

# E-Q<sub>uest</sub>

Fort Valley State University

Fall 2019

Office of Sponsored Programs



Quest is published annually by the Office of Sponsored Programs, a business unit of the Division of Academic Affairs at Fort Valley State University. The magazine highlights the achievement of FVSU principal investigators and program directors. The Quest is designed and printed with funds from the Title III part, part B initiative.

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Future E-Questers,

This is my first letter to readers as the director for the Office of Sponsored Programs at Fort Valley State University. This is also the first issue of the new E-Quest newsletter that will be published annually. I am really excited about FY 2020 and the opportunity to share articles and stories that make a difference. Each issue is meant to inspire, educate, and encourage our administration, students, faculty, and staff. We would also love to engage the research community by highlighting individuals who are creating ideas and securing funding that supports local, statewide, national and global efforts. I am honored to be entrusted with this important and timely transition of our beloved Quest newsletter that has broken so much ground since its 11 year beginning. The E-Quest intends to serve a purpose in our greater community that goes beyond dollars and cents, creating a responsible and sustainable enterprise that will be a vehicle for progress. We believe these higher goals are in line with our university goals. Even more, we are convinced our literary contributions and content will reflect and embody the spirit of tomorrow's leaders. We are passionately interested in showcasing the nitty-gritty of what makes for success and celebrate the creative people in all areas of research, at all levels, who inspire innovation.

I hope this issue and the issues to follow touch on everything from the Land Grant Mission, Continuous Improvement, Stakeholder Involvement, Financial Sustainability and Institutional Branding, which are all university priorities. Moreover, we invite and welcome submissions about new research efforts for inclusion in future issues.

Please send articles and reviews, or other materials directly to the editorial team by email to [hester@fvsu.edu](mailto:hester@fvsu.edu) and contact us with questions regarding submissions.

Thank you for taking time to connect with me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joyce Y. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Joyce Y. Johnson  
Director, Office of Sponsored Programs



The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) strives to promote a transparent, efficient and customer-centered research environment and ensure that Fort Valley State University's faculty and staff have access to all funding opportunities committed to the delivery of high quality programs, services and research initiatives to support the university's mission. Toward that end, the OSP supplies a variety of grantsmanship resources and services for the FVSU family, communicates and enforces proposal submission and contract compliance requirements, and functions as adviser, change agent and strategic partner to the university's decision-makers.

#### ***Director***

The director of the Office of Sponsored Programs is responsible for providing leadership, management and development, in support of the promotion of externally funded activities at Fort Valley State University. The director manages efficient pre- and post-award infrastructure, oversees the development of policies and procedures, and facilitate opportunities that yield a positive environment for growing the university's externally funded activities.

Joyce Y. Johnson has served as the Director of the Office of Sponsored Programs since October 2018. She previously served as the post-awards coordinator from 2010-2018. She has over twenty (20) years of higher education experience, including twelve (12) years in grant management. Johnson earned her B.S. in Accounting and her M.ED in Counseling and Student Development from Tuskegee University. In her spare time, Ms. Johnson enjoys reading western novels, and watching shows and movies depicting the old west.

#### ***Administrative Assistant***

The Administrative Assistant is responsible for providing administrative support to ensure efficient operation of the office such as greeting visitors, scheduling appointments, organizing meetings and answering and directing phone calls. The administrative assistant coordinates confidential and time-sensitive materials, such as budgets, contracts, PANs, and proposal submissions.

Shahetah Gray is the Administrative Assistant for the Office of Sponsored Programs. She has served in this position since February 2019. In 2011 she graduated from DeVry University with an Associate's Degree in Health Information Technology. She will be graduating from Middle Georgia State University in December of 2019 with a Bachelors in Health Services Administration. Her leisure activities include listening to music, reading books, shopping, and spending time with family.

#### ***Pre-Awards Coordinator***

The Pre-Awards Coordinator serves as the catalyst for proposal development and application package submission. The coordinator also interprets and communicates sponsor agency policies, regulations, compliance and related issues.

