised of introns and retroelements. Intron splicing is conserved from bacteria to humans, wherein a complex machine known as the spliceosome removes introns and ligates exons to produce mRNA. Spliced introns are released as lariats, reminiscent of a cowboy's lasso. Regulation of splicing is essential, an estimated 50% of human disease mutations alter mRNA splicing. Group II intron ribozymes are the expected ancestors of the spliceosome, sharing a conserved RNA active site and reaction mechanism. Thus, these ribozymes offer a simplified system to study splicing.

Although many structurally unique families of group II introns are known, only a handful of introns have been biochemically characterized. The goal of this project is to examine how diverse RNA structures accomplish a conserved splicing reaction. **The student will employ molecular biology, biochemical and structural biology techniques. She/he will clone self-splicing introns, express proteins involved in splicing, test splicing by *in vitro* splicing and RNP reconstitution assays, and perform RNA crystallization trials on promising candidates.** Ultimately, our long-term goal is to solve crystal structures of different RNA structural subclasses to gain mechanistic insights into how diverse structures catalyze a common splicing reaction, and use this information to develop RNA based therapeutics to manipulate aberrant splicing patterns associated with human disease.

## **Cory Robinson, Ph.D.**

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### **MDSC expansion and migration during neonatal sepsis**

Neonates are more susceptible to infection and that susceptibility is associated with distinct differences in immune profile relative to adults. The laboratory is investigating mechanisms that contribute to impaired immunity in early life. Myeloid-derived suppressor cells (MDSCs) are an immature myeloid cells that have immune suppressive function. MDSCs are more abundant in human and murine neonates and we hypothesize that they contribute to impaired immune responses during infection. We have established a mouse model of neonatal sepsis to explore the involvement of MDSCs in early life immune responses. Using this model we have define the chemokines that are expressed in peripheral tissues during infection. Additionally, we have characterized the chemokine receptors expressed on MDSCs and how these change during infection. The next step is to investigate MDSC expansion and recruitment to inflammatory sites during infection. We aim to determine the abundance of MDSCs in the bone marrow, peripheral tissues, and lymph nodes along a timeline during infection. We further want to enumerate their abundance in different tissue compartments and follow their migration in real time relative to bacteria using adoptive transfer and whole animal imaging. Our planned experiments will further dissect mechanisms of chemotaxis in vitro to determine the chemotactic factors that drive migration. The work in this project will enhance our understanding of MDSC migration out of the bone marrow during infection and identify strategies that may be useful to block MDSC activity during neonatal infection.

## **Dr. Yon Rojanasakul**

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### **Cancer Cell Biology and Nanotechnology**

Major research interest is in the area of cancer development and chemotherapy. Our laboratory is particularly interested in the carcinogenic effects of engineered nanomaterials and environmental agents. We also investigate drug resistance mechanisms and new therapeutic strategies for cancer treatment. The student will learn research techniques for 1) growing and manipulating cells in culture, 2) assessing cellular responses to carcinogenic and anticancer agents, 3) identifying biomarkers and drug targets for lung cancer using various molecular biology techniques.



**Cole Vonder Haar, Ph.D.**

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**Behavioral consequences of traumatic brain injury**

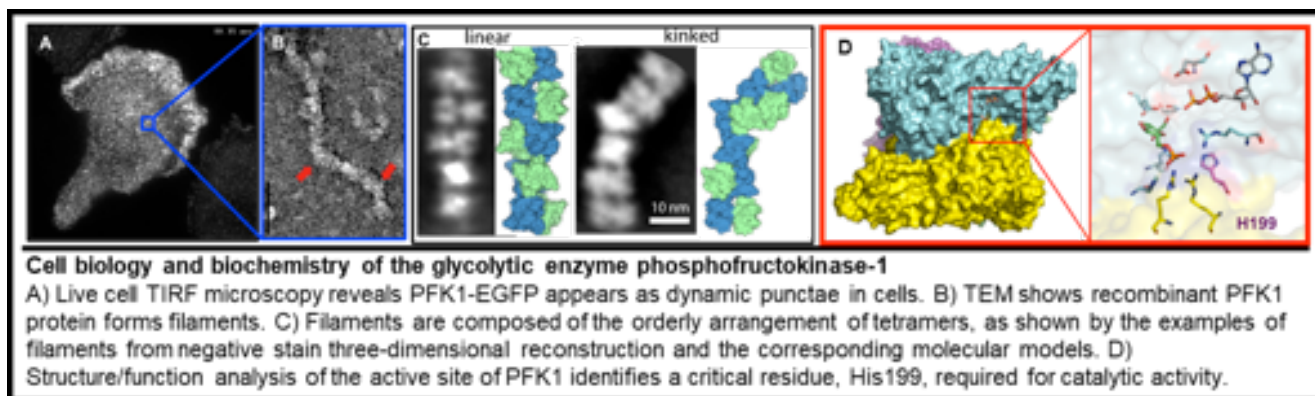
My lab is primarily interested in the chronic consequences of traumatic brain injury in rats. Although individual projects vary, some core areas of research include: 1) the role of (low) dopamine in chronic deficits, and dopaminergic drug treatments, 2) how inflammation may cause psychiatric-like symptoms, and 3) environmental modulation ("rehab") alone or along with neuromodulation (transcranial direct-current stimulation) to treat deficits. Students should note that almost all projects within this lab carry a heavy component of daily behavioral testing, and are well-suited for students looking to enter psychology or behavioral neuroscience graduate programs. Other techniques the lab utilizes are: stereotaxic surgeries, behavioral pharmacology, immunohistochemistry, and advanced statistical analyses.

## Bradley Webb, Ph.D.

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### Cell biology and biochemistry of intermediary metabolic enzymes

The enzymes and pathways controlling intermediary metabolism for energy production, nutrient utilization, and biomass synthesis play critical roles in cellular homeostasis. Dysregulated metabolic enzymes and pathways are now considered central to diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and neurodegenerative disorders. Despite being studied for half a century, we still have limited knowledge of the spatial and temporal dynamics of metabolic enzymes in cells, which is critical for understanding metabolic flexibility in normal cells and aberrant metabolism in diseases. We are currently addressing questions regarding the localization, regulation, and structure/function of enzymes in the glycolytic pathway. Using biochemical, cell biological, and cell imaging techniques, INBRE students will enhance our understanding of the spatial and temporal regulation of the glycolytic enzyme phosphofructokinase-1. In particular, the INBRE student will study how metabolites, post-translational modifications, or disease-associated mutations regulate the enzymatic activity and localization of phosphofructokinase.



