



VOLUME 5

ISSUE 3

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GRADUATE STUDENT
ORGANIZATION

March 2025

Graduate Student of the Month

Nithin Batthula, M.S. Student - University of Florida

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am a MS student at the University of Florida under the guidance of Dr. Ramdas Kanissery. My research is focused on evaluating the effectiveness of different PRE herbicide treatments, both in tank mixes and single applications, controlling nutsedges in tomato production under the plastic mulch. The primary objective of your study is to evaluate the efficacy of PRE herbicides in suppressing nutsedge populations, particularly purple nutsedge (*Cyperus rotundus*) and yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*), which are problematic weeds in Florida's tomato fields.



What drew you to weed science?

My interest in weed science began during my undergraduate experience at Northwest Missouri State University, specifically through my project on the evaluation of growth and emergence of giant foxtail. This early exposure to weed biology and management ignited my passion for understanding the ecological dynamics of weeds another was while I am doing internship with Corteva Agriscience was another pivotal point in my journey, allowing me to dive deeper into practical weed management and herbicide application. Participating in herbicide trials exposed to a variety of weed control strategies and allowed me to see firsthand how herbicides perform in real-world settings.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

WSSA provides a platform for sharing the latest research on weed management, making it a valuable resource for professionals in agriculture, ecology, and environmental science. It brings together experts, practitioners, and researchers from diverse fields. This facilitates collaboration, fosters new partnerships, and helps professionals stay up to date with innovations in the field. WSSA is committed to educating the public and professionals alike on the importance of effective weed management, which helps to mitigate the ecological and economic impact of weeds.

What is your favorite weed and why?

My favorite weed is Palmer amaranth. This rapid growth allows it to quickly outcompete crops like cotton, soybeans, and corn, leading to significant yield losses. It had developed resistance to multiple herbicides, including glyphosate, making it a significant challenge for farmers who rely on herbicide-based weed control strategies. The plant is highly adaptable to various environmental conditions, making it a problem in diverse agricultural regions across the U.S. and beyond. It thrives in disturbed soils, often found in crop fields, but it can also establish itself in other habitats, which makes it a widespread issue.

What is your long-term goal?

My long-term goal is to become a weed scientist and create approaches that reduce the need for herbicides and aid in the prevention of herbicide resistance in order to support sustainable weed management techniques. Utilizing IWM, which integrates several techniques such crop rotation, mechanical control, and biological methods, may be necessary for this. Increasing knowledge of weed growth and crop interactions to develop better control strategies is another objective of weed biology and ecology research.

If you want to add Nithin Batthula to your network, connect with Nithin on:

LinkedIn: Nithin Batthula; E-mail: nbatthula@ufl.edu; X: @Batthula2024

If you would like to be featured in the WSSA Graduate Student Organization newsletter or know an outstanding graduate student and want to nominate them, please send your suggestion to ryan.hamberg@ag.tamu.edu

WSSA GSO Alumni Spotlight

Taylor Randell Singleton, Assistant Professor - Extension Sustainability Specialist, University of Georgia

What Universities did you attend/ degrees did you earn?

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College – B.S.
University of Georgia – M.S.
University of Georgia – Ph.D

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

I started my position as an assistant professor and extension sustainability specialist at the University of Georgia in July 2023.

What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

I love conducting applied research, then sharing those results with growers in an extension setting. It has been really exciting to meet folks all around the state, learn more about their farming operations, and how I can help them as an extension specialist through research and outreach.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

Take the time now to get organized and structured in your routines and approach to managing your time (in and outside of work), your research, notes, priorities, goals, etc. In graduate school, whether we realize it or not, our attention is on our courses, research, and writing. In our careers, we have these tasks plus a million others....so having a good foundation of organization, focus, and structure will help make sure nothing slips through the cracks, deadlines are met, our research is sound, and we have a healthy work-life balance.

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

If you can, start early preparing your application materials in advance – think through the kinds of jobs you are interested in applying for and go ahead and update your CV, draft sample philosophies, cover letters, etc. This will help you think through and start formulating your ideas and what you can bring to the position. Take the time to talk with people who are in the types of jobs you are interested in and learn what their roles look like. Mostly importantly, ask for help! Reach out to mentors/advisors and ask for advice on the preparing, application, and interview process.

