

# NEWSLETTER

Center for Research and  
Evaluation (CRE)

November 2021



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# NEWSLETTER

## Center for Research and Evaluation (CRE)

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**Dr. M Elena Villamil,  
PhD**  
*Professor of Epidemiology*

# Message from the CRE Director

It is with great pleasure that we are presenting to you the AUACOM Center for Research and Evaluation's first Newsletter. In this Newsletter we will introduce you to the present and future of Research at AUACOM.

Research has been an integral part of AUACOM for many years. From the moment I joined AUACOM in March 2019, and before CRE was formed, I realized how eager our students were to learn about the research process. I had the pleasure of giving presentations on Basic Steps in Research to AMSA members. At the end of 2019, following the vision of our previous Executive Dean of Basic sciences, Dr. Samuel LeBaron, the CRE was created. Since then, many faculty members have been enthusiastically developing innovative ideas for research

that would benefit our students, fellows, and faculty.

One of the innovations brought by CRE is the creation of a Research Academy in 2020. This CRE unit designs and delivers research courses, and guides the students through the initial stages of their research projects. Research skills have become an important part of the necessary skills of the physician of the future. Teaching these skills to all basic science and clinical students develops an essential knowledge base for their future careers.

With a Research Academy in mind, in March 2020, before lockdown, Dr. Cross organized a workshop on DNA Metabarcoding. It was given by Dr. Ray Enke of James Madison University, with the participation of many students, faculty and with attendees from

the Department of the Environment of Antigua.

Delayed by the 2020 pandemic, our CRE activities restarted in 2021 with planning of online events. CRE organized two very successful Research Days, one in Spring and one in Fall. Keynote Speakers were Dr. Roy A. Jensen, Director of the University of Kansas Cancer Research Program, and Dr. Deepak L. Bhatt, Professor at Harvard Medical School. The events also counted with the participation of AUACOM Faculty members Dr. Noha Hussien and Ms. Amruta Rajput along with two clinical students, Ms. Tiffany Joseph and Ms. Khartika Nair, rounded out the programs.

Starting in August 2021 and after a great deal of planning the CRE launched the first courses on Research Skills as part of the Research Academy. The basic courses included The Research Process, presented by Dr. Maria Elena Villamil, Reference Management, presented by Dr. Ravindrasingh

Rajput, and Introduction to Qualitative Research, presented by Dr. Jason Ratliff. These courses and many more will be offered in the coming semesters.

In this first edition of our Newsletter, you will read about many of our ongoing research projects, all of them involving students, fellows and faculty working together. New and exciting projects are on the pipeline, starting in the following semesters, with ample opportunity for collaboration. Some of AUACOM's previous publications from basic sciences and clinical students are presented in the last pages of this Newsletter.

AUACOM will always praise great achievements. On that note, it gives me great pleasure to tell you that one of our CRE committee members, Dr. Prasanna Honnavar, Assistant Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at AUACOM, has been appointed by the American Society for

Microbiology, ASM Country Ambassador to Antigua and Barbuda. This appointment will foster the dissemination and development of microbiological knowledge and will strengthen ASM's connection with the local scientific community.

We hope you enjoy our first CRE Newsletter. AUACOM and CRE are working together at delivering increasing opportunities in research to all our students in Antigua and in their rotations around the world. I do not want to end my message without thanking AUACOM authorities, our CRE committee members, and everyone who very kindly helps us on our daily endeavors.



**Dr. Arun K Agnihotri,**  
**MBBS, MD**  
*Professor of*  
*Pathophysiology*

# Editorial

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first CRE Newsletter. The central component of this issue is a roundup of details of the research projects and the scientific events organized by the Center for Research and Evaluation in the year 2021. Also featured in this issue is a message from the CRE director.

Additionally, the readers can enjoy some beautiful photographs of the LIFEPLAN project lead by Dr. Joseph Cross and the DNA Metabarcoding Workshop at American University of Antigua College of Medicine, jointly presented by American University of Antigua, James Madison University, and the DNA Learning Center in March 9-10, 2020.

A relevant section, which also must be highlighted, is the list of publications by AUA faculty members and students.

The cyclical nature of our activities, and the need to keep the momentum moving forward with ambition and enthusiasm towards the research, places a significant challenge to all CRE committee members.

The future plan included obtaining an ISSN number for this newsletter.

Enjoy your reading of this Newsletter, and may you find the information provided interesting!

