I am excited and honored to join the Department of Physiology as the new Chair. My first months in Augusta have passed quickly, and I am especially grateful to the faculty, students, fellows, and staff who have eased my transition to the Medical College of Georgia (MCG). As I have had the opportunity to get to know everyone better, I am continually impressed with the positive attitude that each individual presents. It is my great pleasure to join a department with an established tradition of excellence in research, teaching, and service.

Special thanks is owed to Dr. Ruth Harris, who just completed her term as the Interim Chair. Ruth’s personal commitment and dedication to the department and institution is remarkable. Dr. Harris not only filled the chair role for the past year, but she also worked diligently to advance the mission of the department while continuing her personal scientific research and other activities. Dr. Harris serves as a great role model for all of us.

The department faculty continue to be world leaders in their respective fields with outstanding research programs. The department ranked #10 in the Blue Ridge Institute Rankings for 2018 with just over $5.5M in total National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding. Further evidence of the faculty member’s scientific influence is their active participation in international societies and meetings, scientific committees, editorial boards, invited lectures, and other scholarly activities. The postdoctoral fellows and students are also contributing and highly productive members of the department. Together with the outstanding professional staff, the department is a vibrant place to work that is making scientific progress on a continuing basis.

In addition to the department’s excellence in research, faculty continue to not only excel but also lead the service and teaching mission at MCG. All of the faculty are involved in these missions, but special credit goes to Dr. Michael Brands, Chair of the MCG Student Academic Promotions and Professionalism Conduct Committee, and Dr. Ruth Harris, Chair of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Similarly, the department is a leader in medical and graduate education. Evidence of teaching effectiveness is the receipt of multiple teaching awards by department faculty. Among them was the “Distinguished Faculty Award for Basic Science Teaching” awarded to Dr. Paul O’Connor and the “Caught in the Act of Great Teaching Award” to Dr. Jen Sullivan. The department also had four faculty recipients of ‘MCG Exemplary Teaching Awards’ (Dr. Wendy Bollag, Dr. O’Connor, Dr. David Stepp, and Dr. Mong-Heng Wang).

There were also a large number of accomplishments by department members in the past year; notable among them: Dr. Jessica Filosa and Dr. Zsolt Bagi were promoted to Professor. These promotions reflect the excellence of both Jessica and Zsolt in research, teaching, and service.

Dr. Ruth Harris completed her term as the President of the international Society for the Study of Ingestive Behavior (SSIB). Ruth was elected to lead the society by her peers. The SSIB serves as the world’s leading scientific organization for the study of ingestive behavior and is comprised of individuals from over 30 different countries.

Dr. Wendy Bollag was named the founding Research Director of the Augusta University Adrenal Center. The Adrenal Center represents a collaborative clinical and research effort by several departments whose mission is to provide multidisciplinary, comprehensive and timely care to patients with diseases of the adrenal gland.

Dr. Jennifer Sullivan chaired the organizing committee for the American Physiological Society Conference on ‘Cardiovascular, Renal and Metabolic Diseases: Sex Specific Implications for Physiology’. The aim of the conference was to educate, explore, and expand the knowledge of unique considerations for the study of cardiovascular physiology of males and females in order to improve medicine from bench to bedside.

Finally, the department welcomed two new faculty members. Dr. Philip O’Herron joined us from the Medical University of South Carolina as an Assistant Professor, and Dr. Justine Abais-Battad from the Medical College of Wisconsin joined the department as an Instructor.

It is my true pleasure to serve as the Chair of this historically significant department that has a rich academic tradition. I look forward to building on the great work that is occurring and guiding the department in new directions.

Best,

David L. Marron, PhD
Professor and Chair
Georgia Research Alliance (GRA) Eminent Scholar in Hypertension
Dr. Zsolt Bagi received an R01 grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to further parse how obesity drives cardiovascular disease. Dr. Filosa provided a subaward for Dr. Ergul’s parent R01 grant and an administrative supplement to her NIH R01 to study Alzheimer’s disease on her R01 grant.

The American Physiological Society honored Dr. Webb with a Career Development Award. He was also awarded with the 2019 Mayerson-DiLuzio Lectureship from the Tulane Hypertension and Renal Center of Excellence.

Dr. O’Herron received a grant from the National Institutes of Health to further pursue his research related to his R01 grant “Novel Role of Bscl2 in Cardiac Substrate Metabolism and Function.”