### Publications:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/myncbi/bradley.webb.2/bibliography/46426825/public/?sort=date&direction=descending>

**Dr. Zachary M. Weil**

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The Weil Lab at West Virginia University is focused on understanding the basic biology and long-term consequences of traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a serious public health issue costing Americans over 75 billion dollars annually in health care costs and lost productivity. One prominent feature of TBI is that injuries make future injuries more likely and more devastating. Moreover, individuals with a history of TBI are more likely to develop substance abuse issues. Our lab is interested in understanding the molecular and biochemical basis of these phenomena.

There are two lines of research in our lab that students can become involved with:

- 1) Energetic dysfunction in the brain following traumatic brain injury. This project investigates how brain injuries can impair the brain's ability to process and utilize energy and how this can make the brain more vulnerable to other kinds of injuries, like repeated brain injuries, later on.
- 2) Alcohol abuse after traumatic brain injury. Traumatic brain injuries early in life can increase the likelihood of developing alcohol abuse issues later on in life. Our lab is interested in trying to understand how a brain injury can lead to increases in drinking behavior.

## **II. Mentors at Marshall University**

### **Dr. Subha Arthur**

Assistant Professor

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### **Regulation of intestinal bile acid absorption in obesity.**

Obesity is a national epidemic, and even more so in West Virginia with adult obesity rate of 39.5%. Dyslipidemia is central to most of the complications of obesity e.g. heart disease, fatty liver, stroke, type 2 diabetes etc. Increased absorption of dietary fat, which is one of the primary causes of obesity leading to dyslipidemia, has been further attributed to increased bile acid levels in the intestine, leading to dysregulation of bile acid and lipid homeostasis in obesity. Apical sodium dependent bile acid co-transporter or ASBT located only in the brush border membrane of villus cells, and only in the distal ileum, is exclusively responsible for the reabsorption of bile acids in the mammalian intestine. Despite the importance of ASBT in the maintenance of bile acid homeostasis and in turn lipid steady state, the altered regulation of ASBT, which may lead to dyslipidemia of obesity, is unknown. The ongoing research involves understanding the physiological and molecular regulation of intestinal bile acid absorption mediated by ASBT in Zucker rat model of obesity. Better understanding of the regulation bile acid absorption that directly affects lipid absorption in obesity may result in novel and efficacious treatment modalities.

## **Dr. Lydia Bogomolnaya**

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Our research focuses on characterization of molecular mechanisms utilized by Gram-negative bacteria *Salmonella enterica* ser. Typhimurium and *Serratia marcescens* to survive host response and to develop better treatment options. In particular, we are interested in the following important questions:

### **Project #1: Identification of natural functions of drug efflux pumps during infection**

Non-typhoidal *Salmonella enterica* serotypes including Typhimurium are the leading cause of bacterial food-borne enteritis in the United States. Until recently, *Salmonella* isolates were highly susceptible to most of the commonly used antibiotics but in the last decade the emergence of multidrug resistant *Salmonella* has been reported worldwide. *Serratia marcescens* is an opportunistic pathogen with increasing clinical importance. *S. marcescens* can cause meningitis, endocarditis, infections of airway and urinary tract, especially in immune-compromised patients. Efficiency of antibiotic therapy for these patients in some cases is extremely low due to the high intrinsic antibiotic resistance of *S. marcescens*. One mechanism for resistance of bacteria to antibiotics is through antibiotic efflux via multidrug efflux pumps. However, little else is known about the natural functions of these pumps during infection. We found that at least one pump called MacAB present in both bacterial species protects them against reactive oxygen species (ROS). We are interested in identification of natural substrates of this pump; how these substrates protect bacteria from ROS and how substrate production is regulated. Our studies will advance our understanding of the natural functions of bacterial efflux pumps beyond excretion of antibiotics and will aid to develop alternative strategies to control bacterial infections and augment conventional antimicrobial therapy.

### **Project #2: Defining the role of secreted DUF1471-containing proteins in adaptation of bacteria to different environments**

Bacteria are able to successfully exist in ever-changing environment. For a quick adaptation to a new niche, bacteria rely on secondary metabolites, peptides and secreted proteins. These molecules can participate in a number of important biological processes: signal transduction within population, production of new compounds (for example, antibiotics), formation of biofilms, and also play an important role in virulence. Gram-negative bacteria from *Enterobacteriaceae* family secrete in the environment a number of proteins containing DUF1471 domain with unknown function and a similar structure. The physiological role of these proteins in maintaining of bacterial viability remains unexplored. We hypothesize that bacteria utilize DUF1471-containing proteins as a network of signals to accelerate adaptation to a new environment. Our studies will be focused on identification of DUF1471-containing proteins needed for survival during infection and during antibiotic exposure.

WV-INBRE participants will receive training in standard microbiological techniques, molecular cloning, generation of mutants, DNA and protein analysis, and animal handling.

## **Dr. Piyali Dasgupta**

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The following projects are available in my laboratory:

1. **Anti-cancer activity of nicotinic antagonists in lung cancer:** Smoking bears a strong correlation to the development of a type of lung cancer called lung adenocarcinoma. In our laboratory we study the signaling pathways of how nicotine and NNK (components of cigarettes) promote the growth of lung cancer. Specifically, students working on this project will examine whether compounds which block the effect of nicotine can be useful for lung cancer therapy. Other techniques the students will learn are (i) to measure the effects of nicotine on the growth of human lung cancer cells (ii) the measure the anti-cancer activity of compounds (that inhibit the effects of nicotine) in human lung adenocarcinoma.
2. **Capsaicin and small cell lung cancer:** Capsaicin is the major active ingredient of chilli peppers. Preliminary data in our laboratory shows that capsaicin can inhibit the growth of human small cell lung cancer cells. We are interested in investigating molecular pathways contribute to this process. If you are interested in this project, you will learn (i) to perform specific assays to determine whether capsaicin can cause cell death in human small cell lung cancer cells (ii) to examine the biochemical mechanisms underlying this growth-inhibitory activity of capsaicin.