# CRE events – 2021 and beyond



Dr. Roy A. Jensen,  
MD



Dr. Noha Hussien,  
MD, PhD

CRE had the pleasure of organizing Research Day at AUACOM. In Spring 2021, **Dr. Roy Jensen**, Director, The University of Kansas Cancer Center, delivered his talk *BRCA1-DNA Repair is Just My Day Job*. Our faculty speaker, **Dr. Noha Hussien** from AUACOM, presented her latest research entitled *The Interaction between Stem cells and Gene Therapy: A Promising Gene Delivery Tool*.



Dr. Deepak Bhatt,  
MD, MPH



Ms. Amruta Rajput,  
MSc

In Fall 2021, our keynote speaker, Dr. Deepak Bhatt, Professor from Harvard University, captivated the audience with his presentation, *Advances in Omega-3 Fatty Acids Research with a focus on cardiovascular disease*. Our faculty speaker, Ms. Amruta Rajput, AUACOM Basic Sciences, presented her latest research, *New Anthropometric markers for screening Diabetes Type II in the Caribbean Region*, a project with great potential and direct application to Antigua and Barbuda.



Ms. Tiffany Joseph



Ms. Karthika Nair

Last, but not least, our student speakers **Ms. Tiffany Joseph** and **Ms. Karthika Nair**, presented their research, *Depression and Anxiety in Medical Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic – a literature review*, which included epidemiologic studies from around the world.

Both events were a huge success!

# AUACOM

## Research Academy



AUACOM Research Academy is working at developing an integrated program that will provide our students with a differential edge to increase their future opportunities in their medical careers. Our students will be acquiring and improving new research, critical thinking, and critical appraisal skills, and by learning to summarize research and communication. This will prepare them to evaluate research findings using the learnt concepts of evidence-based medicine, enabling them to become even better physicians. In F2021, CRE faculty members have offered courses to students, fellows, and faculty on basic research skills topics: The Research Process (introduction to research), Reference Management, and Introduction to Qualitative Research. Courses are delivered at different intervals throughout the year, to accommodate for the students' busy agendas. In S2022, in addition to the basic courses offered in F2021, CRE will offer new courses on statistical analysis skills, preparation of scientific publications and conference posters, and communication skills. As more faculty members express interest in passing on their expertise to students, we are developing new courses. Additionally, CRE would like to hear from AUA students who have research expertise and wish to assist in the development of new courses. From S2022, students involved in research will have the opportunity to present their work at a Students' Research Presentation Event to be held every semester. Events planned in the near future include talks by external speakers, electronic poster sessions, and journal clubs for students, faculty and fellows.

For information, please contact **Prof Maria Elena Villamil:** [evillamil@auamed.net](mailto:evillamil@auamed.net)



# AUACOM Research – Present and Future

AUACOM and the center for research and evaluation (CRE) are working together at delivering increasing opportunities in research to all our AUA community.

Students from semesters 2 onwards can participate in ongoing research projects as well as designing the basis of their own research projects under the supervision of our AUACOM faculty. The CRE committee oversees, gives approval, and sponsors research projects. Our financial sponsorship extends to any member of the AUACOM family attending events to present their research work and supports publication of their research work in scientific journals.

To participate in research, one needs an open and curious mind and a great deal of discipline and organization. That is where CRE Research Academy can assist, by taking our new investigators through the basic steps in research and improving their research and communication skills, and critical thinking.

In addition, students, fellows, and faculty can be a part of the CRE Research Days and Students' Research events. Keep an eye for CRE's latest news!

*Please contact Dr. Villamil ([evillamil@quamed.net](mailto:evillamil@quamed.net)) to discuss the possibilities that CRE can offer.*



# Ongoing research projects



**Dr. Joseph Cross, Assistant Professor of Genetics,** runs the **Lifeplan** project. In 2020 AUA, in partnership with the Antigua and Barbuda Department of the Environment, was successful in a joint proposal to join **Lifeplan**, which is funded and managed by the EU and the University of Helsinki.

<https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/projects/lifeplan>

**Lifeplan** brings together the key expertise needed to generate and interpret Big Ecological Data for a global synthesis of biotic patterning across our planet uniting community ecology,

methods for automated species recognition, and Bayesian statistics for immense data. **Lifeplan** will generate well-standardized global data for a substantial proportion of all species. Such standardization is achieved through semi-automated methods, producing comparable data independent of the exact expertise of the person or team conducting the sampling. It is based on a recent revolution in sampling methodology. Being part of **Lifeplan** also allows Antigua and Barbuda to fulfill its biodiversity monitoring obligations under the UN Biodiversity Agreement, to which Antigua is signatory. Equipment provided by **Lifeplan** has now been received and set up in a 100 sq m natural bushland area of Antigua. <http://aua-dna-barcoding.weebly.com/> Since August 2021, AUA students have been volunteering to help with data collection for the project. This involves travelling to our rainforest site, downloading camera trap, audio trap, insect trap data to their cell

phone apps, and then transferring that data to our colleagues at the DOE, for eventual transfer to Helsinki.

