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CIVITAN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER

www.uab.edu/medicine/circ

Emerging Scholar Recipient Austin Svancara wins the 2022 Outstanding Graduate Student Award



In 2020 when Austin Svancara won the Civitan International Emerging Scholars Award, he had no idea of the impact the Award would have on his career. The Emerging Scholar Award allowed him to focus on his dissertation work, publishing, and developing his professional network and research skills which are all the elements required to being successful in finding a position in the industry.

Austin is in his 5th year in the Developmental Psychology Doctoral Program. He was awarded the Emerging Scholars Award for his impressive work investigating the barriers to independent driver's licensure among individuals with autism spectrum disorder and how self-driving vehicles could be used to promote safe mobility.

As he finishes his doctoral program, he will be transitioning to Washington, D.C., where he has accepted a position with the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and will continue to investigate important matters in the field of transportation. Austin says the Emerging Scholars Award was a big part in him receiving both the prestigious Outstanding Graduate Student award and his successful move to the AAA Foundation later this year.



Austin is an outstanding young man with a long list of achievements which can be viewed at:

[Microsoft Word - CV_Svancara_Svancara_6.22.21.docx \(uab.edu\)](#)

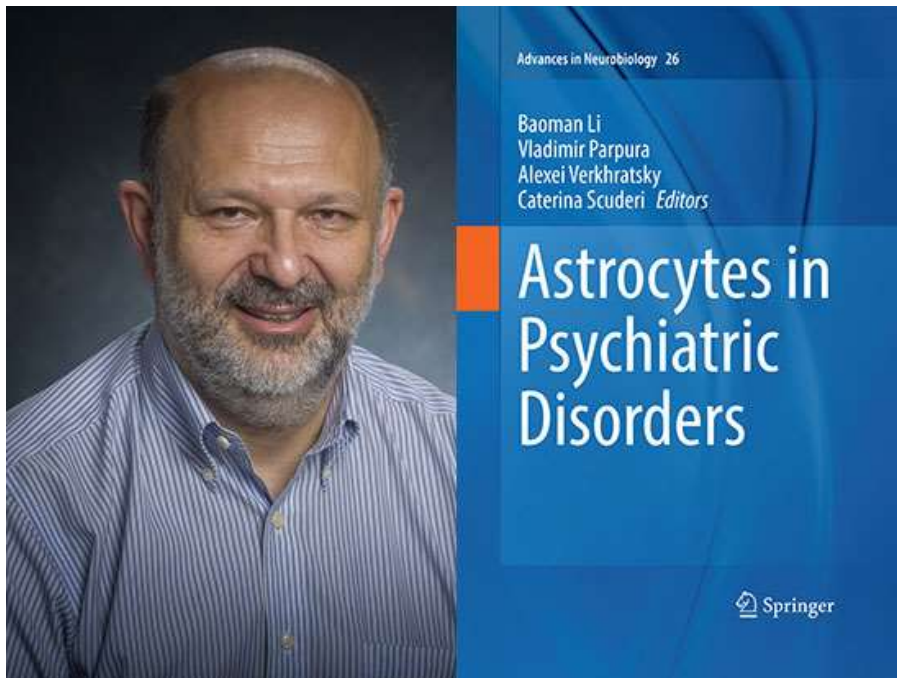
McNulty Scientist Award

The McNulty Scientist award is given each year in memory of Civitan member Tommy McNulty and his family who pioneered research efforts for developmental disabilities. Tom and Mary McNulty and their son Tommy were the driving force behind the creation of the Civitan International Research Center and the research focus of Civitan International.

The McNulty Scientist Award is bestowed on a faculty member who has exhibited exemplary leadership in the field of Developmental Disabilities research. Each awardee receives funding to pursue their research projects.

Since its inception, the impact the award has had on research has been monumental. Below are highlights from a few past award winners which indicates their current titles and the wide spectrum of research to which the award has contributed.