If you want to add Dr. Taylor Randell Singleton to your network, connect with Taylor on:

E-mail: trandell@uga.edu; X: @trsingleton22



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Important Events & Dates

WSWS Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA
March 10 – 13, 2025

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Graduate Student of the Month

Conner Purvis, Ph.D. Student – Michigan State University

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am currently at Michigan State University as a third year PhD student under the advisement of Dr. Erin Burns. My research focuses on the biology and ecology driving johnsongrass competitiveness. I investigate herbicide resistance in diverse biotypes across the United States and further trying to characterize the mechanism of resistance within these biotypes. Additionally, I study hybridization between johnsongrass and grain sorghum to distinguish between the varying hybrids that can form. Lastly, I examine the relationship between johnsongrass and its soil microbiome, and how these interactions could be utilized in weed suppression.



What drew you to weed science?

Before starting at Michigan State, I had no experience in agriculture, much less weed science. I got my initial start in research on the more basic side looking at secondary metabolites and fungal pathogens in turfgrass. What drew me to the weed science field is the adaptability of weedy species, the quickness of the responses to selection in agriculture and natural systems. Even with my research focusing now on one species, I find myself everyday still doing something new and exciting!

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

I always enjoy attending the regional and national meetings every year. I've been to three NCWSS and two WSSA meetings since starting graduate school, every year I've gotten to connect with old friends and make new ones too. I came to MSU in 2022, it's also been great to see the diversity of topics in weed science continue to grow. I think there is a lot of exciting new research coming out and plenty of avenues additionally to explore. The people and connections truly make the weed science societies a great place to engage and collaborate.

What is your favorite weed and why?

My favorite weed would have to be johnsongrass. I started working on johnsongrass finishing up in undergraduate looking at gene expression of the pathway that produces cyanide (sick!). Working with this beast of a plant especially in the greenhouse can be challenging, but the diverse responses in this species to survive is exciting. My next steps are really trying to understand how johnsongrass curates its soil microbiome, it entices me what relationships this weed has that may drive its invasiveness.

What is your long-term goal?

My long-term goal is to have my own research lab. There's a lot of work I currently do I want to expand on plus other endeavors. With a background in conservation, I want the opportunity to have large-scale research that aims to create sustainable agricultural solutions for growers. Mitigating climate change affects and battling the global need for secure food production would be the driving force. I hope to integrate ecological principles into my research in weed science that can enhance both productivity and sustainability.

If you want to add Connor Purvis to your network, connect with Connor on:

LinkedIn: Connor Purvis; **E-mail:** purvisco@msu.edu; **Bluesky:** conner-purvis.bsky.social

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WSSA GSO Alumni Spotlight

Jose de Sanctis, Technology Development Representative - Bayer Crop Science

What Universities did you attend/ degrees did you earn?

I have a diverse academic background. I earned my BS in Agricultural Engineering from the University of São Paulo – ESALQ Campus. As part of my studies, I spent two semesters as an exchange student at Western Illinois University before returning to Brazil to graduate. Afterward, I returned to the US to pursue my MS at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which I completed in 2020, and I recently earned my PhD from North Carolina State University this past fall.



What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

I started a new role as a Technology Development Representative with Bayer in Eastern Iowa this January, and I currently reside in Iowa City.

What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

In my role I get to conduct my field research and to engage with sales teams and other stakeholders to provide technical support. And what excites me the most about it is the dynamic relation of constantly receiving input/feedback and addressing those questions in my research objectives or using my training to give the best recommendation possible giving their current situation and immediate needs. It's always a challenge, and I know there is still much to learn.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

As students we tend to dig very deep into our research and understand everything there is to know about a very specific topic, in my case it was paraquat-resistant Italian ryegrass. However, after graduate school, our jobs often require engaging with a broad range of topics. Looking back, I sometimes wish I had exposed myself to more disciplines beyond my core research.

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

As we navigate through graduate school it is easy to get overwhelmed with our tasks and responsibilities and only focus on the finish line (graduation). I encourage you to think beyond that and envision where you want after graduation. Once you have a direction, set achievable goals to guide you there. Plans may change and evolve, but having a vision will help you stay on track. I also encourage students to take full advantage of the unique opportunities available to them. Many doors are open during graduate school, and people are often eager to help if you take the initiative to ask. Network actively, visit other universities or labs, and participate in company tours and field days—it's an invaluable way to expand your perspective and build connections for the future.