Lori Howard has served as the Pre Awards Coordinator for the Office of Sponsored Programs here at FVSU since February of 2019. She has an MBA and B.S. Degree from Mercer University; an MPA from Georgia College and State University formerly Georgia College; and is a Certified Project Management Professional (PMP). In her spare time she likes to jog, golf and spend time with family and friends.

### ***Post-Awards Coordinator***

The Post-Awards Coordinator is responsible for assisting principal investigators and program directors in managing grants and contract awards. This position provides assistance in the business and financial aspects of sponsored programs including: award negotiation, Sub-recipient agreements, renewals and extensions and closing of non-financial project activity. The post-awards coordinator also assists in ensuring compliance with university policies and in obtaining the possible conditions for both the principal investigator and the university.

Jaron Lucas has served as the Post Awards Coordinator for the Office of Sponsored Programs here at FVSU since February of 2019. He is a 2014 graduate of The Fort Valley State University with a Bachelors in Management and a minor in Marketing. During his time in undergrad, Mr. Lucas interned with the Office of Sponsored Programs. Mr. Lucas holds a Master's in Public Health with a focus on Environmental Health. During his spare time, he enjoys DJing, listening to music, event planning and spending time with family and friends.”

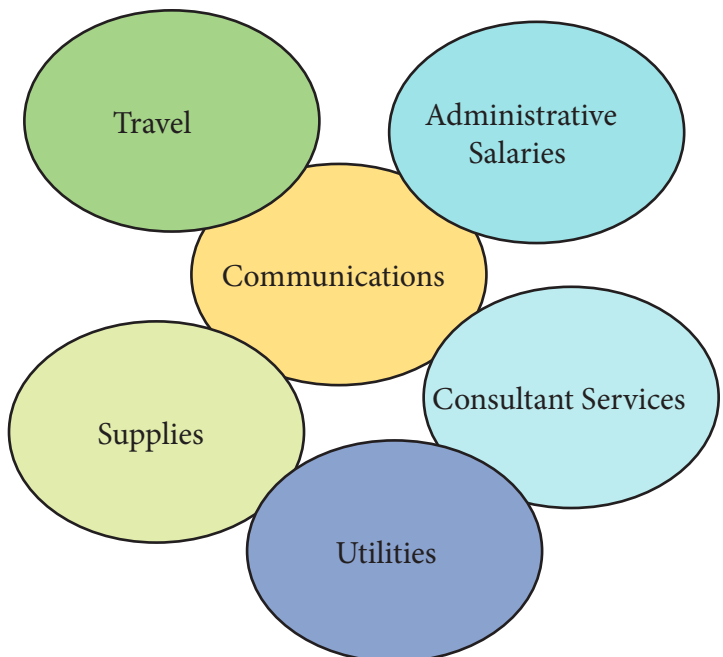
### ***Data and Technology Research Analyst***

The Data and Technology Research Analyst updates Office of Sponsored Programs webpages, creates and disburses surveys, and designs Internal and external publications. Assists with grants submission via grants.gov, research.gov and NSF fastlane. The Data and Technology Research Analyst assists both Pre and Post Awards with maintaining compliance in the areas of record keeping and time and effort certification.

Alfreda Hester has served as the Data and Technology Research Analyst for the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) since October 2017. She has over fifteen (15) years experience in higher education, prior to joining the OSP team Alfreda worked in College of Graduate Studies and Office of Information Technology. Hester holds a Bachelor's degree in Computer Information Systems from The Fort Valley State University and a Master's degree in Instructional Technology from American Intercontinental University. During her spare time she likes to read, play video games, and spend time with family and friends.

## **What's My Indirect Cost?**

Facilities and Administration (F&A) costs represent overhead expenses not readily identified with a particular contract, project or grant. Indirect costs include costs, which are frequently referred to as overhead expenses (for example, rent and utilities) and general and administrative expenses (for example, officers' salaries, accounting department costs, and personnel department costs). Currently, FVSU's negotiated indirect cost rates are 36 percent for on-campus activities and 13.64 percent for off-campus activities, which are effective until June 30, 2022. All proposal budgets should be calculated using these rates, except for proposals with lower stated rates and proposals that do not allow the collection of indirect costs. Please notify the OSP as soon as possible for assistance with proposals that have special indirect costs requirements.