- **Brandon Rocque, MD, FAANS**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Neurosurgery
Hydrocephalus, spina bifida, cerebral palsy and many other neurological disorders
- **Matthew Alexander, PhD**, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Pediatrics
Identifying novel factors that regulate childhood neuromuscular disorders
- **Kristina Visscher, PhD**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
Understanding what brain mechanisms underlie the ability to process information
- **Sarah O'Kelley, PhD**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Psychology
Exploring the Autism Spectrum Disorder phenotype in a clinical population.
- **Vladimir Parpura, MD, PhD**, Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
Glioblastoma growth in animal models
- **Brian Sims, MD, PhD**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Pediatrics
Cellular mechanisms involved in premature brain injury
- **Adrianne Lahti, MD**, Professor and Chair, Dept. of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuro
Revealing the contribution of glutamate to the pathophysiology of schizophrenia
- **Erik Roberson, MD, PhD**, Professor, Dept. of Neurology
Gene therapy that may provide a novel approach for treating some people with frontotemporal dementia
- **Farah Lubin, PhD**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
Molecular genetic mechanisms that govern how gene expression programs control memory
- **Linda Wadiche, PhD**, Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
Neurodevelopment and developmental disabilities; learning, memory and synaptic plasticity
- **Scott Wilson, PhD**, Associate Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
Identifying genes essential for the development and function of the peripheral nervous system
- **Lucas Pozzo-Miller, PhD**, Professor, Dept. of Neurobiology
A mutation in the Rett Syndrome gene that leads to premature truncation of the gene's protein product



A leading researcher at the Civitan International Research Center, Dr. Vladimir Parpura, has a first-of-its-kind book which explores astrocytes as an emerging player in psychiatric disorders. Despite decades of research many psychiatric disorders have been resistant to treatment.

Dr. Parpura and colleagues have published “Astrocytes in Psychiatric Disorders” which addresses mood disorders, schizophrenia, addictive disorders, and eating disorders.

The book also explores methods of targeting astrocytes in the therapeutic management of neuropsychiatric disorders.

For the complete story visit:

[Astrocytes in Psychiatric Disorders - School of Medicine - Civitan International Research Center | UAB](#)

Dr. Robin Lester is the recipient of the 2021 Ellen Gregg Ingalls/UAB National Alumni Society Award for Lifetime Achievement in Teaching!

Dr. Lester has educated professional students in the schools of Medicine, Dentistry, and optometry and recently extended his reach to undergraduates. “In teaching, you have you keep things fresh. Just like bench science. You have to keep up to date with the material and the teaching methods,” said Lester, now a professor of neurobiology. “You have to approach learning from the student’s perspective — what they find interesting — and build on that.”



His newest course for UAB Honors College students, Strange Brains: How Myths and Legends Shaped the History of Neuroscience, explores the early understanding of the brain by ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans and moves from the myths to modern science.

The Ellen Gregg Ingalls/UAB National Alumni Society Award for Lifetime Achievement in Teaching is presented annually to a full-time UAB faculty member who, throughout their 20-plus year career at UAB, demonstrates an outstanding commitment to teaching.

Congratulations Dr. Lester!!!

What are some of the Researchers working on???

Myopia

Rett Syndrome

Childhood Absence
Epilepsy

Anxio-depressive,
addiction, and head
trauma disorders

Developmental
Diseases

Genetic Diseases

Human Learning,
Memory and
Emotion

Neurodevelopmental
Impairment

Birth Asphyxia

Autism Spectrum
Disorder

Macular
Degeneration

Neurofibromatosis

Schizophrenia

Learning, memory and
Neuropsychiatric Disease

Retinal
Degenerations

Bioinformatics

Parkinson's Disease

Electrical Brain
Stimulation

Brain Tumors

Genetic and
molecular basis of
disease

Neuromuscular
Disorders

Videos

2021 McNulty Scientist - Dr. Brandon Rocque - School of Medicine - Civitan International Research Center UAB

2021 CIRC Annual Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHsyhdzrhKc>

2020 CIRC Highlights <https://vimeo.com/410726907>

2019 CI Video: <https://civitan.org/research/>

2018 Convention <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/328-civitan-convention>

What is the CIRC? <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/324-what-is-the-circ>

Athens Civitan Club <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/316-athens-ladies-civitan-club>

Priceville Civitans <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/circ/test/303-priceville-junior-civitans-2>

Labs <http://www.uab.edu/medicine/neurobiology/news-events/news-archive/203-neurobiology-labs>

For updates on the Civitan International Research Center visit the website at:
www.uab.edu/medicine/circ

Due to COVID restrictions, private tours are temporarily suspended.

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VIDEO: www.youtube.com/uabnews