If you want to add Dr. Jose de Sanctis to your network, connect with Jose on:

LinkedIn: Jose de Sanctis; **X:** @JosedeSanctis1

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Call for Applications: 2025 WSSA Travel Enrichment Experience Award

Description of Scholarship: The Travel Enrichment Experience will provide an opportunity for WSSA graduate students to participate in a five-day, four-night educational experience with professionals in a different WSSA region. Each recipient will be awarded \$ 2,000 from the WSSA to cover expenses incurred during their experience.

Eligibility Requirements: Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Enrolled as a current degree-seeking graduate student (M.S. or Ph.D.) in good academic standing at an accredited college or university
2. Currently conducting or recently finished research in weed science
3. An active member of the WSSA at the time of application
4. **Must submit an abstract and present a 10-minute oral presentation about his/her experience at the next WSSA annual meeting.** Specifics will be provided directly to recipients.

Application Procedure: Submission of the following information as a single PDF is required.

1. Completed application form (<https://wssa.net/society/student-resources/opportunities/>)
2. Cover letter describing applicant's interest in weed science and the travel enrichment experience (< 1 page)
3. Brief resume or CV summary highlighting recent relevant experiences (< 1 page)
4. Two letters of support, one of which must be from the applicant's major advisor (<1 page)

Email the application packet to Dr. Cara McCauley (cara.mccauley@corteva.com) by May 10, 2025, as a single PDF with "WSSA Travel Enrichment Experience" in the subject line.

Important Events & Dates:

- May 12-16: Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW) - Washington D.C.
- July 14-17: Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Providence, Rhode Island
- July 29-30: Northeastern Weed Science Society Weed Contest, Bridgeton, New Jersey
- July 30-31 - North Central Weed Science Society Weed Contest, BASF Midwest Research Farm, Seymour, Illinois
- August 8 - Southern Weed Science Society Weed Contest, University of Arkansas, Newport, Arkansas

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May 2025

Graduate Student of the Month

Sammi Bowen, M.S. Student – University of Georgia

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am currently pursuing my M.S. in Crop and Soil Science with a concentration in herbicide chemistry at the University of Georgia under the advisement of Dr. Timothy Grey. My research covers a wide range of topics, including PGR tank mix interactions, herbicide dissipation, and organic weed management in peanut. As I transition into my Ph.D. program, my focus is shifting from terrestrial to aquatic weed management. My doctoral research will focus on aquatic herbicide degradation in surface waters & the management of hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*).



What drew you to weed science?

I'll be honest, I stumbled into it. Growing up in a small rural South Georgia town, agriculture was a way of life, so studying it in undergrad was an easy decision. What I didn't expect was the administrative error that redirected my student worker placement. Instead of joining the Beef Unit, I was assigned to a weed science laboratory. It was in this lab that I discovered the complexities, challenges, and potential impact of weed science. I found my passion and haven't looked back since then.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

My favorite thing about both WSSA and my regional society (SWSS) is their strong commitment to student engagement and success. I began presenting at SWSS as an undergraduate, and the support I received from the society and its stakeholders is something I can never fully repay. Without their encouragement, I may not have pursued graduate school, and I certainly would not have built the network of connections that continues to support and inspire me today.

What is your favorite weed and why?

The better question is, what is my favorite challenge? If that's the question, then it's *Hydrilla verticillata*. This is because many of its biological traits remain unknown. It's aggressive, and it exhibits a remarkable ability to adapt and persist in diverse aquatic environments, making it both a fascinating and formidable species to study. As for my favorite weed based off of looks, it's sicklepod (*Senna obtusifolia*), mostly because its seedlings resemble peanuts, and I really like peanuts!

What is your long-term goal?

Whether my future lies in terrestrial or aquatic weed management, my goal remains the same. I want to create meaningful, science-backed solutions that improve outcomes for growers and land managers alike.

If you want to add Sammi Bowen to your network, connect with Sammi on:

LinkedIn: Samantha Bowen; E-mail: samanthabowen@uga.edu

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WSSA GSO Alumni Spotlight

Andrew Osburn, National Claims Compliance and Field Operations Manager - RWC INC and Ferrosafe

What universities did you attend/ degrees did you earn?

I obtained my bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Miami University in 2014. After graduating, I found my passion for weed science & decided to go back to school for higher education. I got my master's from The Ohio State University in Horticulture & Crop Science, and then I went to Texas A&M for PhD in Agronomy.

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

My current job title is National Claims Compliance and Field Operations Manager with RWC INC and Ferrosafe. It is a bit of an odd role working with two separate entities within the same organization. I have been with my current employer for about 2 months now, previously I was working with chemical manufacturers.