***Examples of Indirect Cost***

# Funding Tips

Need specialized Equipment for your lecture? Have an idea for a research project? Looking for away to enhance your course? Then look no further, the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) is here to assist you. -

The OSP recommends that your register or subscribe to the following agency newsletters and email distribution lists to receive the most current funding grant and contract opportunity announcements.

## ***Federal Business Opportunities***

[www.fbo.gov](http://www.fbo.gov)

## ***Grants Resource Center***

[aascu.org](http://aascu.org)

## ***White House Initiative on HBCUs***

[sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/](http://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/)

## ***Federal Grant Opportunities***

[www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov)

## ***Grantforward***

[Grantforward.com](http://Grantforward.com)

## Award Management

### ***National Science Foundation***

[research.gov](http://research.gov)

### ***United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Grants/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)***

[nifa.usda.gov/grants](http://nifa.usda.gov/grants)

### ***National Institutes of Health (NIH)***

[grants.nih.gov/funding/index.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/funding/index.htm)



# FVSU students are well-served through TRiO program grants



Dr. Davida Curtis, TRiO SSS Director with Student, Alexis Daniels, and Project Academic Coordinating Advisor, Mrs. Victoria Sturm, at the SSS Academic Achievement Recognition Ceremony

By Valerie D. White

As an undergraduate student, Jansen Felton said he had a short period when his grades began to decline. Following the advice of a friend, he went to Student Support Services and solicited help from Dr. Davida Curtis. Felton received his undergraduate degree and is enrolled in the University's mental health graduate program. He plans to pursue a doctorate and receive his license for private practice.

The Fort Valley native credits Student Support Services with helping him get acclimated to classes. Now as a graduate assistant, he works with students in the program with their writing.

DeJourni Parker, a media studies student from Thomasville, said she progressed from being a E-Quest

mediocre student the first semester of her freshman year to being on the Dean's List that semester. "I wanted to stay on the Dean's List to make my mother proud," said the senior who wants to be a magazine writer and editor.

Student Support Services is one entity in the four-prong TRiO program, which also includes Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search and the Ronald McNair Scholars program. All four programs serve low income, disadvantaged, first generation, underrepresented students.

Curtis, like the other program directors, is writing her Annual Performance Report to get her \$1.5 million grant renewed for five more years. The grant is designed



to improve graduation rates. The students in Curtis' program exceed the University average.

"Because of the services we provide," she said, "we have more students wanting to be a part of the program." The grant provides funding for a minimum of 140 students, but Curtis said they serve more than that.

"We don't turn any students away," the former K-12 educator said. "We probably have 200 students we are serving."

Curtis further explained that grant funds are used solely for the Student Success Services students. Students funded through the grant can use the facilities, participate in weekly academic Lunch and Learn workshops, glean from faculty and staff who provide their expertise and participate in educational and cultural excursions.

"All students must have an academic need, whether it is low test scores, undecided about their major or have low college grades," Curtis said. "We help the students who are not supposed to be here, who were not necessarily slated for college."

The project is based on a \$200,000 allotment per year for five years. In the grant renewal process, Curtis will provide data to demonstrate that she and her team have met or exceeded the goals and objectives outlined in the proposal. The most recent Annual Performance Report showed that the students in the program have a retention rate of 88%. Students in good academic standing are 89%, and 100% of the students receive their bachelor's degree.

Bertha Knight, a sophomore, social work student who plans to become a licensed clinical social worker, said being in the program "helped me achieve more than I thought I could achieve." The LaGrange native who was a student in the Educational Talent Search program in high school said she started as a volunteer. Her biggest challenge was adjusting to the lifestyle of college and an HBCU because her high school advanced placement classes were majority white.

