THE GOOFY GOOBER NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2025

Greetings, Peanut Fam!

We're excited to bring you this edition of the APRES Graduate Student Organization (GSO) Quarterly Newsletter!

Whether you're a seasoned researcher or just peanut-curious, we hope this newsletter informs, inspires, and entertains!

Stay nutty,
APRES GSO Team

In This Issue

Stay Connected with APRES GSO!

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Join the conversation and stay engaged with the APRES community year-round.

APRES GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

APRES
American Peanut Research & Education Society, Inc.

57th Annual Meeting

Omni Richmond Hotel
July 15-17, 2025

The 57th Annual Meeting of the American Peanut Research and Education Society (APRES) was held July 15 - 17, 2025, at the Omni Richmond Hotel, nestled in the heart of historic Richmond, Virginia. This signature event brought together peanut researchers, industry professionals, and educators for three days of collaboration, innovation, and discovery.

The meeting began with a field tour showcasing ongoing peanut research across Southeastern Virginia, followed by a visit to the iconic Jamestown Settlement, a fitting blend of agricultural progress and historical roots.

Throughout the three-day event, attendees engaged in a dynamic program that featured general sessions, student competitions, workshops, and networking opportunities, with a healthy dose of fun along the way. The conference spotlighted cutting-edge research and global developments in peanut science, reaffirming the vital role of collaboration in advancing the industry.

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GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION

📊 2025 Student Presentation Summary

We were thrilled to see such enthusiastic participation in this year's student competitions, with **64 total presentations** from students representing **12 universities and research institutes**.

Breakdown of presentations:

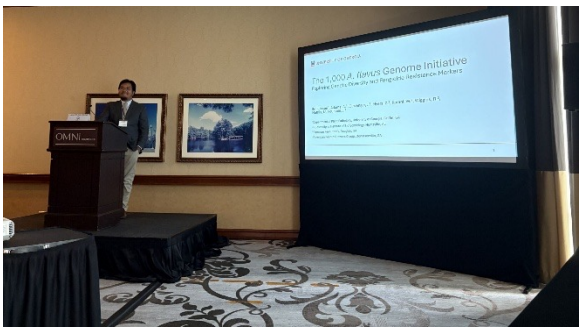
🗣️ Oral Presentations:
- MS: 22
- PhD: 19

🖼️ Poster Presentations:
- MS: 7
- PhD: 16

🎓 Institutes participated:

- Auburn University
- Clemson University
- Mississippi State University
- North Carolina State University
- Oklahoma State University
- Texas A&M University
- Texas Tech University
- The Volcani Center (ARO)
- University of Florida
- University of Georgia
- Valdosta State University
- Virginia Tech

PhD candidate Keely Beard from Virginia Tech, presenting her talk on "Effect of Mid-Season Heat and Drought on Reproductive Physiology in Virginia-Type Peanuts and the Implications for Peanut Production in the Virginia-Carolina Region"



PhD candidate Santiago Emil Joson from University of Georgia, presenting his talk on "The 1,000 *Aspergillus flavus* Genomes Initiative: Exploring Genetic Diversity and Fungicide Resistance Distribution in Southeast Peanut Production."

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt, Virginia Tech, and Alison Adams, University of Georgia

Joe Sugg Oral Competition

PhD Winners

1st Place: Santiago Emil Joson (University of Georgia)

Title: The 1,000 *Aspergillus flavus* Genomes Initiative: Exploring Genetic Diversity and Fungicide Resistance Distribution in Southeast Peanut Production

2nd Place: Bhavya Shukla (University of Georgia)
Title: Diversity Study of Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus in Major Cultivated Hosts in Southeast Georgia, United States

3rd Place: Samuel Lamon (University of Georgia)
Title: The Role of Genetic Instability in Peanut Domestication and Its Lasting Impact on Cultivated Varieties

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt, Virginia Tech

Joe Sugg Oral Competition

MS Winners

1st Place: Fnu Anshul
(University of Georgia)
Title: Exploring Agronomic Management Practices to Improve Peanut Oil Production

2nd Place: Lucinda McEachin
(University of Georgia)
Title: In-Vitro Temperature Response and Sensitivity of Three *Rhizopus* spp. to Peanut Seed-Treatment Fungicides

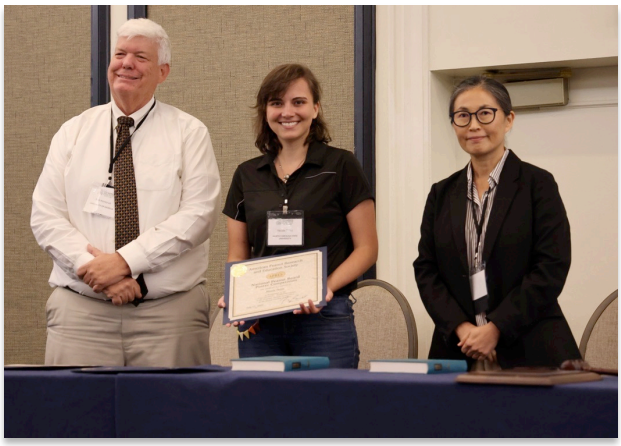
3rd Place: Hannah Grubbs
(University of Georgia)
Title: Impact of Variable Soil Water Tension Irrigation Thresholds on Georgia Peanut Production

