



Fall 2024

## Note from the Chair

I hope this message finds you well! It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce myself as the new chair of the Department of Biological Sciences. I am truly honored to be part of such a vibrant community, rich in tradition and innovation.

As I step into this role, I am excited to build upon the strong foundation laid by my predecessors and to foster an environment that nurtures curiosity, collaboration, inclusivity and academic excellence. The start of a new academic year brings with it a renewed sense of purpose, excitement and boundless opportunities for our Department to flourish. Our Department is committed to advancing research, education and service that not only enhances our understanding of life sciences but also addresses the pressing challenges of our time and makes a lasting impact on Clemson, the state of South Carolina and the world.

The Department is flourishing. With over 1,800 students pursuing undergraduate degrees in biological sciences, microbiology and the recently added pre-pharmacy, pre-professional health and pre-rehabilitation Science programs, we proudly house the largest group of majors on the Clemson campus! We are continually innovating our curricula and are currently focused on enhancing success in Gateway courses while designing signature experiences through Creative Inquiry, undergraduate research and Global Challenges. This includes two exciting study abroad courses led by John Cummings in South Africa and Kelly Willemsens in Costa Rica.

Our graduate programs in biological sciences, microbiology and environmental toxicology are providing cutting edge instruction to nearly 100 M.S. and Ph.D. students on campus, as well as additional 150+ students online. The Biological Sciences Graduate Students Association meets regularly for lively discussions and organizes both scientific and social events for everyone to enjoy. Our undergraduate and graduate students consistently win prizes, excel in their studies and pursue a wide range of impressive careers and activities after graduation (we are diligently working to track their post-graduation journeys).

While we celebrate our successes, we recognize they are largely due to the talents of our students, the dedication of our faculty and staff and the tremendous support we receive from Clemson University and our alumni. Although our financial support for all students is not yet where we would like it to be, we are making steady progress in that area as well.

We are proud to have you as part of that community and are grateful for your interest and support. I look forward to connecting with many of you and hearing your stories, insights and ideas. Your perspectives and experiences are invaluable, and together, we can continue to strengthen the ties between our past, present and future.



*Karolina Mukhtar*  
Chair

Stay tuned for updates on departmental initiatives, events and opportunities to engage. I am eager to embark on this journey with all of you!

Go Tigers!

Karolina M. Mukhtar  
*Professor and Chair*

## *Explorations*



*Adriana Bankston*

### **Alumni spotlight: Adriana Bankston**

Adriana Bankston is making an impact in scientific research, but she doesn't work in a lab. Bankston, who graduated from Clemson University in 2005 with a degree in biological sciences before receiving her doctorate in biochemistry, cell and developmental biology from Emory University, advocates for science and innovation at the federal level.

During her career, Bankston has pushed for steady and predictable federal research funding, fought for improved professional development and training of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers and provided evidence-based scientific expertise to help shape legislation and policy.

**[Learn more about Adriana.](#)**

## *Impressions*



*Andrew Brown*

## **Drive and determination lead biological sciences student to his Clemson degree in 2 years flat**

Andrew Brown was “all in” at Clemson. There was never really any doubt where he was going to go to college.

“I am one of those people who was a part of Clemson even before I started going there. I’ve lived about 20 minutes away from Clemson for most of my life. I had been to Clemson a lot. Everyone in my family is a Clemson fan,” he said. “It was my first pick.”

And he went “all in” once he started attending Clemson University in the second summer minimester in 2022. Brown graduated in August, completing his bachelor’s degree in biological sciences in just two full calendar years.

[Learn more about Andrew and his fast track to medical school.](#)



*Samantha Price, Virginia Abernathy, Kaustubha (Kos) Qanungo and Lisa Wagner.*

## **Department of Biological Sciences faculty promotions**

At the beginning of the Fall semester, the University announced the tenure and promotion of 25 faculty in the College of Science.

Congratulations to our newly promoted faculty in the Department of Biological Sciences:

- Samantha Price — Associate Professor with Tenure
- Virginia Abernathy — Senior Lecturer
- Kaustubha Qanungo — Senior Lecturer
- Lisa Wagner — Senior Lecturer

[Read more about all the College of Science promotions.](#)

## *Noteworthy*

### Faculty

Alumni Distinguished Professor Richard Blob was recently elected president of the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology (SICB) for the 2025-2027 term.

### Students

[More than 140 students spent the summer immersed in experiential learning](#) through Creative Inquiry research projects.

[STEM education initiative won competition prize](#): Mercy Crapps, biological sciences; Ryan Mehlem, biochemistry; and Natalia Nortz, biological sciences, designed a mobile STEM academy toolkit providing resources, volunteer support and community outreach to students in rural South Carolina schools.

[Give to the Department](#)



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