Kevius Shaw arrived at the University positive that he wanted to major in biology or education. He did not want to double major because as a first-generation

college student he thought he might become overwhelmed. Now in his junior year, the Valdosta native chose biology and plans to pursue an M.D./Ph.D. degree specializing in pediatrics thanks to the benefit of being a McNair Scholar.



McNair students and staff having fun in the evening after attending the SAEOPP McNair/SSS Research Conference in Atlanta

"The McNair Scholars program has made a huge impact in my college career," Shaw said. "The program has opened many doors that will help me in the future and has given me insight on other degree opportunities other than a doctorate degree."

The emphasis of the program is for students to attain doctoral degrees, whether it is a Ph.D. or alternative doctoral degree from a graduate or professional school. Dr. Shirley McClellan manages the five-year, \$1.2 million grant. McClellan said she is required to track students for 10 years with this October being the third year the McNair program has been at FVSU.

The program is STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) focused; however, McClellan said she will accept students from other majors such as the social sciences, humanities and business, if there is a need to fill the 25 slots. Students must have at least a 2.9 grade point average, but McClellan looks for a 3.0 or better.

Dr. Jessica Simpson, associate director of the McNair Scholars, said the program is "definitely having an

impact as the grant intended for it.” The FVSU graduate said, “My position allows me to tap into what I’m passionate about, which is mentoring and serving as an ally to students when it comes to graduate school. It shows students that they can go on and pursue their interests.”

The 20-something Marietta native who earned her doctorate from Louisiana State University in chemistry said she identifies with the demographics of the students served by the McNair Scholars program. “My personal background relates to a lot of students in the program. I’m first generation college from a low-income family.”

The prestigious program has a summer component where students conduct research at FVSU and other universities for eight weeks with an assigned faculty mentor to help guide them, McClellan said. Students also take trips to graduate schools. This year they visited the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine located in Suwanee and Moultrie, Georgia, and Meharry Medical College, Tennessee State University and Vanderbilt University in Nashville. McClellan said students attend regional conferences where they present their own research and learn about others’ research, attend networking events and participate in graduate school fairs.

Aanesa Watson, a junior chemistry major, spent 10 weeks of her summer conducting research at LSU.

Watson said that experience taught her about herself.

“I learned that I’m stronger and more independent than I imagined. I was able to successfully grow and learn in a new environment where I knew no one,” said the Selma, Alabama, native via email. “It was eye-opening to see how diverse my field of study was.

I would talk to the grad students in my lab about their research and goals. I found it very exciting and hopeful of all the possibilities there were in chemistry. Watson is president of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers.

Shaw also spent his summer conducting research at FVSU on the inactivation of E. coli on chicken breasts using ultra violet light. “On this campus, it (the McNair Scholars Program) has helped me get into the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation and to go to Athens (University of Georgia) to present my research conducted over the summer,” the track and cross-country athlete said.

McClellan also manages the five-year, \$1.8 million grant for **Educational Talent Search**. This program serves at least 728 middle and high school students in nine counties—Crawford, Crisp, Dooly, Houston, Macon, Peach, Sumter, Talbot and Taylor. Just like Student Success Services, McClellan said they probably serve more



Upward Bound student Dontravious Oliver uses 3D technology at AdventHealth University, Orlando, Florida



**Upward Bound students built and launched their own high-flying model rockets.**

students than their cap.

She and her staff of three educational specialists and one administrative specialist/field assistant who sometimes doubles as a chaperon on field trips serve students who are two-thirds first generation, low-income students and one-third general population. The goal of the program is to introduce students to college and to get them interested in attending college. While getting students to attend college is the goal, “the program cannot serve as a recruitment vehicle (for FVSU),” McClellan said. The Annual Performance Report showed that 99% of the students in the program graduated from high school during the last reporting period.

Dr. LaVasa Parks, the director and principal investigator, for the five-year, \$1.5 million **Upward Bound** grant met or exceeded all six objectives for this reporting period. “This is a significant accomplishment,” wrote Parks in an email. Aside from receiving the special services of academic and cultural exposure, the 70 high school students enrolled at Peach County and Macon County high schools also “made a positive impact on our community by participating in various community service projects,” Parks wrote. “During the 2018-2019 academic year, our students participated in community service projects with the Feed Center, Macon Food

Bank, Ronald McDonald House (Macon, Georgia) and Montezuma Health Care Center.”