Honorary Mention: Benedetta Sara Poles (University of Georgia)
Title: Differential Harvesting in Peanut: Irrigated Fields with Rainfed Corners

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt , Virginia Tech

Poster Competition

PhD Winners



1st Place: Nicole Pettit (North Carolina State University)
Title: Virginia Peanut Maturity Indicators Obtained From Aerial Imaging and Analysis for Phenomic Prediction

2nd Place: Jacob Forehand (Virginia Tech)
Title: Evaluating Early Season Post-Emergence Herbicide Injury in Peanut

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt, Virginia Tech

MS Winners

1st Place: Andrew Marchetti (University of Georgia)
Title: Evaluation of Late Leaf Spot-Resistant Peanut Breeding Lines With Putative Novel Resistance From TxAG-6

2nd Place: Vikash Verma (University of Florida)
Title: Effectiveness of Controlled-Released Potassium Fertilization in Peanut Production in Sandy Soils of Northcentral Florida

Graduate Student Spotlight – Keely M. Beard

Can you share a bit about yourself and your major program?

I am a 4th-year PhD student at VT in the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences. My major is Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science (PPWS), with a concentration in Plant Physiology. I joined my department through an interdisciplinary rotations program funded by the Translational Plant Sciences Center.

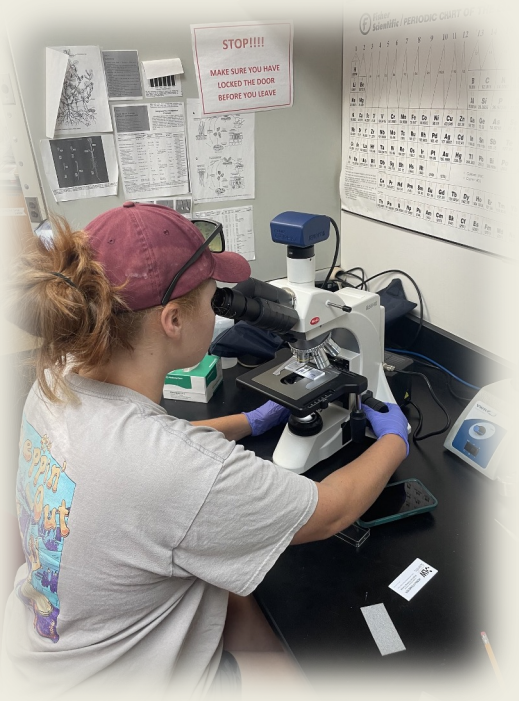
What is the focus of your research, and what drew you to this area?

My research focuses on understanding how peanut flowers and pollen are affected by heat and drought stress. My project seeks to understand the molecular mechanisms relating to changes in flower and pollen development, how these changes manifest in reproductive physiology, and their potential impacts on yield. I was drawn to this particular project because it truly embodied the mission of translational science. Working at the intersection of lab, field, and computational approaches adds critical depth to my investigations and provides the opportunity to gain novel insights in a multi-faceted way.

How do you think your research could impact peanut farming or the industry?

My research will become increasingly relevant over the coming years as abiotic stress related to climate change increases in frequency and severity. The ultimate goal of my project is to inform the breeding of climate-resilient cultivars, but that takes more than a decade to come to fruition. This is why all of my trials have been conducted on current cultivars available and grown in my region. In that sense I'm killing two birds with one stone – I'm assessing the resilience of current germplasms while informing future breeding efforts. All of my findings are reported to growers in the region through extension publications and presentations at local meetings.

Graduate Student Spotlight – Keely M. Beard



What do you find most exciting or challenging about working with peanuts?

Studying pollen is extremely difficult in peanuts. Peanuts have a somewhat rare fertilization style due to their flowers' unusual physiology. The reproductive organs are permanently enclosed within modified petals called the keel. These petals don't open when the rest of the flower blooms, creating a protected environment for pollen release and fertilization. Due to a reduced risk of pollen loss to the elements, these "cleistogamous" plants produce less pollen, giving me less material to work with. The flowers are also tiny!

What's your favorite thing about being part of APRES as a graduate student?

I love the closeness of the graduate student community and the APRES community as a whole. I've made some awesome friendships and have loved the opportunity to get together, swap ideas, and cheer for each other's accomplishments.

What are some of your interests or hobbies outside of your research?

I enjoy spending time outside, going to the gym, and crafting. I've always loved hiking, boating, and camping, and I'm thinking about getting into rock climbing too! On quiet days, I love to find a peaceful spot to paint and read.

Looking ahead, what are your career goals after graduation?

I would love to continue in the research space, but in a position at the intersection of research and extension. This may be a position with a government agency like USDA-ARS, or a faculty position in extension. I haven't decided anything definite, but I'm open to any opportunities that allow me to share my passion for research with the broader agriculture community and to serve the growers in my area.

