



Faculty Awards Ceremony

Medical College of Georgia Faculty Senate

5 p.m., Thursday, May 22, 2025



Dear Colleagues:

The MCG Faculty Senate's Faculty Awards Ceremony recognizes exceptional achievement by faculty and residents in the areas of teaching, research, clinical care and service.

Today's honorees have contributed their significant skills and passion to attaining excellence and have set a high standard for us all. We gather today to thank them for their contributions to our medical school and to the dynamic present and future of medicine.

We thank as well the members of the MCG Faculty Senate Faculty Recognition Committee for their diligent efforts to make this celebration possible.

Thank you for all you do.

Most respectfully yours,

David C. Hess, MD
Dean, Medical College of Georgia
Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs
and Integration, Augusta University
Interim Executive Vice President for Research
and Innovation
Presidential Distinguished Chair
Professor, Department of Neurology

Vishal Arora, MD
President, MCG Faculty Senate
Professor, Department of Medicine

Program

Welcome	Vishal Arora, MD President, MCG Faculty Senate Professor, Department of Medicine, Division of Cardiology
Remarks	David Hess, MD Dean, Medical College of Georgia Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs and Integration, Augusta University Interim Executive Vice President for Research and Innovation Presidential Distinguished Chair Professor, Department of Neurology
Educator of the Year Awards	Class Presidents
Outstanding Basic Science Teaching Award	Class Presidents
Outstanding Clinical Science Teaching Award	Class Presidents
Resident of the Year Award	Natasha Savage, MD Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education and Designated Institutional Official Vice Chair of Academics and Professor, Department of Pathology
Mentoring Excellence Award	Lara Stepleman, PhD Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Success Professor and Chief of Psychology, Department of Psychiatry & Health Behavior
Distinguished Faculty Awards	Cassandre Perard, DO Chair, Faculty Recognition Committee Secretary, MCG Faculty Senate Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine Almira Vazdarjanova, PhD Past Chair and Member, Faculty Recognition Committee Vice President, MCG Faculty Senate Professor, Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology
Champion of Advocacy and Success Award	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Institutional Service Award	Dr. Perard
Patient Care Award	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Outstanding Faculty Award	Dr. Perard
Lifetime Achievement Awards	Dr. Vazdarjanova
Spirit of MCG Award	Dr. Arora
Recognition of Faculty Senate Executive Committee	Dr. Hess
Closing Remarks	Dr. Arora

Honorees:

Educators of the Year

Jennifer Tucker, MD '97

Associate Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2025, Main Campus, Augusta

Kurt Horst, MD

Associate Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2025, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

Jennifer Tucker, MD '97

Associate Professor, Department of Emergency Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2026, Main Campus, Augusta

Melanie Wooten, MD

Assistant Professor, Department of Pathology

Selected By: Class of 2026, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

Amanda Barrett, MD '13

Associate Professor, Department of Pathology

Selected By: Class of 2027, Main Campus, Augusta

Donald Scott, MD

Associate Professor, Department of Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2027, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

Puttur Prasad, PhD

Professor, Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Selected By: Class of 2028, Main Campus, Augusta

Theresa Rohr-Kirchgraber, MD

Professor, Department of Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2028, AU/UGA Medical Partnership, Athens

Dr. Elapulli Prakash, MBBS, MD

Professor, Department of Physiology

Selected By: Class of 2028, MCG Savannah Campus

Outstanding Basic Science Teaching Award

Department of Cellular Biology and Anatomy

Selected By: Class of 2027, Main Campus, Augusta

Outstanding Clinical Science Teaching Award

Department of Medicine

Selected By: Class of 2025, Main Campus, Augusta

Mentoring Excellence Award

LaShon Sturgis, PhD '07, MD '14



Dr. LaShon Sturgis is an associate professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine and assistant dean for academic advising for the Medical College of Georgia. She serves as a senior consultant for the AAMC Diversifying the Physician Workforce Action Plan.

Through her leadership, Dr. Sturgis has systematically enhanced student resources, bringing the medical school in line with the latest evidence-based approaches to mentorship. Her active participation in key committees, such as the At-Risk Student Committee and Curriculum Oversight Committee, has fostered a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Beyond institutional advancements, she embodies mentorship as a personal calling, inspiring both students and faculty alike with her commitment to fostering growth. Her exemplary track record, including multiple teaching awards and contributions to student diversity initiatives, highlights her lasting impact on medical education and the broader academic community.