## **TECHNIQUES:**

The techniques that are routinely performed in our laboratory:

1. Cell culture techniques
2. Preparation of lysates, nuclear, membrane and cytosolic fractions
3. Assays to study cell growth and cell cycle progression
4. Detection of proteins using Western Blotting
5. Measurement of tumor angiogenesis.
6. Animal studies: anti-cancer studies on nude mice models

**Dr. Richard D. Egleton**

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My research focuses on how opioids regulate various cells in the brain during development. I have projects that look at cells in tissue culture and also in whole animals. My studies focus on how opioids given in utero alter the development of the brain.

**Opioid regulation of brain development**

In West Virginia we have one of the highest levels of opioid abuse in the whole country. Unfortunately this also includes among pregnant women, with approximately 10% of all neonates having exposure to opioids during pregnancy. The long term consequences of this exposure are not currently known. Studies with other drugs of abuse have shown that there can be significant developmental issues for the child when given during pregnancy. Our lab investigates how opioids can regulate the development of the brain. This project will investigate the effects of opioid exposure on the regulation of oligodendrocytes and brain myelination. Changes in myelination can have a significant effect on brain development, and lead to long term developmental delay. Methods that will be used will include dissection, Western blot analysis, immunofluorescence microscopy, and real-time PCR.

**Instrumentation:**

This project may involve using fluorescent and UV plate readers, real-time PCR, microscopy, gel rigs, centrifuges, balances and other standard lab equipment.

## **Dr. Lawrence M. Grover**

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**Central nervous system consequences of prenatal opioid exposure.** Fetal exposure to opiate drugs due to maternal drug use has both immediate and long-term consequences due to effects on the central nervous system. Immediate consequences include neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which is caused by drug withdrawal after birth. Symptoms of NAS may include hyperexcitability, high-pitched cry, tremor, diarrhea, vomiting, sweating, rapid breathing, feeding and sleep problems, and seizures. The symptoms of NAS reflect disturbances in nervous system development and function as a consequence of opiate exposure. Infants exposed prenatally to opiates also have a long-term risk for neurobehavioral problems lasting at least through childhood. The mechanisms through which prenatal opiate exposure produces these adverse consequences are still poorly understood. We are investigating the hypothesis that neurotrophic factors, which play critical roles in development and plasticity of the nervous system, are altered by prenatal opiate exposure leading to both immediate symptoms of NAS and longer term alterations in the nervous system and behavior.

**Methods and instrumentation.** Students participating in these projects will have the opportunity to learn animal handling, techniques for *in vitro* analysis of neuron function (dissection of CNS tissue samples, electrophysiological measurement of neural functions), techniques for measuring protein expression (Western blotting, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay or ELISA), and techniques for analysis of emotional and cognitive behaviors in laboratory animals. For tissue preparation and analysis of neural function, we use *in vitro* incubation chambers, micromanipulators, amplifiers, stimulators, and oscilloscopes; data is collected and analyzed using software running on personal computers. For Western blotting and ELISA we use gel electrophoresis equipment, chemiluminescence, a digital imager, and a plate reader. Animal behavior is recorded and analyzed using a computer-based animal tracking and measurement system. Students will use standard lab equipment (scales, pH meter, osmometer, pipettors, sonicator, centrifuge, etc) for preparing solutions, reagents and samples.

## **Dr. Brandon Henderson**

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### **Examining the effect of flavors on vaping-related behaviors**

While nicotine is the primary addictive component of all tobacco and vaping products, flavor additives have now been found to alter the neurons that are critical for addictive behaviors. As the use of electronic cigarettes continue to grow, it is critical that we understand how all constituents of vaping e-liquids effect the neurons that mediate addiction. The Henderson lab directly studies how nicotine and flavors trigger addiction. We use mice that are trained to use vaping devices to model human smoking and vaping behaviors. In these experiments we directly study how combining flavors with nicotine can increase drug reinforcement and vaping initiation. We then conduct follow-up experiments to examine changes in neurobiology and neurophysiology. These include the use high-powered fluorescence microscopy to examine structural changes in the dopamine neurons that play a major role in addiction neurocircuitry and electrochemistry to examine functional changes in the release of dopamine in the brain. Together, these experiments allow us to determine how entire brain circuits are modified by vaping constituents and trigger changes that reinforce vaping-related behaviors. For more information, visit the Henderson lab website: [www.hendersonlab.org](http://www.hendersonlab.org)



## **Dr. Jung Han Kim**

Professor

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### **Genetics of Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes**

My research interest is in understanding the etiology and pathogenic mechanisms underlying type 2 diabetes and obesity, concomitantly related diseases. Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of human diabetes, accounting for over 90% of cases and obesity at such epidemic proportions creates serious public health problems. There is substantial evidence demonstrating that genetic factors are strongly involved in the development of type 2 diabetes and obesity, and I have focused my attention on the link between gene dysfunction and these diseases and its interaction with diets. As an internship project in our laboratory for the WV-INBRE Summer Research Program, I propose to study candidate genes for diabetes and obesity loci identified in a genetic mouse model of obesity and type 2 diabetes and their interactions with diets. This study will ultimately provide ready targets for diabetes and obesity therapies in humans. Experimental methods involved in this internship research will include enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, colorimetric assay, polymerase chain reaction (PCR), western blot analysis, and real-time quantitative PCR. DNA, RNA and protein will need to be isolated from mouse tissues. Instruments involved in this project include gel electrophoresis, western blotting apparatus, microplate readers, spectrophotometer, imaging system, thermal cyclers, EchoMRI, and comprehensive lab animal monitoring system.

**Dr. Emine C. Koc**

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**WV-INBRE SUMMER RESEARCH PROJECTS**

Ovarian cancer, worldwide, is the most common cause of gynecologic cancer death. Primary treatment consists of a combination of surgical and platinum-based therapy. Despite success in attaining remission in many cases of ovarian cancer, over half of women with ovarian cancer experience of recurrence with chemoresistance and metastasis, specifically in high grade serous ovarian cancer (HGSOC). Interestingly, mitochondrial dysfunction is emerging as one of the major contributors of aggressiveness and chemoresistance in HGSOC due to its central role in energy metabolism.