The American Physiology Society elected Dr. Bagi to serve on the AJP Select editorial board and he accepted an invitation to join the Editorial Board of the Journal of Vascular Research. He also received an R01 subaward from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The Medical College of Georgia selected Dr. O’Connor as the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Faculty Award for Basic Science Teaching. His manuscript “Oral NaHCO3 Activates a Splenic Anti-Inflammatory Pathway: Evidence That Cholinergic Signals Are Transmitted via Mesothelial Cells” was The Journal of Immunology’s most downloaded article in 2018.

Dr. Choudhary received a Poster Travel Award at the American Heart Association Funding Center of Excellence.

Dr. Yoon received one of Augusta University’s Caught in the Act of Great Teaching awards as well as a Diacomp Conference Support Grant.

Dr. Liu is a visiting faculty member from the Hunan Agricultural University in Dr. Chen’s lab to further research related to her R01 grant “Natural Role of BclU2 in Cardiac Substrate Metabolism and Function.”

Dr. Choudhary received a Poster Travel Award at the Southeastern Regional Lipid Conference.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke awarded Dr. Filosa a subaward for Dr. Ergul’s parent R01 grant and an administrative supplement to her NIH R01 to study Alzheimer’s disease on her R01 grant.

Dr. Harris completed her term as elected President of the International Society for the Study of Ingestive Behavior and has started her term as the Chair of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).

The Medical College of Georgia selected Dr. O’Connor as the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Faculty Award for Basic Science Teaching. His manuscript “Oral NaHCO3 Activates a Splenic Anti-Inflammatory Pathway: Evidence That Cholinergic Signals Are Transmitted via Mesothelial Cells” was The Journal of Immunology’s most downloaded article in 2018.

Dr. O’Herron received a two year R21 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to further pursue his research related to his R01 grant “Novel Role of Bscl2 in Cardiac Substrate Metabolism and Function.”

The American Physiological Society honored Dr. Webb with a Career Development Award. He was also awarded with the 2019 Mayerson-DiLuzio Lectureship from the Tulane Hypertension and Renal Center of Excellence.

Dr. Yoon received a three year American Heart Association Transformational Project Award.

Dr. Filosa was recognized for his contribution to teaching during the 2017-2018 academic year and was recipients of the Medical College of Georgia 2018 Exemplary Teaching Award.

Drs. Boegehold, Bollag, O’Connor, Stepp, and Wang were selected for NIH Funding at the Medical College of Georgia international Society for the Study of Ingestive Behavior and has started her term as the Chair of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke awarded Dr. Filosa a subaward for Dr. Ergul’s parent R01 grant and an administrative supplement to her NIH R01 to study Alzheimer’s disease on her R01 grant.

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### Congratulations to our trainees that successfully defended!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alec Davila, PhD</td>
<td>Dr. Zsolt Bagi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ladonya Jackson, PhD</td>
<td>Drs. Adviye Ergul and Susan Fagan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patricia Martinez-Quinones, PhD, MD</td>
<td>Dr. Clinton Webb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yue Pan, PhD</td>
<td>Dr. Xiaoling Wang</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lia Taylor, PhD</td>
<td>Dr. Jennifer Sullivan</td>
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**R. Clinton Webb Postdoctoral Travel Award**

The R. Clinton Webb Postdoctoral Travel Award was created this year to recognize scholarship, leadership and service by a Postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Physiology, Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University. Scholarship activity includes, but is not limited to, external funding, refereed publications and national and/or international presentations. Service includes, but is not limited to, contributions to teaching, training, and committee service. Each year, Postdoctoral fellows are encouraged to apply and one will be selected by a committee to receive $1,000 for use in the next year to cover travel expenses related to a scientific conference.

**Recent Postdoctoral Awardees**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ellen Gillis</td>
<td>Dr. Jennifer Sullivan</td>
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<td>Riyaz Mohamed</td>
<td>Dr. Jennifer Sullivan</td>
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**Physiology Trainees received 22 travel awards in the past year.**

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<td>Mahmud Abdellah</td>
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**Recent Graduate Student Awardees**

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**Welcome our newest trainees to the labs!**

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**Keep up with our trainees on Instagram!**

Scan the QR code below or visit [www.instagram.com/aug_physiology](http://www.instagram.com/aug_physiology)
Dr. Wendy Bollag: My undergraduate training was in biochemistry but although I liked learning about molecules and their structures, I wanted to know how these molecular entities fit into the big picture, how they participate in ensuring homeostasis, and how they regulate the body’s responses to changes in the external and internal environment. Therefore, for my doctoral work I applied and entered a physiology graduate program and have never regretted this decision. An understanding of physiology has allowed me to educate others, contribute to research in a range of biomedical disciplines and hopefully improve human health in the near future.