We thank our student volunteers *Marian Osimen, Tahreem Rajput, Alexandra Lorca, Monica Pevida, Danielle Rowe, Jewelle Burton, James Gainous, Aastha Jain, Mayowa Odugunwa, Brittany Dickinson, Jose Orta* and *Paraskeva Bruton* for their fantastic assistance in helping to preserve Antigua's biodiversity.



**Dr. Prasanna Honnavar, Assistant Professor of Microbiology,** runs a project on the **Isolation and DNA barcoding of keratinophilic dermatophytes - a potential cause dermatomycoses - in soil from different habitats in Antigua.**

**This study specifically** aims to investigate the occurrence of keratinophilic fungi. After isolation of fungi and extraction of DNA, ITS region will be amplified, sequenced and phylogenetic tree will be constructed using bioinformatic tools. In addition, Dr Honnavar is also compiling a literature review on the association between microbiome dysbiosis and colorectal cancer, to understand the pathways/mechanisms by which the microbiota promotes colorectal cancer development. Various faculty and students collaborate in his projects.



**Dr. Arun Kumar Agnihotri, Professor of Pathophysiology,** is interested in forensic identification and medical education. He has conducted

studies to determine stature and gender by utilizing the dimensions and indices for various body parts such as cephalofacial, upper limb, and lower limb in the IndoMauritian population. The data suggested that reliable height estimate is not attainable using cephalofacial measurements (*Agnihotri et al. J For Leg Med 2011;18:167-72*), but successfully predicted by the upper limb dimensions (*Agnihotri et al. J For Identification. 2018;68:23455*) and percutaneous length of tibia and ulna (*Agnihotri et al. For Sci Int. 2009;187:109e1-109.e3*). Regarding gender determination, the three cephalofacial indices such as cephalic index, nasal index, and facial index (*Agnihotri et al. J For Identification 2014;64:44964*) and the finger length ratios such as 2D/3D, 2D/4D, 3D/4D, and 4D/5D exhibit significant sex differences (*Agnihotri et al. J For Leg Med 2015;35:4550*). The findings of these studies may not be applicable to other ethnic

groups. At the American University of Antigua College of Medicine in Antigua, where the student population is ethnically diverse, we are currently conducting the similar studies to see if these dimensions can be used for stature and gender determination in other ethnic groups. The current projects are **‘Study the cephalo-facial anthropometric differences among gender, ethnicity, and age’** and **‘Study the upper limb anthropometric differences among gender, ethnicity, and age – Dr Ayoola Awosika as a Principal Investigator’**. In addition, Dr. Agnihotri has a project on medical education titled **“The relationship between students’ perception of educational environment and their academic performance.”**



**Dr. Noha Hussien, Associate Professor of Anatomy,** is collaborating with faculty and students on a **review of novel techniques on cell-based therapy in glioblastoma.** In this project, Dr Hussien aims to summarize and discuss the up-to-date pre-clinical studies that used stem cells or immune cells to treat GB. Likewise, her research summarizes the most recent clinical trials using both cell categories to treat or prevent recurrence of GB in patients. As with any therapeutics, cell-based therapy in GB is still hampered by many drawbacks. Therefore, several novel techniques are highlighted in the review, such as the use of biomaterials, scaffolds, nanoparticles, or cells in the 3D context that may depict a promising future when

combined with the cell-based approach.



**Dr. M. Elena Villamil, Professor of Epidemiology,** runs courses on Research, as part of the AUACOM Research Academy including The Research Process, and Introduction to Quantitative Research. Apart from collaborating with various research groups as an epidemiologist, she runs various systematic review projects in collaboration with AUACOM students and faculty in area of lifestyle intervention in disease. Some of these projects are:

- Depression and Anxiety in medical students during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020.

- Exposure to gluten foods early in infancy and development of diabetes later in childhood.
- Comparison of the incidence of Mucormycosis in patients with Covid-19 infection without Covid-19 infection
- Is magnesium deficiency associated with generalized anxiety disorder?
- Nutritional interventions in early childhood for prevention and treatment of ADHD.