In humans, mitochondria are responsible for providing over 90% of the energy in the form of ATP, which is generated by the process of oxidative phosphorylation. They have their own 16.5 kb circular genome and translation machinery/ribosomes essential for the synthesis of 13 essential proteins of the oxidative phosphorylation complexes. The mammalian mitochondrial ribosome (55S) is composed of ~80 mitochondrial ribosomal proteins (MRPs), accumulating data suggest that alterations in expression levels, mutations, and post-translational modifications of MRPs, such as acetylation and phosphorylation, affect disease states, apoptosis and cancer. Our multidisciplinary research takes advantage of biochemical, molecular and biological, and mass spectrometry (MS)-based proteomics technologies in a "systems biology" approach. The following studies will be aimed at understanding the role of mitochondrial translation and protein acetylation in HGSOC.

**Project 1: Detection of changes in MRP expression in ovarian cancer.** Apoptosis, also known as programmed cell death, is an essential process for normal development, tissue maintenance and aging. The failure in this process can cause tumor formation. Two pro-apoptotic proteins, DAP3 (Death Associated Protein 3) and PDCD9 (Programmed Cell Death Protein 9), were identified in our proteomics analysis of the mitochondrial ribosome as MRPS29 and MRPS30, respectively. We have characterized a DAP3 splice variant with an upstream open reading frame (uORF) that is involved in regulation of its expression in different cell lines. Alterations in MRPS29 and MRPS30 transcript levels are also observed in tumors; however, regulation of their expressions and contributions to tumor formation is not yet understood. Expression of pro-apoptotic MRPs and the other functionally significant MRPs will be screened at the transcript and protein levels by quantitative RT-PCR and immunoblotting analyses using HGSOC biopsies.

**Project 2: Regulation of protein synthesis in mitochondria by acetylation in ovarian cancer.** Changes in expression of various histone deacetylases and sirtuins have been associated with metastasis in ovarian cancer. We have shown that the reversible acetylation of MRPL10 regulates protein synthesis in mitochondria. To investigate the role of protein acetylation on mitochondrial translation and cell proliferation in HGSOC, OVCAR3 cell lines will be treated with small inhibitors of these deacetylases.

## Isabel Larre, Ph.D.

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Tight junctions are the intercellular junctions primarily responsible for barrier formation; they form paracellular diffusion barriers that regulate the flow of ions and solutes along the paracellular pathway. Structurally, they are composed of a large number of transmembrane proteins including claudins, occludin and junctional adhesion molecules, peripherally associated cytoplasmic proteins and proteins involved in signal transduction. These proteins interact to form a continuous and regulated paracellular barrier. Claudins are the primary proteins involved in developing the selectivity of the barrier.

In the three major renal tubular segments: the proximal tubule, the thick ascending limb of Henle's loop and the distal nephron, Claudin isoforms are expressed in a segment-specific manner, and control the permeability and ion selectivity of each segment. In particular, the TJ in the proximal tubular segment are quite permeable to  $\text{Na}^+$  through claudin-2, while the distal tubular segment regulates chloride paracellular transport. Therefore, revealing the molecular mechanism involved in the regulation of claudin isoform expression in kidney is not only important for advancing our knowledge of epithelial biology and renal physiology, but is also relevant to various human diseases such as hypertension.

In a previous report, my colleagues and I have demonstrated that ouabain regulates TJ function by activating the Na/K-ATPase-mediated signal transduction in renal epithelial cells. Those results suggest that the Na/K-ATPase (NKA) plays a critical role on TJ permeability. We found that a specific mutation on alpha 1 NKA sequence regulates the degree of tightness of TJ. We are interested in studying **Na/K-ATPase-mediated TJ regulation, and determining the molecular mechanism by which Na/K-ATPase exerts such regulation in renal epithelial cells phenotype.**

Our long-term goal is to establish both cellular and animal platforms that will allow us to develop new tools for *in vivo* investigation of the role of Na/K-ATPase-mediated TJ regulation of renal tubular structure and function.

Students working in my lab will be exposed to molecular, cell biology and transgenic animal techniques and other approaches that are currently available to perform integrated renal physiology research.

### **Project 1: We will test the hypothesis that Na/K-ATPase differentially regulates the expression and trafficking of claudin isoforms.**

**Rationale:** Since our preliminary data demonstrated an increase in TER in cells expressing Na/K-ATPase mutants, we propose that such changes in TER are due to altered expression of claudins. To test our hypothesis, we will first analyze cellular expression of different isoforms of claudins, and the role of NKA specific mutation on claudin expression. We will then reveal the molecular mechanisms by which NKA regulates the expression of claudin isoforms.

**Method:** To assess the mechanism of Na/K-ATPase-mediated claudins regulation, students will be exposed to cellular methodology like western blot and confocal immunostaining and immunoprecipitation.

### **Project 2: We will analyze TJ properties in renal nephron segments derived from animal models of salt-sensitive hypertension where the signaling function of NKA is known to be dysregulated.**

**Rationale:** Since cell lines approaches have limitations, it will be necessary to develop new strategies to corroborate our previous finding and study the relevance in human diseases.

**Method:** To assess the relevance of our new findings from cell culture, we will make an effort to validate our *in vitro* studies in hypertension animal models. We consider this an important study because it not only allows us to verify the physiological relevance of our findings, but also generates a new technology platform that will enable us to generate the platform to study the regulation of the renal paracellular permeability by NKA. Students working in this project will learn and get involve with animal handling, blood pressure measurement and kidney physiology.

**Wei Li, M.D., Ph.D.**

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**Email:** [liwe@marshall.edu](mailto:liwe@marshall.edu)<https://jcesom.marshall.edu/research/office-of-research-and-graduate-education/research-faculty/biomedical-sciences/wei-li/>**Project 1. Examine the mechanistic role of thymidine phosphorylase in thrombosis.**

Our recent study revealed, for the first time, that thymidine phosphorylase (TYMP), an enzyme in the DNA salvage pathway, plays important, mechanistic roles in facilitating platelet activation and thrombosis (Li et al. *Circ Res.* 2014). Thrombosis, namely, clot formation in the vascular system, is a fatal complication for many diseases, which causes myocardial infarction, stroke, or pulmonary embolism. Various anti-platelet and anti-thrombotic drugs have been developed; however, in addition to that they cause severe side effects, such as bleeding, some patients do not respond to those drug. Therefore, developing novel mechanism-mediated anti-platelet and anti-thrombotic therapy is a top priority. We believe that TYMP is a promising target because TYMP deficiency significantly inhibits arterial thrombosis but does not disturb systemic hemostasis. Furthermore, TYMP inhibitor has been approved by the FDA for clinical use, which makes it possible to be repositioned as a novel and systemically safe anti-platelet drug. For this, it is first necessary to elucidate the detailed mechanistic pathways of TYMP in platelet activation and thrombosis. Our hypothesis is that *TYMP plays an important mechanistic role in platelet activation via signaling pathways involving platelet glycoprotein VI (GPVI) and G-protein coupled receptors (GPCRs).*

In this project, we will use basic laboratory techniques including cell lysate preparation, protein concentration quantification, Western blot and immunohistochemistry, as well as platelet aggregation assay, flow chamber assay, among others. The intern will participate in platelet isolation, stimulation, cell lysate preparation, measurement of protein concentration and perform Western blot assays etc.