Dr. Jennifer Sullivan: Physiology is the study of the fundamental mechanisms that dictate the function and health of all living organisms. As such, I view physiology as the foundation for most of the fields of study in the biomedical sciences. Our PhD training in cardiovascular pharmacology, although the questions that I was interested in asking had their basis in physiology, therefore, when the opportunity arose, I chose to join the Physiology Department at the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) at Augusta University.

Dr. Yoon: Why is physiology important? Why did you choose it as a specialty?

Dr. Sullivan: The physiology Department at MCG provides a number of unique opportunities for our PhD students. The Department supports a fellowship for each PhD student annually to participate in the APS Professional Writing Skills Course, the students run a department sponsored lecture series each year, and students have multiple networking opportunities through the external seminar series and the annual mini-symposium. Indeed, together, the invited lectureship, seminar series, and mini-symposium bring in ~15-20 leaders in the physiology and the students have an individualized time to meet with each of these outstanding scientists.

In addition to providing numerous opportunities for professional development, the Department also recognizes the importance of building relationships within the department and maintaining a culture that encourages collegiality and collaboration. To this end, the Department hosts a number of annual social events that includes both faculty, staff, and trainees throughout the year.

How do you ensure the trainee has a productive time while enrolled?

Dr. Bollag: I love having trainees in my laboratory as they are generally so excited to try new things and enthusiastic about science. I try to strike a balance between providing guidance and allowing independence to experiment and learn about the scientific process on their own. I encourage them to read the appropriate literature and help them to gain critical thinking skills by discussing relevant articles in our biweekly laboratory meetings. Since networking is so important in science, I also urge trainees to attend meetings whenever possible. There is a regional meeting that I attend every year with my lab members, the Southeast Regional Lipid Conference, where I really enjoy that this is my favorite conference is because everyone is all in it. Besides the main talks, I keynotes lectures, are presented by trainees. In addition, the meeting attendees are very friendly, asking questions and offering advice in a constructive and kind manner, thereby creating a wonderful opportunity for my trainees to ‘get their feet wet’ in presenting their research to the scientific community.

Dr. Sullivan: The productivity and success of each trainee depends on the trainee, major advisor, and committee working together towards a common goal. While the Department of Physiology at MCG provides everything necessary to ensure the success of each trainee, in the end it comes down to effective communication, hard work, and sometimes some luck, to maximize the productivity of each trainee.

Dr. Bollag: ‘Productive’ as successful completion of PhD degree? Or scientific productivity? Well, either one cannot happen without the other. We make sure the students are correctly on schedule for each milestone required for the degree. The program has certain standards that students need to meet. Our program has a maximum graduation requirement and the majority of the students exceed this requirement. The members of the mentorship committee is to guide and advise the students for successful completion of the degree, and they are fully committed to it.

Dr. Sullivan: ‘Productive’ as successful completion of PhD degree? Or scientific productivity? Well, either one cannot happen without the other. We make sure the students are correctly scheduled for each milestone required for the degree. The program has certain standards that the students need to meet. Our program has a maximum graduation requirement and the majority of the students exceed this requirement. The members of the mentorship committee is to guide and advise the students for successful completion of the degree, and they are fully committed to it.

Dr. Bollag: I do believe our trainees would encourage others to join the Program because of the strengths of the Department of Physiology at MCG we’ve mentioned. The members of the Department are like a family; we help each other and have fun together not only in the lab but also outside. On a personal note, whenever I discuss science, I think that our trainees enjoy this atmosphere and would express their satisfaction with the Program.

Dr. Sullivan: I like to think that our current trainees would encourage others to join the Physiology Graduate Program. We have an outstanding Program that works hard to address the needs of each individual student. In addition to helping our students reach their individual goals, the Department is made up of truly nice people. It is a group that I am proud to work with and enjoy spending time with.