The Upward Bound program not only focuses on the academics but also on “soft skills,” Parks said. Students attend workshops on résumé writing, interviewing, professional dress, conflict resolution and teamwork/team building. This past year through \$40,000 additional funding solicited by Parks, students received instruction on new technologies and innovations, such as 3-D printing, hydraulic robotics, drones, flight simulation and marine science.

Parks and her team plan to continue to meet or exceed the program goals and to add an additional focus to the curriculum. “Although we are not an Upward Bound Math-Science program, I plan to include a STEM curriculum and more STEM activities in our next proposal.”

Parks has an affinity to the program due to her background. “Growing up as a first-generation, disadvantaged student, I understand the barriers our students face,” Parks wrote in an email. “Therefore, I am passionate about the work that I do. I have the potential to change lives, break generational cycles and develop our future leaders.”

# Why is it Necessary for Proposals to come before the Human Subjects Committee ?

As is the case with institutions of higher learning and many other companies in the private sector who conduct research, it is imperative that safeguards are in place that serve to protect the rights and safety of any persons who may be involved in that research. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees the registration of each institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB). At Fort Valley State University, our IRB is comprised of a group of faculty, staff, and students who meet on a monthly basis as the Human Subjects Committee (HSC), to review all research proposals involving the use of human subjects. Oversight for the HSC falls under the office of the Provost. It is our job to review all research proposals to ensure that no persons involved in research, whether they be students, faculty, staff, or other, are allowed to be placed in any undue danger or discomfort, and that they are aware of their rights as participants of the study. This includes physical danger to their person as well as any psychological danger to their mind. In addition, by doing so, we are tasked with protecting the integrity and reputation of our institution.

## IRB Guidelines

To ensure proper submission of proposals for research involving human subjects to the Human Subjects Committee at Fort Valley State University, the following guidelines are established:

1. Acquire the current proposal and disclaimer forms from the chair of the HSC at [rileyc@fvsu.edu](mailto:rileyc@fvsu.edu).
2. Complete the proposal form following the attached instructions. Take note that:
  - In the case of faculty or FVSU staff submissions, the Primary Investigator (P.I.) will be the lead faculty or staff member with whom all correspondence from the HSC will be made. All additional researchers will be listed as co-Primary Investigators (co-P.I.'s)
  - In the case of a student submission, the P.I. will be the faculty member supervising or overseeing the research (e.g. committee chair, etc.). The student will be the first co-P.I. and all additional researchers will be listed as additional co-P.I.
  - If a consent form is necessary, the official FVSU disclaimer must be included on the form.
  - An Executive Summary to include a brief description of the study and methods to be used is required. Note that in the case of student research, it should not be Chapter 1 of the study. It must be in brief summary form.
3. Any other pertinent documentation such as questionnaires, letters of permission or cooperation, surveys, etc., are also required.
  - All documents are to be submitted, in "Word" format, to the chair of the HSC at [rileyc@fvsu.edu](mailto:rileyc@fvsu.edu). The deadline for submission of all documents to be considered at the next HSC meeting is one week prior to the scheduled

meeting. In general, the HSC meets on the first Thursday of each month September through April. As other University commitments may occasionally conflict with these dates, care should be taken to check with the chair of the HSC to confirm meeting dates when submitting proposals as well as to ascertain meeting times and locations.

4. On the day of the meeting, the P.I. and/or co-P.I. are asked to facilitate and expedite the approval process being present to answer any questions the HSC may have regarding the proposal. In this manner, they will also have any additions or changes clarified which may be necessary prior to final approval of the proposal.
5. Any changes necessary are to be subsequently made and resubmitted electronically to the chair of the HSC, along with a hard copy with all necessary signatures.
6. Upon receipt of all necessary changes to the proposal and additional documents, as well as a signed hard copy, a letter of approval will be issued. A deadline for completion of the study will be included in the letter of approval. Any study not completed by the deadline will need to be renewed one month in advance of the expiration date.