**Project 2. Examine the mechanistic role of thymidine phosphorylase in obesity and atherogenesis.**

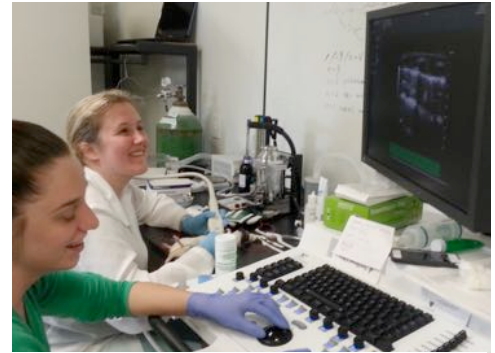
Dysregulated lipid metabolism and chronic inflammation have been recognized as key contributors to the development of obesity and atherogenesis. All of these are risk factors for causing thrombosis, which leads to myocardial infarction and stroke. TYMP is an enzyme in the pyrimidine salvage pathway. Our recent study revealed, for the first time, that TYMP possesses signaling functions and is essential for platelet activation and thrombosis, suggesting a novel function of TYMP in the cardiovascular system. TYMP is present in the lipid rich core of human atherosclerotic lesions, yet its function remains unknown. By searching Gene Expression Omnibus, we have found that TYMP is potentially correlated with the development of obesity. We thus hypothesize that TYMP participates in lipid metabolism and is essential for obesity and atherogenesis.

In addition to the basic laboratory techniques mentioned in project 1, this project will include preparation of aortic tree and aortic root for evaluation of atherosclerotic lesion. The intern will participate in dissection of the aortic tree, histological examination and quantification of the lesion areas as well as evaluation of leukocyte adhesion and rolling assay etc.

## Dr. Sandrine V. Pierre

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The Pierre lab studies specific intracellular pathways involved in the integrated response of the myocardium to hemodynamic and metabolic disturbances. Our goal is to develop new paradigms to therapeutically address cardiovascular diseases based on the Na/K-ATPase signaling complex. We examine these issues by combining techniques of molecular and cell biology with *ex-vivo* (biochemistry and cell physiology, isolated heart perfusion, primary cardiac cell cultures, histology) and *in-vivo* assessments of cardiac function in genetically altered mice (echocardiography, measurement of blood pressure by tail-cuff and telemetry, cardiac and vascular catheterization). In the interdisciplinary environment provided by MIIR, interns are exposed to the pre-clinical models and key techniques that are currently available to cardiac and vascular physiologists and pharmacologists.



*Echocardiographic assessment of rodent cardiac function by Dr. P. Marck and undergraduate fellow A. Bryant.*

### **Project 1. Cardioprotection by Na/K-ATPase ligands in acute myocardial infarction**

**Rationale:** In addition to pumping ions, Na/K-ATPase interacts with neighboring membrane proteins and takes part in signaling complexes to send messages to various intracellular organelles. We believe that understanding these pathways and targeting the Na/K-ATPase receptor function will lead to novel interventions for the treatment and prevention of ischemia and reperfusion injury.

**Method:** the INBRE fellow will learn the isolated Landendorff-perfused mouse heart preparation and expose it to novel compounds targeting the Na/K-ATPase cardioprotective signaling pathway. This includes analysis of contractile function in real time and assessments of activation of the Na/K-ATPase cardioprotective pathway biochemically. The effectiveness of promising compounds will be further tested *in vivo* following experimentally-induced acute myocardial infarction (AMI). Mice will be subjected to an acute occlusion of the left descending anterior artery (LAD) for 30 min, and cardiac function and remodeling will be monitored after 1 and 2 weeks of reperfusion. In addition to functional echocardiographic assessments, the fellow will conduct morphometric and histological studies as well as biochemical (western blot) and qPCR evaluation of fibrosis, inflammation, and hypertrophy markers.

### **Project 2. Role of $\alpha 1$ Na/K-ATPase in adverse cardiac remodeling and heart failure**

**Rationale:** Heart failure (HF), a chronic incurable illness, is the common end-stage of heart diseases caused by an array of highly prevalent conditions such as hypertension and coronary heart diseases. A greater and broader protection must be achieved to face the unmanageably high HF morbidity and mortality rates amidst the exploding incidence and prevalence of the condition worldwide. Targeting the Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup>-ATPase receptor function may lead to novel interventions

**Method:** Using our newly developed model of cardiac-specific KO of Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup>-ATPase  $\alpha 1$ , we will assess the role of Na<sup>+</sup>/K<sup>+</sup>-ATPase  $\alpha 1$  in the development of hypertrophy, fibrosis and heart failure in mice subjected to Angiotensin II infusion by osmotic minipumps. In addition to functional echocardiographic assessments, the students will conduct morphometric and histological studies as well as biochemical (western blot) and qPCR evaluation of fibrosis, inflammation, and hypertrophy markers.

**Dr. Gary O. Rankin**

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The following projects are available in my laboratory:

**Project #1:** Chloroanilines are commonly used chemical intermediates in the manufacture of dyes, drugs, agricultural herbicides and fungicides and thousands of other products. Exposure to a chloroaniline can result in a number of toxicities including toxicity to the blood, liver and kidney. This project seeks to determine the chemical species (parent compound or metabolite) responsible for liver and kidney damage and the mechanism by which toxicity occurs.

**Project #2:** Halogenated benzenes and phenols are common intermediates in the synthesis of a wide range of commercial products and appear as environmental pollutants in many parts of the world. Many of these compounds and/or their metabolites target the kidney and can induce kidney injury. This project will examine the nephrotoxicity induced by these compounds, examine structure-toxicity relationships as well as mechanisms by which these important chemicals harm the kidney.