She completed her doctoral degree in cardiovascular and renal physiology, medical school, and her residency in emergency medicine at the Medical College of Georgia.

Distinguished Faculty Awards

Basic Science Teaching

Ariel VanLeuven, PhD



Dr. Ariel VanLeuven is an assistant professor in the Department of Cellular Biology and Anatomy and a medical educator at the AU/UGA Medical Partnership in Athens, GA.

As the Module Lead for the GI/Endocrine/Reproduction curriculum, she has demonstrated outstanding leadership, fostering collaboration among faculty while continuously refining learning objectives, assessments, and course content to enhance student outcomes. Her dedication to mentorship extends beyond the classroom, as she serves as faculty advisor for multiple student interest groups and is a trusted guide for students seeking extra academic support. Her impact is also evident through her scholarship in medical education, with contributions to national and international organizations, as well as influential publications in esteemed academic journals.

She received her doctoral degree in cell biology from the University of Georgia and completed an interdisciplinary certificate in University Teaching at the Graduate School at the University of Georgia.

Clinical Science Teaching

Subbaramiah Sridhar, MBBS, MPH



Dr. Subbaramiah Sridhar is a professor in the Department of Medicine and consultant in Gastroenterology and Advanced Therapeutic Endoscopy.

Dr. Sridhar has made outstanding contributions to medical education at MCG for the past 24 years. His dynamic, evidence-based teaching style engages learners across various formats, fostering an environment where students, residents, and fellows feel both challenged and supported. His leadership as Fellowship Program Director transformed the Gastroenterology program into a premier training destination, with his mentorship leading to remarkable achievements among his trainees. Beyond curriculum development and scholarly contributions, Dr. Sridhar has been a steadfast advocate for student support in education. His impact is further reflected in his numerous teaching

awards, faculty development efforts, and national/international leadership roles, solidifying his reputation as an outstanding educator and mentor.

Basic Science Research

Huabo Su, PhD



Dr. Huabo Su is a professor in the MCG Vascular Biology Center and Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology.

Dr. Su's lab investigates the mechanisms driving cardiomyopathy and heart failure, with an emphasis on protein modifications regulated by small protein modifiers like ubiquitin, NEDD8, and Ufm1. His academic achievements have garnered international recognition for his research and expertise in neddylation's role in cardiac and vascular health, the pathophysiological impact of non-Cullin neddylation in the heart, novel mechanisms governing mitochondrial quality control, and the intricate functions of deubiquitinases (DUBs) in cardiac biology.

He received his master's in microbiology at Guangxi University and PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology at Fudan University in China. He completed his postdoctoral studies in cardiovascular biology at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

Clinical Science Research

Jorge Cortes, MD



Dr. Jorge Cortes is a professor in the Department of Medicine and the Director of the Georgia Cancer Center.

Dr. Cortes is a globally recognized expert in leukemia research, with exceptional expertise in clinical and translational studies, particularly in myeloid leukemias. Over the past 30 years, his work has focused on developing innovative therapies, predictive models for leukemia, reducing cancer treatment toxicity, and enhancing patient's quality of life. As a leading figure in pivotal clinical trials, his team's efforts have resulted in the FDA approval of five leukemia treatments, significantly advancing patient care. Dr. Cortes has also served as principal investigator on more than 230 grants and contracts, further solidifying his impact on the field. His extensive contributions to medical research are reflected in his

prolific publication record, with 1,267 peer-reviewed original research manuscripts in high-impact journals, as of last month.

Outstanding Early Career Basic Science Faculty Award

Daria Ilatovskaya, PhD



Dr. Daria Ilatovskaya is an associate professor in the Department of Physiology.

Her pioneering work on electrolyte homeostasis and renal epithelial transport has led to significant breakthroughs in understanding sodium handling in disease conditions such as diabetes, polycystic kidney disease, and hypertension. Utilizing advanced techniques—many of which are available in only a few laboratories worldwide—she has developed comprehensive experimental protocols that span molecular, cellular, tissue, and whole-animal levels. Her recent expansion into renal mitochondrial bioenergetics, particularly in studying sex differences in hypertension, further highlights her innovative approach to scientific discovery. With an impressive track record of publications and cutting-edge research, Dr. Ilatovskaya is shaping the future of renal physiology and

disease mechanisms.