Graduate Student Spotlight – Awori Jimmy Kelvin

Can you share a bit about yourself and your major program?

I'm Awori Jimmy Kelvin, I am from Kenya, and currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Georgia.

What is the focus of your research, and what drew you to this area?

My research focuses on identifying heat-tolerant peanuts from wild peanut genotypes, using photosynthetic measurements. The idea is to work with the genotypes that came from the peanut's center of origin, which happens to have diverse climatic conditions. Identifying heat-tolerant genotypes may help breeders develop resilient peanut cultivars able to withstand rising temperatures of climate change. What drove me to this research was the fact that scientists have predicted future yield loss by major crops due to global warming.

How do you think your research could impact peanut farming or the industry?

I believe that my research is vital in helping farmers continue with food production even as the temperatures continue to rise.

What do you find most exciting or challenging about working with peanuts?

Peanuts are very complex crops, especially when you're doing the kind of research that I am doing. Peanuts tend to acclimate to different environmental stresses, especially heat stress. Working with heat stress makes it even more challenging, however it is also very exciting!

Graduate Student Spotlight – Awori Jimmy Kelvin

What's your favorite thing about being part of APRES as a graduate student?

Being part of APRES as a graduate student is very exciting since I can meet with other graduate students and researchers working on peanuts. We are able to exchange ideas and get new insights about our research.

What are some of your interests or hobbies outside of your research?

Outside my research, I spend time talking to my family on the phone, since none of them is here in the US. I also love watching movies.

Looking ahead, what are your career goals after graduation?

I hope I can work in research focused on food security, especially in developing nations.

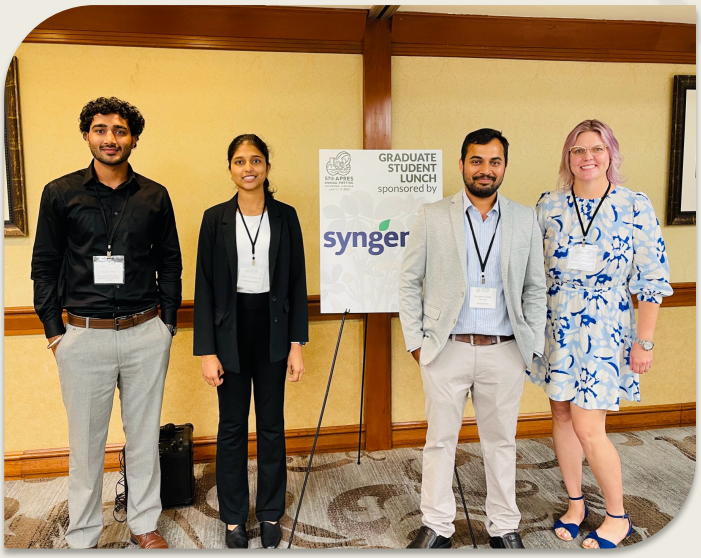
Graduate Student Spotlight

If you'd like to be highlighted in one of our upcoming spotlight posts, please complete the short questionnaire.

Passing the Baton

Thank You to Outgoing Officers, Welcome to the New

As we begin a new term, we'd like to acknowledge and thank the outgoing committee for their service and steady leadership. Over the past year, **Dr. Nicholas J. Shay** led as President, supported by **Ranadheer Reddy Vennam** as Vice President, **Aasish Pokharel** as Social Media Coordinator, and **Samantha J. Bowen** as Reporter. Their efforts have helped maintain momentum and strengthen the foundation of our organization.



We're also pleased to introduce the new committee. **Ranadheer Reddy Vennam** will now serve as President, bringing continuity and insight to the role. Joining the team are **Malarvizhi Sathasivam** as Vice President, **Vikash Verma** as Social Media Coordinator, and **Teresa Gaus-Bowling** as Reporter. We're confident this new group will continue the work with commitment and a fresh perspective.

APRES organized a field tour to Wakefield Peanut Company, Ben-Gar farms, and Jamestown Settlement historical site

Glimpses from the field tour to Wakefield, and Jamestown, Virginia.
Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt, Virginia Tech

Thank you for attending the 2025 APRES annual meeting

Thank you to everyone who attended this year's annual meeting. Your participation helped make a meaningful and engaging event.

Over the course of several days, we enjoyed a range of activities, including general sessions, student competitions, networking dinners, the graduate student luncheon, the 5k fun run, and the awards reception dinner.

We appreciate your contributions, energy, and commitment to the APRES community, and we look forward to seeing you again next year!

On behalf of the APRES Graduate Student Organization (GSO), we hope this newsletter gave you a quick and useful overview of the highlights from this year's conference. If you have any feedback, suggestions, or comments, please feel free to reach out to us. Thanks for reading!

Ranadheer
President, APRES GSO
ranadheerv@vt.edu

Photos by Suzanne M. Pruitt, Virginia Tech, and Aasish Pokharel, University of Georgia

SAVE THE DATE!

58th APRES Annual Meeting

Caribe Hilton · San Juan, Puerto Rico

JULY 14-16, 2026