**Assays and Instrumentation:** Projects that will investigate nephrotoxicity will use in vitro assays that involve isolation of rat kidney cells, measurement of enzyme release from treated and control cells, and potentially, the measurement of cellular ATP levels and other mitochondrial functional parameters. Additional techniques may involve Western blotting, quantifying urinary contents (protein, glucose), and measuring blood urea nitrogen and glucose levels. Instrumentation will primarily involve the use of balances, centrifuges and UV-visible spectrophotometers. High pressure liquid chromatography and thermocycler use is also possible.

## **Dr. W. Christopher Risher**

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Recently, much progress has been made towards understanding how neurons, the cells responsible for the processing and transfer of information in the central nervous system (CNS), interact with non-neuronal brain cells. However, we have still only begun to scratch the surface about how non-neuronal cells contribute to the structural and functional maturation of the neuronal junctions known as synapses. Our work focuses on identifying and elaborating the genes, molecules, and signaling pathways that are crucial for linking non-neuronal cells with the synaptic structures that have been shown to be severely disrupted in nearly all known neurodevelopmental and psychiatric disorders. The long-term goal of our research is to contribute to novel therapeutic strategies to prevent or repair the impaired synaptic connectivity that occurs during abnormal brain development and following CNS injury or insult.

Two primary projects are currently ongoing in the Risher lab:

1) Astrocytes, the primary glial cell type in the brain, secrete a variety of factors that promote synaptogenesis during development and after injury. One family of synaptogenic proteins, the thrombospondins (TSPs), acts through a neuronal receptor, calcium channel subunit  $\alpha 2\delta$ -1, which is known to be altered in some patients with epilepsy, intellectual disability, and autism. We have recently found that this signaling pathway occurs at differing rates in males and females, providing a possible mechanism by which synaptic connectivity diverges between the sexes. We are currently investigating this possibility in rodent cell culture and brain slice models.

2) Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) is a devastating consequence of the national opioid epidemic that is showing striking incidence rates in West Virginia and Central Appalachia. NAS infants are essentially born with an addiction to opiates, and they enter an intense state of withdrawal after being cut off from the mother's nutrient supply. The babies require constant supervision and, approximately 50% of the time, pharmacological intervention before being able to be discharged from the NICU. The long-effects of NAS on cognition and behavior are predicted to be numerous, but there is currently not much known about how prenatal opioid exposure affects brain development. Recently, at Cabell Huntington Hospital, a subset of NAS infants have been described with a particularly harsh form of the condition; these infants were born to mothers who co-abused opioids and the drug gabapentin. Gabapentin is a ligand for the synaptogenic receptor  $\alpha 2\delta$ -1 which prevents the binding of TSP and subsequent synapse-promoting effects. We are now conducting experiments to try to understand the mechanism by which gabapentin and opioids interact to affect the formation and maturation of synaptic circuitry in animal and human models of NAS.

In the Risher lab, students will be exposed to a variety of cellular, molecular, genetic, and imaging techniques. Commonly used methods include animal handling (mouse/rat), primary cell culture, organotypic brain slice culture, Western blotting, immunohistochemistry, plasmid DNA transformation and transfection, confocal microscopy, electron microscopy, 3D reconstruction-based image analysis, genotyping, and viral vectors including CRISPR/Cas9. Students will have the opportunity to meet regularly with Dr. Risher as well as in a group setting such as our biweekly lab meetings/journal clubs.

## **Dr. Louise Risher**

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Our laboratory is interested in understanding how adolescent binge drinking influences brain function and contributes to the development of alcohol use disorder. Using a rodent model of adolescent binge drinking, our laboratory and others have demonstrated that there are acute and long-term changes to neuronal structure, function, and behavior across multiple cognitive domains.

Over the last few decades it has become apparent that non-neuronal cells called astrocytes which outnumber neurons and ensheath many neuronal connections, play an important role in synapse formation, synapse maintenance across the life-span, and synaptic recovery following injury. However, how astrocytes contribute to neuronal and synaptic remodeling following ethanol exposure is not fully understood. Understanding how astrocytes contribute to the long-term effects of adolescent binge drinking in a rodent model is crucial for understanding the impact that underage alcohol exposure can have on the adult brain and how early onset drinking may contribute to the development of alcohol dependence later in life.

We have three ongoing projects: 1. Investigating the acute and long-term effects of binge drinking on astrocyte function. 2. Investigating the role of astrocytes in the development of addiction. 3. Investigating how changes in astrocyte function following adolescent binge drinking influence recovery from secondary injury later in life, e.g., following stroke and/or traumatic brain injury. Techniques used to answer these questions include: intracranial survival surgery, immunohistochemistry, Western blot, qPCR, organotypic slice culture, confocal microscopy, 3D morphometric analysis of astrocytes, and a battery of behavioral paradigms including conditioned place preference, open field, social interaction, and plus maze.

## **Boyd Rorabaugh, Ph.D.**

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### **Impact of Methamphetamine on the Ischemic Heart**

My laboratory studies the effect of methamphetamine on the ischemic heart. We have found that prenatal exposure to methamphetamine causes female rats (but not their male littermates) to become hypersensitive to myocardial ischemic injury when they become adults. Likewise, exposure to methamphetamine during early adulthood also selectively hypersensitizes the female (but not male) heart to ischemic injury. Importantly, this cardiac effect of methamphetamine persists even after exposure to the drug has been discontinued, providing evidence that methamphetamine induces cardiac changes that are long lasting and potentially irreversible. Our data suggest that women who have heart attacks may experience more extensive cardiac injury if they have a history of methamphetamine exposure during the prenatal or early adult periods. We are currently trying to understand the mechanism by which methamphetamine sensitizes the female heart to ischemic injury and determine whether this effect of early life methamphetamine exposure persists into the geriatric phase of life when heart attacks are most common.

INBRE participants will have the opportunity to participate in the identification of methamphetamine-induced changes in cardiac gene expression (RNA sequencing, real time PCR, western blotting), learn how to use the Langendorff isolated heart model, quantify myocardial ischemic injury, and conduct experiments with vascular rings and other isolated tissues. Students will also have the opportunity to interact with other investigators in the department (faculty, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and graduate / undergraduate students), assess scientific literature, and learn to present their data to a scientific audience.