What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

My favorite job so far has been a Technical Service Manager. I was able to basically do a little bit of everything from research to sales support, marketing, and was able to work in different fields like pathology and entomology.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

One thing I wish I knew as a student is how important finishing publications before graduation is to your career and postgraduate time management. Once you graduate and move on to your next role there is a lot less time and pressure to finalize publications and they can easily sit unfinished for a while. My recommendation is to publish as much as you can before you graduate and leave!

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

You most likely will have to look for jobs or positions that are a little outside of your area of study. You might have done your master's or PhD work in something specific such as herbicide resistance gene flow in waterhemp but most industry jobs will be much more comprehensive in agronomic knowledge and academic jobs will have wider scopes that might not focus on your preferred area of interest. Be open and flexible in your search!

If you want to add Dr. Andrew Osburn to your network, connect with Andrew on:

Email: osburnaw@gmail.com

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June 2025

Graduate Student of the Month

Natasha Djuric, MS/PhD Student – Cornell University

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am a third year MS/PhD student at Cornell University supervised by Dr. Antonio DiTommaso and Dr. Matthew Ryan. My research is focused on organic weed management and no-till in small grains. I am leading a multi-state four-year study on Kernza®, the first commercialized perennial grain. The study investigates cultural and mechanical practices to optimize weed management and yield. Additionally, I am experimenting with no-till organic spring wheat in the Northeast by using winter-killing cover crops. Finally, I am researching mechanisms of weed suppression in cereal-legume intercrops with a focus on weed functional traits.



What drew you to weed science?

A love for plants. Plant species indicate so much about the characteristics of a place – water availability, light, soil fertility, compaction – and the more we pay attention to them the more is revealed to us without taking a single measurement! In an agricultural setting, the ability to observe how dynamically plants respond to management practices is deeply fascinating to me. Coming from an ecology background, weed science was and remains an exciting way to engage in applied plant research that meaningfully contributes to protecting our food systems and ecosystems.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

The emphasis on student engagement and career building immediately stuck out to me when I joined the WSSA and NEWSS. At our conferences, I always enjoy the opportunity to meet the researchers behind the work I'm citing all the time, and to catch up with old and new friends working hard on their degrees.

What is your favorite weed and why?

Impossible question, but okay - my favorite weed is common chickweed (*Stellaria media*). It's a nice example of how the definition of weed is challenged when non-seeded plants provide agronomic benefits. Chickweed sometimes behaves more like a volunteer cover crop than a weed, providing an early layer of protection to the soil in a rainy spring and then disappearing quickly into the growing season. The alternating line of hairs along the stem are also a fun characteristic that makes identification a breeze.

What is your long-term goal?

Long term, I aim to promote curiosity-driven, hands-on outdoor learning at an institutional level as a research-teaching professor. I strongly believe developing an intuition for and connection with nature is a critical tool to addressing systemic issues in environmental and social inequality, while developing creative, well-rounded, and compassionate thinkers. I also strive to advance management practices in agricultural systems that promote resiliency and self-regulation through adopting ecological principles.

If you want to add Natasha to your network, connect with Natasha on:

LinkedIn: [Natasha Djuric](#) Email: nd365@cornell.edu

If you would like to be featured in the WSSA Graduate Student Organization newsletter or know an outstanding graduate student and want to nominate them, please send your suggestion to ryan.hamberg@ag.tamu.edu

WSSA GSO Alumni Spotlight

Zahoor Ganie, Senior Global R&D Scientist, FMC



What Universities did you attend/ degrees did you earn?

I attended SKUAST-Kashmir, India for my BSc Agriculture; CCSHAU, Hisar India for MS Agronomy; and University of Nebraska-Lincoln for PhD in Agronomy/ Weed Science.

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

Senior Global R&D Scientist Herbicide Discovery and I have been working with FMC from last 6+ years.

What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

Some of my favorite things about this job are staying up to date with the scientific literature, emerging issues, innovations and technologies in Ag. Working with novel potential herbicide areas, addressing unique research questions, and teamwork.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

Value of networking. To be specific, find more professional mentors in your scientific community beyond your lab or university.

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

Have a clarity on career goals, networking, and do not rush into whatever you find, rather have patience till you find the right job that suits you better.

If you want to add Dr. Zahoor Ganie to your network, connect with him on:

LinkedIn: [Zahoor Ganie](#)

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