**Dr. Jobila Sy, Associate Professor of Education Enhancement,** is running research on Learner-Centered Educational Opportunities: Student and Faculty Experiences with Data Driven Decision Making. In her projects, she works in

collaboration with faculty and students. She believes that viewing the craft of education and students' learning through the data/information lens provides an opportunity for transformation to support student achievement. The aim of this study is to examine perceptions and effectiveness/value/quality of data-driven decision making (DDDM) at AUA in small groups, and to explore the impact of DDDM on student achievement through learner-centered educational opportunities. Another of Dr Sy's interests concerns students transitioning in and through a Caribbean medical school. Her research seeks to answer the research question: how do second-year medical students make meaning of their transition experience in and through a Caribbean medical school?



**Dr. Jason Ratliff, Assistant Professor of Education Enhancement**, is working on a project entitled: **Exploring the lived experiences of academic support professionals at Eastern Caribbean medical Schools**. It will explore, through qualitative methodology, the career, educational, and practical experiences of academic support professionals in the Eastern Caribbean.



**Dr. Adekunle E Omole, Assistant Professor of Anatomy** is working together with faculty and students on a **Review of Stem cell therapy for Parkinson's disease (PD)**. Cell therapy for Parkinson's disease began in 1979 with the transplantation of fetal rat dopamine containing neurons that improved motor abnormalities in the PD rat model with good survival of grafts and axonal outgrowth. Recently, cell therapy is expected to develop as a realistic treatment option for PD patients owing to the advancement of biotechnology represented by pluripotent stem cells. Although medical treatment using levodopa, surgery including deep brain stimulation, and rehabilitation have all been established as current therapeutic strategies, they have been unable to stop the progression of the disease.





**Dr. Richard Millis, Professor of Pathophysiology**, is working on **AUA-Shrewsbury echocardiogram project**. Dr. Courtney Lewis MD, Assistant Professor in AUA's Department of Clinical Medicine and Assistant Director of AUA's Clinical Simulations and Emergency Medicine Training Centre, supervised in January 2020 the medical aspects of a collaboration between AUA Professor Dr. Richard Millis and Chester University Professor Dr. John Buckley of the Shrewsbury Centre Active Living Lab (UK). Dr. Lewis coordinates phlebotomy and echocardiography on a retired British Navy officer who volunteered as a study subject after spending more than 45 days rowing across the Atlantic Ocean from the Canary Islands to

Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua, the finishing line for the world's most extreme rowing race, the annual Talisker Atlantic Challenge. Drs. Lewis and Millis are also collaborators on extreme sport physiology research projects with the UK's Exeter University (2021) and University of Cambridge (2018-19). The **Shrewsbury echocardiogram project** is continuing this coming January (2022) when the 2021 group of rowers arrive in Antigua after leaving the Canary Islands in the middle of December.

Other Current Research Projects are:

- Original Research: "Relationship Between Occipital Alpha Blocking, Theta-Beta Ratio & Academic Performance in Medical Students," being arranged.
- Original Research: "Relationship Between EEG Attention Markers & Psychometric Measures of Attention in Medical Students," being arranged.

- Review Article: "Epigenetics and Obesity," being arranged.

# CRE Inauguration



# AUA-Shrewsbury echocardiogram project







LIFEPLAN Research

DNA Metabarcoding  
Workshop





DNA Metabarcoding Workshop



DNA Metabarcoding Workshop

2017



# Latest publications

## 2020 / 2021

- **Agnihotri AK**, Vij M, Aruoma OI, Yagnik VD, Bahorun T, **Villamil ME**, Menezes GA, Gupta V. *The double trouble: COVID-19 associated mucormycosis a focused review and future perspectives. Glob J Med Pharm Biomed Update. 2021;16:4. doi: 10.25259/GJMPBU\_4\_2021.*
- **Agnihotri AK**, Yagnik VD, Aruoma OI, Bahorun T, Mody V. *COVID-19 Pandemic: Emerging Issues and Future Challenges. Glob J Med Pharm Biomed Update. 2020;15:1. doi: 10.25259/GJMPBU\_5\_2020.*
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- **Attia N**, Mashal M, Puras G, Pedraz LJ. *Mesenchymal Stem Cells as a Gene Delivery Tool: Promise, Problems, and Prospects. Pharmaceutics, 2021;13(6):843. doi: 10.3390/pharmaceutics13060843.*
- Marzouk S, **Attia N**, Mashal M. *Insights into the potential role of alpha1-antitrypsin in COVID19 patients: Mechanisms, current update, and future perspectives. Clin Respir J. 2021;15(9):1019-24. doi: 10.1111/crj.13406.*
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- **Attia N**, Mashal M. *Mesenchymal Stem Cells: The Past Present and Future. Adv Exp Med Biol. 2021;1312:107-129. doi: 10.1007/5584\_2020\_595.*