## **Dr. Travis Salisbury**

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The aryl hydrocarbon receptor (AHR) is a ligand-activated transcription factor that binds environmental toxicants, pharmaceutical drugs and endogenous ligands. We and others have discovered that the AHR promotes or inhibits breast cancer depending on the ligand that it binds. We hypothesize that the AHR modulates breast cancer progression by regulating the activity of embryonic pathways that have become oncogenic in breast cancer cells. We hypothesize that a better understanding of the mechanisms by which AHR regulates signaling in breast cancer cells will lead to novel therapies to treat this disease. Students in my lab would have the opportunity to study these questions in several lines of human breast cancer cells. Our methods are largely molecular biology based; therefore, students would have the opportunity to use real time PCR machines, electrophoresis equipment, and laminar flow tissue culture hoods. Students will also have a choice as to what technique they would like to learn during their intern. Techniques in lab will include, but are not limited to, real-time PCR, western blot, chromatin immunoprecipitation analysis, interfering RNA approaches to gene knockdown and proliferation assays.

## **Nalini Santanam, Ph.D., M.P.H., F.A.H.A.**

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The following projects are available in my laboratory:

**Project 1: Non-opioid analgesics and pain:** Opioid addiction is high among people who suffer from chronic pain. My laboratory is interested in understanding the physiology of pain, in order to test non-opioid analgesics to alleviate this pain. We will use cell culture and animal models of pain and test the analgesic compounds that work through non-opioid signaling.

**Project 2: Epigenetics and cancer risk:** Cancer is a leading killer, next only to heart disease. Epigenetics, which are heritable changes that are not caused by alterations to DNA, is studied by changes in DNA methylation, histone methylation or acetylation and microRNAs. Our laboratory is interested in identifying the epigenetic pathways involved in the risk of cancer. This will help identify better treatment options.

### **TECHNIQUES:**

Techniques that will be used in the above projects are:

1. Animal studies: rodent models of pain
2. Cell culture systems to study cancer proliferation and transformation
3. Isolation and quantification of RNA (including miRNA) and DNA
4. Detection of genes using quantitative PCR/Real time PCR and Western Blotting
5. Detection of Epigenetic markers: DNA and histone markers using Western blotting and microarrays, microRNAs arrays

## **Dr. Yevgeniy Shakirov**

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Our research interests focus on telomeres, the evolutionarily conserved protein-DNA complexes that cap linear eukaryotic chromosomes, promote genome maintenance and regulate cellular lifespan. Telomere length shortens with each somatic cell division and is often viewed as the most accurate cellular marker of biological age. Proper maintenance of telomere length has important implications for aging, stem cell-related diseases and cancer. Although considerable variation in mean telomere length exists in yeast, plants and humans, mechanisms underlying telomere length homeostasis are largely unknown.

**Project 1. Genetic and epigenetic architecture of natural telomere length variation.**

The main objective of current research in the lab is to elucidate the genetic and epigenetic causes of telomere length variation using the genetically facile plant *Arabidopsis thaliana* as a model. To achieve this goal, we use a plethora of cutting edge natural variation resources available for this organism and a collection of powerful molecular, genomic and epigenetic tools. We recently identified a major effect QTL that explained 48% of telomere length variation in recombinant inbred *Arabidopsis* populations, with the underlying natural polymorphism mapping to the *NOP2A* gene. Mutations in mammalian *NOP2* orthologs lead to uncontrolled proliferation of cancer cells, and their expression serves as a prognostic marker of tumor development. INBRE program participants will work with laboratory personnel on understanding the role played by *NOP2A* and other genes in telomere length control. Our studies will have an impact on understanding genetic differences in telomere length between individuals and populations, and may provide novel insight into the molecular basis for different rates of aging and predisposition to telomere-associated stem cell, cancer and age-related diseases.

**Project 2. Analysis of the interplay between telomere biology and ribosome biogenesis.**

We have recently identified several components of rRNA maturation machinery, including RPL5, that impact species-specific telomere length set point in plants. Interestingly, human *RPL5* inhibits tumorigenesis, and its inactivation is the most common (11-34%) somatic ribosomal protein defect in multiple tumor types. Indeed, important similarities exist between human diseases known as telomeropathies and ribosomopathies, and our findings argue that components of rRNA maturation machinery may impact species-specific telomere length set point across eukaryotic evolution. INBRE participants will work with mutants of ribosome biogenesis genes in plants to uncover specific mechanisms linking telomeres with ribosome biogenesis.

All participants will receive training in molecular cloning, RNA, DNA and protein analysis, aspects of genetic manipulations and bioinformatics.

**Dr. Vincent Sollars**

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<http://www.marshall.edu/bms/2012/08/30/vincent-e-sollars-ph-d/>

**The Question:** *“What are the processes that enable a normal cell to start misbehaving and become cancerous?”* The process that cells in our bodies undergo to become cancer cells all end up producing a cell that ceases to listen and cooperate with its neighbors, which is necessary for the complex mixture of cell our bodies are. This grant will investigate a process known as “canalization”, which much like a canal for water directs the flow of water, directs a cell as it matures to the necessary type of cell the body requires. Disrupting this “canalization” process can cause a cell to change and lose its direction, potentially pushing it down paths that lead to cancer.

**Research Goals:** The research will use both cells grown in the laboratory and animal models of human leukemia, along with advanced scientific methods to test the role of canalization in the process of maturing cells and cancer development. The research will allow students at Marshall University the opportunity to participate in cutting edge research in preparation for careers in science.

**Specific Project:** A cell culture model for hematopoietic stem cells is used in our laboratory. This project will involve the differentiation of these cells and the study of the effects of inhibition of canalization during this maturation of the resulting cells. Techniques involved will be flow cytometry and mammalian cell culture.

## **Dr. Monica Valentovic**

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Our laboratory is focused on exploring new interventions that will reduce the adverse effects of drugs. We have recently focused on examining ways to reduce the toxicities of cancer chemotherapy agents. Projects available in my lab:

**Project #1. Reducing serious cancer chemotherapy side effects.** This is an ongoing project that has been funded by a federal grant from NIH. Our laboratory is evaluating new compounds that may reduce the adverse effects experienced by individuals treated with cancer chemotherapy drugs. In addition, another goal of this project is to come up with methods to improve the effectiveness of the cancer chemotherapeutic agents while lessening the side effects. This project has clear clinical relevance and is translational. The drugs we are exploring are used in controlling breast, lung, ovarian cancer and leukemia. An individual involved in this project will investigate cellular changes in toxicity, specifically we want to explore changes in the mitochondria as well as post-translational modifications of proteins caused by exposure to cancer chemotherapy drugs including doxorubicin, cisplatin camptothecin or irinotecan.

