Researchers from NORC and Departments of Nutrition Sciences and Environmental Health Sciences take top honors at 2016 Graduate Student Research Day competition

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Researchers from UAB’s Nutrition Obesity Research Center (NORC), Department of Nutrition Sciences, and Department of Environmental Health Sciences distinguished themselves at the recent annual Graduate Student Research Day competition. Abstracts were scored on clarity, the significance of the research, and the scientific approach to the problem.

Ireland Session

Daniella E. Chusyd, MA, graduate student trainee in the NORC and the Department of Nutrition Sciences, was awarded 1st place for “Body Composition and Ovarian Cycling Status in Elephants.” Some female zoo African elephants exhibit abnormal ovarian cycles, but it is not known why. In other species, including humans, there appears to be a relationship between body composition and fecundity and fertility. This study’s aim is to determine if a similar association exists in zoo African elephants: Is the elephant's body composition associated with whether the elephant is cycling or not cycling? UAB co-investigators are Tim R. Nagy, PhD, professor in the Department of Nutrition Sciences, and David B. Allison, PhD, distinguished professor and director of the NORC and Office of Energetics.
Camille Schneider, MS, RD [7], graduate student trainee in the NORC and PhD student in the Department of Nutrition Sciences, was awarded 2nd place for “Associations of Neonatal Adiponectin and Leptin with Growth in African American Infants.” Larger newborns have a greater risk for future obesity, and there has been interest in recent years in identifying biomarkers from birth as well as in beginning to elucidate the physiological mechanisms underlying this association. Adiponectin and leptin are biomarkers of fetal growth and have been associated with greater body mass index in later childhood. This study’s aim was to examine whether concentrations of leptin and adiponectin in the umbilical cord blood were associated with neonatal fat mass and with the change in fat mass to 3 months of age in a cohort of African American infants, which is a relatively understudied population despite their greater long-term risk for obesity. Co-investigator in the study is Paula Chandler-Laney, PhD [8], assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition Sciences.

Molly C. Bernhard, MPH [9], pre-doctoral fellow in the NORC and pre-doctoral candidate in the Department of Environmental Health Sciences, was awarded 2nd place for “Effects of the Indoor Thermal Environment on Human Food Intake: A Pilot Randomized Cross-over Trial.” This study’s aim was to estimate changes in thermoregulation; to determine differences in food intake by thermal condition; and to assess if changes in thermoregulation mediated food intake in the two thermal conditions. This study provided valuable pilot data for future studies to clarify this relationship. Small changes in thermal environment that are minimally observed may provide a mechanism for decreased food consumption and eventual weight loss. There may be additional value as an intervention at reducing building energy usage in the summer and increasing comfort while not affecting productivity. Co-investigators in the study are Peng Li, PhD, research associate in the
Department of Biostatistics [10]; David B. Allison, PhD, distinguished professor and director of the NORC and Office of Energetics; and Julia M. Gohlke, PhD [11], former assistant professor in UAB’s Department of Environmental Health Sciences and current assistant professor in the Department of Population Health Sciences at Virginia Tech.

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