# Latest publications

## 2020 / 2021

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- Amer S, **Attia N**, Nouh S, El-Kammar M, Korittum A, Abu-Ahmed H. *Fabrication of silver nanoparticles/polyvinyl alcohol/gelatin ternary nanofiber mats for wound healing application. J Biomater Appl. 2020;35(2):287-298. doi: 10.1177/0885328220927317.*
- Fakoya AOJ, **Omole AE**, Satyadev N, Okaruefe CO. *Induced pluripotent stem cells in intestinal diseases. Editors: Ahmed El-Hashash, Eiman Meguid. The Intestine - Stem Cell Innovation in Health & Disease, Academic Press. 2021. 101-122.*
- Rodney C, Rodney S, **Millis RM**. *Vitamin D and Demyelinating Diseases: Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO) and Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Autoimmune Dis. 2020;2020:8718736. doi: 10.1155/2020/8718736.*
- Gorantla VR, Tedesco S, **Chandanathil M**, Maity S, Bond V Jr, Lewis C, **Millis RM**. *Associations of Alpha and Beta Interhemispheric EEG Coherences with Indices of Attentional Control and Academic Performance. Behav Neurol. 2020;2020:4672340. doi: 10.1155/2020/4672340.*
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- Maity S, **Chandanathil M**, **Millis RM**, Connor SA. *Norepinephrine stabilizes translation-dependent, homosynaptic long-term potentiation through mechanisms requiring the cAMP sensor Epac, mTOR and MAPK. Eur J Neurosci. 2020;52(7):3679-3688. doi: 10.1111/ejn.14735.*

# Latest publications

## 2020 / 2021

- Jagadeesh A, Maroun LE, Van Es LM, **Millis RM**. Autoimmune Mechanisms of Interferon Hypersensitivity and Neurodegenerative Diseases: Down Syndrome. *Autoimmune Dis.* 2020;2020:6876920. doi: 10.1155/2020/6876920.
- Dehkordi O, **Millis RM**, Dalivand MD, Swang M, Dávila-García MI. Menthol-Activated Cells in the Reward-Addiction Neurocircuitry. *J Alcohol Drug Depend.* 2020. 8: 332. doi: 10.35248/2329-6488.20.8.332.
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- **Honnavar P**, Dogra S, Handa S, Chakrabarti A, Rudramurthy SM. Molecular Identification and Quantification of *Malassezia* Species Isolated from Pityriasis Versicolor. *Indian Dermatol Online J.* 2020;11(2):167-70. doi: 10.4103/idoj.IDOJ\_142\_19.
- **Honnavar P**, Chakrabarti A, Dhaliwal M, Dogra S, Handa S, Lakshmi PVM, Rudramurthy SM. Sociodemographic characteristics and spectrum of *Malassezia* species in individuals with and without seborrhoeic dermatitis/dandruff: A comparison of residents of the urban and rural populations. *Med Mycol.* 2021;59(3):259-65. doi: 10.1093/mmy/myaa050.
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- **Rajput A**, Gupta U, Parashar R, Tzivion G, **Rajput R**. Determining New Anthropometric Markers for Screening Hypertension in the Caribbean Region. *J Clin Diagn Res.* 2021;15(8):1–5.

# Latest publications

## 2020 / 2021

- Cruz N, Sy J, Shukla C, Tysor A. *Ready, willing, and able? Exploring the relationships and experiences of international students at a national university in the United Arab Emirates. OJED J Int Students. 2021. Available at: <https://www.ojed.org/index.php/qsm/article/view/3523>*
- Wilson K, Sy J. *A framework for managing innovation in higher education: lessons learnt from the UAE iPad initiative. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives. 2021;17(1):16-28. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/LTHE-08-2020-0013>*
- Sy J, Hariri M, Azzam S. *Book review: Positive Academic Leadership: How to Stop Putting Out Fires and Start Making a Difference. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives. 2021;17(1):72-5. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/LTHE-03-2021-055>.*
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- Mallin K, Mallin R. *Substance Use Disorders in South-Paul, Matheny & Lewis, eds. Current Diagnosis & Treatment in Family Medicine, 5th edition, McGraw Hill. 2020*



# Latest publications

## 2020 / 2021

AUACOM Clinical Students

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## CRE Newsletter 2021

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