**Project #2. Potential role of e-vape flavoring agents in renal impairment.** E-cigarettes and e-vaping have a complex series of flavoring aldehydes. Recent studies have shown alterations in genetic expression in the lung, kidney, brain and liver following vaping in rodent models. We will examine changes mediated by flavoring aldehydes on renal proximal tubules. This project will examine the impact of flavoring aldehydes on mitochondrial proteins critical in generation of ATP.

**Project #3. Mechanisms exploring the link between obesity and cancer.** Obesity is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. In this project we are examining surgical tissue from humans for increased free radical damage. In addition, we are culturing breast cancer cell lines with different medias containing lipids to evaluate their impact on the mitochondria. This has direct application to humans and is clinically relevant. Individuals (students or faculty) involved with this project will participate in examining cellular changes that may increase cellular stress in normal and cancer tissue or cells.

**Project #4. Examination of the mechanism of renal damage by an antiviral agent used in in treating HIV and hepatitis.** Patients with HIV or hepatitis B must take antiviral agents to slow the progression of heir disease for very long periods of time. Side effects often occur after someone takes an antiviral agent for over 1 year. We are examining the mechanism of damage to the kidney by a commonly used antiviral agent. We are using a normal human proximal tubular epithelial cell culture model for this study.

## Dr. Yanling Yan

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If you have kidney disease, you are more likely to get heart disease. Kidney disease and heart disease share the main cause – high blood pressure – the major cause of death around the world. An impaired capacity of the kidney to excrete sodium is a final pathway through which vascular, neural, and inflammatory responses raise blood pressure. However, the underlying mechanisms are not fully understood.



Reactive oxygen species (ROS) as a natural byproduct of the normal metabolism of oxygen in the biological context is attracting attention because of redox signaling. Our laboratory primary research is to explore the molecular mechanisms of renal sodium (Na) handling, blood pressure regulation, and cardiac remodeling, focusing on the role of ROS, inflammation, and Na/K-ATPase receptor-mediated signal transduction. Our long-term goal is to open up the possibility of translational clinical research and develop personalized patient management.

Potential projects are listed below: (1) ROS sensing and signaling in renal proximal tubule; (2) Na/K-ATPase receptor-mediated proximal tubule Na handling; (3) Na/K-ATPase receptor as an amplifier for ROS involved in renal Na handling and blood pressure regulation; (4) Na/K-ATPase receptor-mediated signal transduction and cardiac remodeling. With the support of NIH COBRE grant, a multidisciplinary research approach including cell biology, molecular biology, biochemistry, and surgery is applied in various *in vitro* and *in vivo* systems. We use Dahl salt-sensitive rat, diet-induced obese C57B6/6J mouse (DIO), and polygenic obese TALLYHO/JngJ (TH) mouse to cover a broader spectrum of human disease mechanisms.

Participants will join an active laboratory and closely work with Dr. Yan, medical students, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and faculty to contribute to ongoing biomedical research. The participants will present at WV Symposium. **Note:** Former intern is a coauthor of a journal paper (*Int. J. Mol. Sci.* **2019**, *20*(14), 3495; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms20143495>).

Summer program participants will have the opportunity to learn:

1. Animal handling and diet studies, as well as metabolic cage studies
2. Cell culture techniques
3. Preparation of lysates, including tissue and cell lysates
4. Subcellular fractionation – isolation of endosome
5. Western Blotting for detection of protein
6. Indirect competitive ELISA for quantification of small peptide
7. qRT-PCR for mRNA measurement
8. Fluorescent microscopy techniques
9. Standard lab equipment (scales, pH meter, pipettors, sonicator, centrifuge, etc.) for preparing solutions, reagents, and samples.

## **Dr. Hongwei David Yu**

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My research focuses on bacterial biofilms, lung infections and gut microbiota. Four projects are ongoing in the Yu lab.

**Project #1: Cystic Fibrosis Biofilms.** Individuals afflicted with cystic fibrosis (CF) are susceptible to recurrent lung infections with a bacterium called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. During the infection in CF, this bacterium forms a capsule (biofilms) by producing a polysaccharide called alginate. Alginate is a virulence factor that allows greater adhesion to lung epithelial cells, as well as protection from antibiotics and the host's immune system. We study how alginate production is regulated. Elucidation of the alginate pathways will lead to better understand the pathogenesis, and development of novel therapeutics for treatment in CF.

**Project #2: Testing Antimicrobials.** Most of bacterial lung infections starts with the colonization of upper respiratory tract. Aspiration of oropharyngeal secretions containing colonizing bacteria deep into the lung allows for the establishment of lower respiratory tract infections. We are using an inhalation exposure system to introduce bacteria into the distal airways of the mouse lungs, causing the development of pneumonia. This model is being utilized to test the safety and efficacy of novel antimicrobials against the multiple drug-resistant (MDR) lung infection. The goal of this project is to develop novel therapeutics against the MDR Lung infections and pneumonia.

**Project #3: SFB Probiotics.** Gut microbiota, a bacterial community made up of 1,000 different species, are important to human health. Among all the species, there is a morphologically-distinct symbiotic member known as segmented filamentous bacteria (SFB). The SFB belongs to a group of clostridia bacteria, which cannot be grown *in vitro*. However, the SFB play a vital role in the development of the immune system in mice. More specifically, SFB have been shown to attach to the apical epithelium of the small intestine to induce the interleukin-17-producing T helper (TH<sub>17</sub>) cells. TH<sub>17</sub> cells are important for the protection against intestinal pathogens as well as in maintaining gut homeostasis. In this project, we will examine possibilities of how to develop the SFB into a novel probiotic to prevent and control the gastrointestinal diseases in children.

**Project #4: New Biopolymer Development.** Through removal of major pathogenicity genes from genome and validation via the genome resequencing, we created a non-pathogenic strain of *P. aeruginosa* that produces large amounts of alginate. Alginate is a polysaccharide widely used in biomedical applications. It consists of an unbranched linear biopolymer comprised of two sugar monomers,  $\beta$ -D-mannuronate and its C5 epimer  $\alpha$ -L-guluronate. Through introduction of changes of genetic codes for the alginate biosynthetic enzymes, we hope that we may be able to use the non-pathogenic strain to produce alginate with custom compositions.