What is your long term vision for the trainee program?

Dr. Bollag: I would love to see our PhD Program used to ‘grow our own,’ or in other words, to train students who return after their postdoctoral fellowships to bring new techniques and approaches to the Department of Physiology at MCG and train the next generation of students.

Dr. Yoon: Our trainee program has been around for a while because it has been successful, so the long-term vision is to continue the success. The success of the physiology graduate program is essential for the Department of Physiology at MCG which is inevitably tied to the available funding. Our new Chair Dr. Matson recognizes this and will start a new initiative to maintain the funding for graduate students. The number of students in this program is on an upward trend, and this new initiative will help provide a sustainable future for our program. As we produce a larger number of successful physiologists, we hope that they come back to the department, and contribute to our program.
Dr. Jennifer Sullivan received the prestigious Mid-Career Award for Research Excellence from the Council on Hypertension with American Heart Association. The award recognizes an investigator who has made significant contributions related to hypertension or cardiovascular research. Dr. Sullivan was selected as the recipient for the inaugural John Laragh Research Award from the American Journal of Hypertension. The new award honors an exemplary basic, clinical, translational, epidemiology, population science or health systems investigator under age 45.

Dr. Clinton Webb was honored with the American Heart Association’s highest award, the 2018 Excellence Award for Hypertension Research (formerly the Novartis Award for Hypertension Research) from the American Heart Association’s Council for High Blood Pressure Research. “Dr. Webb is a prolific investigator who more than 40 years after giving his first presentation on the dilation of blood vessels, remains passionately immersed in the field of vascular biology and hypertension,” said Dr. David C. Hess, Medical College of Georgia Dean. “His tremendous body of published, pertinent work and his unique style of mentoring the next generation of vascular physiologists make him an icon in the field of hypertension research.”

Dr. Bollag’s paper “Obesity, hypertension, and aldosterone: Is leptin the link?” was one of the top-cited articles in the Journal of Endocrinology for the year 2018.

Abstract: Obesity is a serious health hazard with rapidly increasing prevalence in the United States. In 2014, the World Health Organization estimated that nearly 2 billion people worldwide were overweight with an estimated 600 million of these obese. Obesity is associated with many chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Data from the Framingham Heart study suggest that approximately 78% of the risk for hypertension in men and 65% in women is related to excess body weight, a relationship that is further supported by studies showing increases in blood pressure with weight gain and decreases with weight loss. However, the exact mechanism by which excess body fat induces hypertension remains poorly understood. Several clinical studies have demonstrated elevated plasma aldosterone levels in obese individuals, especially those with visceral adiposity, with decreased aldosterone levels measured in concert with reduced blood pressure following weight loss. Since aldosterone is a mineralocorticoid hormone that regulates blood volume and pressure, serum aldosterone levels may link obesity and hypertension. Nevertheless, the mechanism by which obesity induces aldosterone production is unclear. A recent study by Belin de Chantemele and coworkers suggests that one adipose-released factor, leptin, is a direct agonist for aldosterone secretion; other adipose-related factors may also contribute to elevated aldosterone levels in obesity, such as low-density lipoprotein (VLDL), the levels of which are elevated in obesity and which also directly stimulates aldosterone biosynthesis. This focused review explores the possible roles of leptin and VLDL in modulating aldosterone secretion to underlie obesity-associated hypertension. © 2016 Society for Endocrinology.

Jennifer Iddings, PhD:
Postdoctoral Fellow, Spinal Cord Injury Clinical Research Scientist, Shepherd Center

Weiguo Li, PhD:
Assistant Professor, Medical University of South Carolina

Rabei Alaisami, MD, MPH:
Clinical Quality Assurance Coordinator, Augusta University

Katherine (Hatcher) Covington:
Research Manager, Institute of Public and Preventive Health, Augusta University

Nicole Kue, PhD:
Manager of Medical Affairs, Reata Pharmaceuticals

Rabei Alaisami, MD, MPH:
Instructor, Medical University of South Carolina


My time in the Department of Physiology at the Medical College of Georgia prepared me to be a better educator and innovator of science curriculum. The Physiology Department is a phenomenal place to acquire the necessary professional skills for today’s academic and research leaders.
Dr. Virendra Mahesh (1932-2019)

“New target found for disease of the heart’s smallest blood vessels” (EurekAlert!)