**The disclaimer that must appear on all proposals and on all consent forms is the following:**

*Research involving Human Subjects at the Fort Valley State University is carried under the oversight of the Institutional Human Subjects Committee. The Human Subjects Committee reports to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.*

**Contact information are as follows:**

**Dr. Ramon T. Stuart**  
**Provost and VP for Academic Affairs**  
**Phone: (478) 825-6330**  
**E-mail: stuartt@fvsu.edu**

**Dr. Clarence E. Riley, Jr.**  
**Chair, Human Subjects Committee**  
**Phone: (478) 825-6898**  
**E-mail: riley@c@fvsu.edu**

*Fort Valley State University is accredited by the Commission on College's of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award baccalaureate and master's degrees. Contact Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or Call 404-679- 4500 for questions about the accreditation of Fort Valley State University.*

**Fort Valley State University is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution and does not discriminate against applicants, students, or employees on the basis of race gender, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, age, and disability, marital or veteran status.**

**Any additional questions regarding the submission of proposals should be directed to:**

**Clarence E. Riley, Jr., Ph.D.**  
**Chair, Human Subjects Committee**  
**Fort Valley State University**  
**(478) 825-6898, riley@c@fvsu.edu**

#### **Institutional Review Board(IRB) Committee**

Clarence E. Riley, Jr.  
Chairperson Veterinary Science and Public Health

Robin Bright, Chemistry  
Jerry Brenner, Rehabilitation Counseling  
Diane Byrd, Behavioral Sciences  
Meigan Fields, Political Science  
Lori Howard, Pre-Awards Coordinator  
Mohammed Ibrahim, Agricultural Economics  
Felicia Jefferson, Biology  
Jerry Mobley, School Counselor Education  
Patrice Terrell, Director of Contracts/Compliance  
Niki Whitley, Animal Science  
Olliff Weldon, Unaffiliated member

# Flint Energies grant helps Police Department purchase body cameras



Chief Anita Allen (left) and Major Rennie Walters accept the \$5,000 check as Flint Energies executives look on.

By Valerie D. White

The FVSU Police Department has become more up to date with the purchase of new body cameras through a \$5,000 grant awarded by Flint Energies.

“The body cams that we had were a bit outdated, and we wanted to come into the 21st Century,” said Major Rennie Walters, the principal investigator for the grant. “We as police officers would like to say that transparency is something you can say about a police department. If you have a question, we want to make sure you are clear about what you have asked. With a video camera that takes away speculation. We will be able to be forthcoming and go to the video.”

The department purchased eight Wolfcom body camera packages, which included a docking station, docking

port, LCD screen monitor and work station. The Web-based technology has backup recovery hardware, evidence management software, video redaction, mobile client software and unlimited technical support and software updates.

Costing at about \$1,000 each, the department provided the additional funds in order to purchase the body cams. “We are grateful to get the \$5,000, and it helped us on our budget,” Chief Anita Allen said. “Body cams are a blessing to any police department to eliminate any negative outcome.”

Walters, who has a background in internal affairs, said cameras are valuable to an investigation, and the police department does not want to diminish trust

with the people it is serving. He said the cameras can help alleviate that burden. "People can be cleared or exonerated from some particular issues," he said.

After fielding different types of body cameras, they opted for the best camera they could afford, said the two-branch military veteran—Army and Air Force.

Allen said the body camera is another efficient tool to use. "It serves not only as protection for your staff but also faculty, staff and students. It allows us to monitor activity on the campus and on the outskirts of the campus.

"It's a tool for court proceedings, demonstrations and training," Allen continued. "It is a very important tool for law enforcement to have to demonstrate what happened when it comes down to an incident."

Walters said the body cameras will be very important for the protective mode of policing which occurs on the university campus as opposed to the sentinel mode, which is used in community policing. He mentioned that some employees have been at the University for 40 years and have made their employment here their life's work. Therefore, he advocates for a proactive policing style.