Dr. Ilatovskaya completed her PhD in Cellular Biology at the Institute of Cytology, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Outstanding Early Career Clinical Science Faculty Award

Hong Shi, MD



Dr. Hong Shi is an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine, Division of Rheumatology. Her groundbreaking work in preventing cardiovascular disease in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) has the potential to transform the management of this life-threatening complication. With over \$1 million in research funding, including prestigious grants from the NIH and the American Heart Association, she has demonstrated remarkable dedication to advancing scientific knowledge. Her extensive publication record, including first-author contributions to *Frontiers in Immunology*, highlights her impact in the field. Beyond research, Dr. Shi is a highly respected mentor and clinician, having established a specialized SLE clinic, supervised trainees, and enriched academic discussions through her leadership at rheumatology conferences. Additionally, her involvement in pharmaceutical clinical trials has brought cutting-edge therapies to patients at Wellstar MCG Health.

Dr. Shi earned her medical degree at Tongji Medical University in China and completed her internal medicine residency at Montefiore Mount Vernon Hospital in New York and rheumatology fellowship at the University of Michigan.

Champion of Advocacy and Success

LaShon Sturgis, PhD '07, MD '14



Dr. LaShon Sturgis is an associate professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine and assistant dean for academic advising for the Medical College of Georgia.

As an assistant dean for academic advising and an associate professor of Emergency Medicine, she has consistently championed success through mentorship, curriculum development, and institutional advocacy. Her leadership in national initiatives, including her role as a senior consultant on the AAMC Diversifying the Physician Workforce Action Plan, underscores her commitment to accessibility in medical education. Dr. Sturgis has enriched MCG and the broader medical community through scholarly contributions, educational initiatives on social determinants of health, and efforts to ensure patient care.

Her engagement with student mentorship programs, advocacy groups, and health care initiatives has empowered individuals to embrace a culture of belonging, making her a true leader.

She completed her doctoral degree in cardiovascular and renal physiology, medical school, and her residency in emergency medicine at the Medical College of Georgia.

Institutional Service Award

Ashley Saucier, MD '11



Dr. Ashley Saucier is an associate professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine and assistant dean for evaluation, accreditation and CQI. She was awarded the Institutional Service Award in recognition of her exceptional leadership, dedication, and contributions to the Medical College of Georgia's LCME re-accreditation process. Serving as site visit coordinator and clinical science lead, she played a pivotal role in securing the successful re-accreditation of MCG, ensuring a more informed and engaged faculty. Her optimism and collaborative spirit empowered subcommittees, fostering teamwork and achievement during a demanding process. Beyond accreditation, Dr. Saucier's commitment to medical education is evident in her tenure as an MCG faculty member, serving in key leadership roles, including as director of the MCG Federally Qualified Health Center & Community Health Center Educational Affiliation. With a passion for curriculum development and mentoring, she has expanded student clinical training opportunities through the recruitment of 21 FQHCs, 4 rural hospitals, and numerous clerkship programs. A recognized educator, she has earned nine MCG Exemplary Teaching Awards and the Faculty Senate Outstanding Clinical Science Teaching Award. Additionally, Dr. Saucier maintains an active clinical practice, has been honored as a Patient Experience Star Performer, and continues to serve on multiple institutional committees, reinforcing her commitment to excellence in medical education and patient care.

She graduated from with her MD in 2011, and completed her residency in Family Medicine at the Medical College of Georgia, both at MCG. She served as as chief resident, in 2014.

Patient Care Award

Cassandra Groth, PhD



Dr. Cassandra Groth is an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Health Behavior.

Dr. Groth is a dedicated psychologist at East Central Regional Hospital's inpatient forensic unit, where she provides critical treatment services and conducts forensic evaluations for patients involved in the legal system. With specialized training in forensic psychology and extensive experience in correctional and psychiatric settings, she offers compassionate, evidence-based care tailored to the unique needs of her patients. Beyond direct patient care, Dr. Groth plays a vital role in shaping future professionals by supervising trainees, providing education to medical students through the You+ program, and contributing to forensic psychology scholarship through research and conference presentations. Her commitment to addressing trauma, competency restoration, and the psychosocial aspects of forensic populations ensures that individuals receive thoughtful, informed care while navigating complex legal and mental health challenges. Passionate about advocacy, she strives to support underprivileged populations and advance the careers of women in medicine and science, making her an invaluable asset to both her patients and the broader medical community.

