

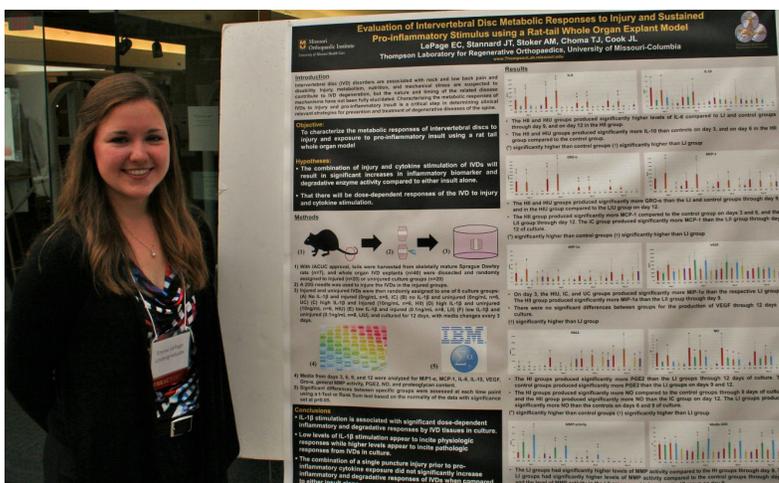
Lab Rats

by Brian Consiglio

Dr. Aaron Stoker is the associate director of the Thompson Laboratory for Regenerative Orthopaedics in the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute. He has received three degrees from Mizzou: a bachelor's degree in biology, a master's degree in biomedical science and a doctoral degree in pathology while working with Dr. James Cook, the director of the Thompson Laboratory for Regenerative Orthopaedics. Dr. Stoker has been working in the lab for over 18 years and has provided many opportunities for students to get involved in orthopaedic research. Currently in his lab are two doctoral students, four master's students, two post-baccalaureate students, six seniors, six juniors, 10 sophomores and two freshmen.

"The students bring a lot of energy and excitement into the lab," said Dr. Stoker. "Watching the students grow and gain confidence is cool because they create a sense of community, and teams defeat individuals any day."

Emma LePage (pictured below) is a senior from St. Charles, Missouri, majoring in biological sciences. She has been working in the Thompson Laboratory for Regenerative Orthopaedics since May of 2017 and her research has included examining the intervertebral discs of rats.



"Getting hands-on experience and learning about the specific functions of different parts of the body has been very beneficial," said Emma. "My drive as an aspiring physician is to help people, and I have been able to acquire so much knowledge working in Dr. Stoker's lab."

Emma attended a musculoskeletal research conference at Washington University in St. Louis last summer. In February she plans to present a research poster at the Orthopedic Research Society Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas.

As a junior at Mizzou, Emma presented at Health Sciences Research Day, the Undergraduate Research & Creative Achievements spring Forum, and Life Sciences Week. In addition to conducting research, Emma is the president of Mizzou's National Residence Hall Honorary and a member of the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega. Currently in the process of applying to medical school, Emma has considered working in pediatrics or family medicine.

Nikki Greco is a sophomore from Chicago majoring in biology. She is a pre-vet scholar and part of her research in Dr. Stoker's lab has included examining the intervertebral discs of rat tails.

"Research has allowed me to make great connections and opened the door to a bunch of different opportunities," said Nikki. "It's really important to see what is out there because you might find you have a passion for something you did not know about before."

Nikki is also a member of the Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity program at Mizzou and enjoys shopping and hiking in her free time.

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