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A central mission of the [Vanderbilt Diabetes Center »](#) and the [Vanderbilt DRTC »](#) is training the next generation of scientists and physicians who will improve the lives of patients with diabetes. Each year the Vanderbilt Diabetes Center presents the Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes Award to recognize a graduate student and a postdoctoral fellow based on his/her diabetes-related research at Vanderbilt.

2013 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes: Graduate Student



Christopher E. Nelson

Christopher Nelson is a fifth year Ph.D. student working in the laboratory of Crag Duvall, Assistant Professor of Biomedical Engineering. Christopher's research is motivated by harnessing RNA interference to revascularize and restore chronic diabetic wounds. Christopher's strategy involves using biomaterials to deliver small interfering RNA targeted against prolyl hydroxylase domain protein 2 to increase expression of angiogenesis-related genes and trigger neovascularization in tissue engineering constructs. This work is a highly collaborative effort spanning both the School of Engineering and the School of Medicine by bringing in the expertise of Associate Professor Scott Guelcher and Professor Jeffrey Davidson.

Christopher's work in developing RNA interference delivery platforms has been published in high impact journals including *Biomaterials*, *ACS Nano*, and most recently, *Advanced Materials*. His work has received recognition by the journal *Wound Repair and Regeneration*, who solicited a highlight article on this subject, and the journal *Nanomedicine*. He has also received recognition from Vanderbilt University School of Engineering, the Society for Biomaterials, and the Biomedical Engineering Society.

2013 Vanderbilt Scholar in Diabetes: Post-doctoral Fellow



Arion J. Kennedy, Ph.D.

Arion Kennedy received her BS and MS in Chemistry at Florida A&M University. She completed her doctoral training at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro working under the direction of Dr. Michael McIntosh in the department of Nutrition. Her dissertation research focused on elucidating the anti-obesity mechanism by which trans-10, cis-12 CLA induced delipidation in human adipocytes.

Because her research interests were aimed at understanding how obesity leads to metabolic disorders, she joined Dr. Alyssa Hasty's laboratory in 2009. Arion's research focuses on immune cells and animal models of obesity and hyperlipidemia. She has published on the role of the chemokine MIP-1a and its receptor CCR5 in adipose tissue macrophage recruitment and insulin resistance. In 2012, she received a UNCRF-MERCK Postdoctoral Fellowship to investigate the function of hepatic immune cells in the development of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.