Dr. Wendy Bollag

“Lipid that aids normal skin turnover may help psoriasis” (EurekAlert!)

Dr. Philip O’Herron

“Scientists explore blood flow bump that happens when our neurons are significantly activated” (ScienceDaily)
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/07/190719094011.htm

Dr. Jennifer Sullivan

“Research shows high-fat diets are bad for blood pressure, even in young people” (WJBF News Channel 6 ABC)
https://www.wjbf.com/csa-news/research-shows-high-fat-diets-are-bad-for-blood-pressure-even-in-young-people/

Dr. Clinton Webb

“Webb receives top honor from AHA Council on Hypertension” (EurekAlert!)

“Danger’ molecules may increase cardiovascular risk from early life stress” (MedicalXpress)

Dr. Lois T. Ellison (1924-2019)

“Doctors work to find new ways to treat Psoriasis” (WJBF News Channel 6 ABC)

Dr. Michael Brands

“Peptide shows promise for protecting kidneys from nephritis” (EurekAlert!)

Dr. Wendy Bollag

“Lipid that aids normal skin turnover may help psoriasis” (EurekAlert!)

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Read more Department of Physiology at Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University News online
www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy/phys_news.php

To learn more about Dr. Mahesh’s career and to support his namesake lectureship, please visit
https://www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy/mahesh.php

To learn more about Dr. Ellison’s career and to support her namesake lectureship, please visit
www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy/postdoc/ellison.php

To learn more about Dr. Ellison’s career and to support her namesake lectureship, please visit
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To learn more about Dr. Ellison’s career and to support her namesake lectureship, please visit
www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy/postdoc/ellison.php
Thank you, Dr. Vinod Bhalla, for your generosity!

Dr. Vinod Bhalla was a Physiology and Endocrinology faculty member under former Chair Dr. Virendra B. Mahesh and generously donated to three departments at Augusta University, the departments of Physiology, Oncology, and Obstetrics & Gynecology.

The Department of Physiology was granted a $50,000 endowment titled “The Mr. Sohrab Modi and Mr. and Mrs. Lal C. Bhalla (Shanti) Endowment Fund” from Dr. Bhalla. This donation was made in honor of Dr. Bhalla’s mentor and parents. The purpose of the fund is to “supplement research expenses of the Department of Physiology faculty, including research supplies and personnel, at the discretion of the Chairman of the Department of Physiology. The fund may also be used to support graduate and MD/PhD students. This named endowment honors the mentor and parents, respectively, of long-time Medical College of Georgia professor of endocrinology and physiology Vinod K. Bhalla, PhD.”

A Look Back In Time

The Endocrine Group, June 19, 1990

The Endocrine Group merged with the Physiology Department in 1986.

Front Row: Drs. Pomila Singh, Barbara Conway-Myers, Laura Murphy, Virendra Mahesh, Bruce Goldman, Carol Bagnell, Brooks Keel, Kevin Osteen, Paul Dmowski, Michael Melner

Second Row: Drs. Thomas Ahney, Elizabeth Brown, Kenneth Roper, Darrell Brann, Carol Lapp, Kenneth Korach, James Ellegood, Max Poole

Third Row: Drs. Rogers Byrd, Russell Myers, Jaime Steinapir, Elizabeth Smanik, Juan Calderon, Gary Watson, Thomas Ogle, Iruvanti Rao, Allen Costoff

Back Row: Drs. Thomas Mills, Richard Parker, John Cidlowski, Francisco Rojas, James O’Conner, Vinod Bhalla, Lawrence Hendry, Chester Hendrich

Consider a gift to the Department of Physiology

- Physiology Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Fellow Endowment Fund
- Endocrinology Fund
- Greenblatt Lectureship
- Herbert S. Kupperman Endowed Chair
- Lois Ellison Lectureship
- Mahesh Lectureship and Graduate Award
- Mr. Sohrab Modi and Mr. and Mrs. Lal C. Bhalla (Shanti) Endowment Fund
- Thomas Muldoon Lectureship
- Hamilton Memorial Fund

For more information on these funds or to make a contribution please visit us at www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy/phys_gift.php
An Inner Look at Physiology

Contact Us

1120 15th Street, CA 3126
Augusta, GA 30912
706 721 7711 office
706 721 7299 fax
www.augusta.edu/mcg/phy