The body cams will also assist his officers when interacting with students whom, he said, present an interesting challenge. He enjoys the mentoring element of the proactive style of policing that, is not found in the municipal environment. Policing on the university campus is a different element of contact with people, he said.

Walters plans to write more grants to get funding to upgrade car equipment.

## Hotlines: Report Fraud, Waste and Abuse

Fort Valley State University Compliance  
[fvsu.edu/compliance/](http://fvsu.edu/compliance/)

USG Board of Regents Ethics and Compliance Reporting  
1-877-516-3466



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
[Oig.hhs.gov](http://Oig.hhs.gov)

U.S. Department of Education  
1-800-MISUSED (1-800-547-8733)



U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[usda.gov/oig/hotline.htm](http://usda.gov/oig/hotline.htm)



National Science Foundation Fraud Hotline  
1-800-428-2189



## Researcher hopes to develop variety of sorghum resistant to invasive pests

By Valerie D. White

An FVSU researcher hopes to develop a sorghum variety resistant to the destructive sugarcane aphid, which is most prevalent in southern states. With a \$499,997 Capacity Building grant from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Dr. Somashekhar Punnuri said the menacing pest invades the sorghum crop, threatening plant yield and subsequently livestock food. Companies have manufactured pesticides and some pest-resistant, hybrid plants, but the problem still persists for sorghum growers.

Punnuri plans to use field-based robotics to detect and photograph sugarcane aphids which bury themselves under leaves and cause heavy sooty mold hindering plant photosynthesis. When this new technology is developed, Punnuri said “this project will strengthen FVSU’s research and education in the fields of plant genomics and plant protection.”

“Sorghum is an important crop in southern cropping systems,” Punnuri wrote in his grant proposal. It is a cereal grain that resembles corn and is used to feed livestock and can be turned into ethanol, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture website. It also can be used as a grain, ground into flour and substituted for wheat (gluten-free) flour. However, “sorghum is mostly used for animal feed in Georgia,” according to the proposal, “and the U.S. is the number one exporter of sorghum grain in recent years.”

Punnuri has more than 10 years of experience in plant breeding. “This will be valuable research across different disciplines related to plant and insect interactions,” he said. Research in plant genomics, plant protection and





**Dr. Somashekhar Punnuri inspecting sorghum.**

plant breeding will also be conducted. His long-term plan is “to give information to breeders to develop sorghum that is resistant to sugarcane aphids.”

This is Punnuri’s first-time securing a grant as principal investigator, although he has been co-PI on other grants. Joining him in this research are colleagues from the USDA in Tifton, Iowa State University, the University of

Georgia and FVSU graduate student Trahmad Wiggins.

With three farms, Wiggins said they did two plantings in July—one in Tifton and one in Fort Valley. “Two weeks after you’ll see an infestation of sugarcane aphids,” said the Cuthbert native. “We have this insecticide spray that we spray on the plant and we



**Sorghum field**

leave some plants untreated. We take that data and look at the genotypes and the physical leaves of plants, compile the data and get information that will be suitable to the public.”

Wiggins, whose degree area is biotechnology, conducted similar research this summer while on internship at the University of California-Davis as a research fellow. “I chose to work with him (Punnuri) because when I was at UC-Davis, it’s kind of the same research I did there. You have to find what you enjoy doing,” he said.

So far, Punnuri said he is acquiring the necessary equipment, sowing lots of sorghum and developing the robotics that will be used in the research. The experienced breeder wants to develop knowledge-sharing workshops for farmers to keep them abreast of new research concerning sugarcane aphids.

“If everything goes well,” Punnuri said, “it will enhance plant breeding with information farmers can use.”



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[www.fvsu.edu/sponsored-programs](http://www.fvsu.edu/sponsored-programs)

Fort Valley State University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award associate, baccalaureate, and master's degrees. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of Fort Valley State University.

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This initiative is supported by the Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program grant (Title III, part B) of the U.S. Department of Education Act 1965, as amended.