She obtained her PhD in Clinical Psychology, with a formal concentration in forensic psychology, from Nova Southeastern University.

Outstanding Faculty Award

Wendy Bollag, PhD



Dr. Wendy Bollag is a Regents' Professor in the Department of Physiology. She has built a distinguished research program focused on endocrinology and cellular signaling, earning international recognition as a thought leader in her field. Her scientific accomplishments include over 149 original manuscripts, numerous grants and awards, and leadership roles in key research initiatives such as the VA Merit Award and NIH-funded projects. In addition to her prolific research, Dr. Bollag is deeply committed to education, mentoring students at all levels, directing and co-directing over 30 courses, and leading institutional initiatives such as the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and the AU Adrenal Center. Her influence extends beyond MCG through editorial positions with leading endocrinology journals and invitations to speak at prestigious national and international institutions. Recognized with multiple teaching and service awards, Dr. Bollag's dedication to advancing medical education, research, and institutional excellence makes her a truly outstanding faculty member whose impact continues to shape the future of physiology and medical science.

Dr. Bollag earned a doctorate in cellular and molecular physiology from Yale University and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Hoffmann-La Roche, Inc., in New Jersey.

Lifetime Achievement Awards

Richard Schwartz, MD



Dr. Richard Schwartz served as chair of the MCG Department of Emergency Medicine for 22 years and as a faculty member for 28 years. His distinguished military service, during which he earned multiple honors including the Bronze Star Medal, shaped his dedication to operational medicine, leading him to establish the first U.S. Army/Civilian Emergency Medicine Residency at MCG.

As department chair, he played a pivotal role in advancing emergency medical education, research, and patient care. His leadership in disaster medicine has been instrumental in shaping national protocols, with his work on the Model Uniform Core Criteria for Disaster Triage setting the U.S. standard. Under his guidance, the National Disaster Life Support curriculum has trained over 200,000 professionals worldwide, demonstrating his global impact on emergency

response.

Beyond his academic and research accomplishments, Dr. Schwartz has been deeply engaged in tactical medicine, serving as a trusted medical advisor to law enforcement and federal agencies for over two decades. His expertise has supported numerous FBI missions and earned him recognition from the American College of Emergency Physicians for his contributions to law enforcement medicine. His institutional service is equally remarkable, having led Augusta University Medical Associates and contributed to the merger with Wellstar Health System. With over \$20 million in extramural funding, numerous publications, and a legacy of mentorship, he has shaped the field through education and advocacy. His commitment to community service, including his long-standing role in regional EMS leadership, underscores his dedication to improving emergency health care at all levels

Spirit of MCG Award

Vincent Robinson, MD



Dr. Vincent Robinson is the Glen E. Garrison, M.D., Distinguished Chair in Cardiovascular Medicine and professor in the MCG Department of Medicine.

As a leading expert in cardiovascular physiology and nuclear cardiology, he has faithfully served the institution through his clinical practice, research, mentorship, teaching, and leadership. His commitment to fostering a strong and supportive medical community has shaped the careers of nearly 60 medical students, residents, and fellows, many of whom regard him as their most influential mentor. As director of the Cardiology Fellowship program for 16 years, he trained a generation of cardiologists, securing resources and endowments to advance education. His research contributions, including more than 50 published

manuscripts and multiple clinical trials, continue to impact cardiology and patient care. Dr. Robinson has also championed diversity in medicine, earning the Association of Black Cardiologists Spirit of the Heart Award for his efforts in training and mentorship.

Dr. Robinson's leadership has strengthened the institution's legacy and alumni engagement. He established the Kimmerling Showcase Conference, a homecoming event that reunites current trainees and esteemed alumni, fostering collaboration and philanthropy. His role in re-engaging faculty and former trainees at the American College of Cardiology meeting has further solidified MCG's presence on the national stage. As Faculty Senate President, he reinforced institutional pride by introducing the Spirit of MCG Award, a testament to his belief in preserving the college's history while inspiring its future.

MCG Faculty Senate Executive Committee 2024 – 2025

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MCG Faculty Senate Faculty Recognition Committee

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