



VAIGS Alumni Newsletter February 2017

Save the Date

- [Grand Rapids Griffins Purple Community Night](#)
February 17 @ 7 pm
- [Winterfest](#)
February 23 @ 6 pm
- [Osteoporosis: An Impending Public Health Crisis](#)
March 3 @ 7 am
- **Career Day**
March 16
- [Purple Community 5k](#)
April 29 @ 8 am
- **Commencement**
May 15

Staying Connected

- Check out the new VAIGS video!
<https://vaigs.vai.org/about-vaigs/>
- Please keep an eye out for the alumni survey which will be going out soon. We greatly appreciate you taking the time to complete it!

VAIGS Recent Publications

Dickson BM, **de Waal PW**, Ramjan Z, Xu HE, Rothbart SB. 2016. [A fast, open source implementation of adaptive biasing potentials uncovers a ligand design strategy for the chromatin regulator BRD4](#). *J Chem Phys*. 145:154113.

Liu P, Jia MZ, Zhou XE, de Waal PW, Dickson BM, Liu B, Hou L, Yin YT, Kang YY, Shi Y, Melcher K, Xu HE, Jiang Y. 2016. [The structural basis of the dominant negative phenotype of the \$G\alpha_{i1}\beta_{1\gamma_2}\$ G203A/A326S heterotrimer](#). *Acta Pharm Sin* 37:1259–1272.

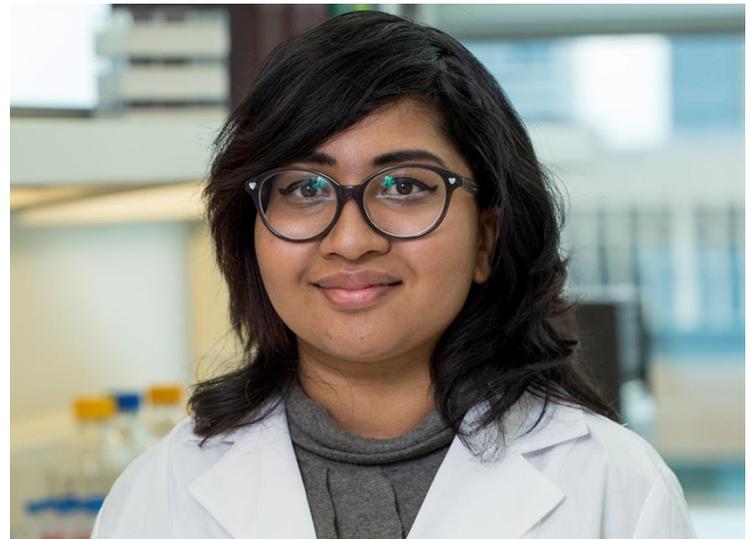
2017 Dissertation Defenses

- Agni Naidu “A Role for MEK in Arteriogenesis”
 - Successfully defended in December 2016
- Kevin Maupin
 - Defense on February 23, 2017
- Nikki Thellman
 - Defense on April 10, 2017
- Eric Nollet
 - Defense on April 17, 2017



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT AGNI NAIDU

- **Undergraduate University:** [San Francisco State University](#) (B.A. Creative Writing, B.S. Physiology)
- **Thesis:** A role for MEK in arteriogenesis: Implications for vascular disease
- **Mentor:** [Bart Williams, Ph.D.](#) and Nick Duesbery, Ph.D.
- **Experience:** Undergraduate research at San Francisco State University on epigenetic mechanisms in multiple species of ants, 2010 NSF-REU Fellowship recipient, medical internship at the University of West Virginia
- **Home State:** California
- **Hobbies:** Composing and playing violin and piano music, creating YouTube videos, selling commissioned artwork and hand-made artisan crafts, and learning to code video games



How do you think earning an advanced degree will change your role in society?

I believe that every level of a higher academic degree comes with a higher level of academic responsibility. A doctorate, to me, means that I will have the responsibility to communicate my own research, and scientific topics in general, to a lay public. I will have the responsibility to make sure the decisions of myself and others in my life are informed when it comes to science policies. I will have the responsibility to make sure I use the skills I learn to contribute to society, whether inside or outside of academic sciences.

What is your primary motivation for persevering through graduate school?

People should not have to suffer due to medical conditions. We know that certain poor lifestyle choices such as high fat diets or smoking can lead to vascular disease. But at the end of the day, there is always that exception: the smoker who lived over 100, or the completely healthy 30-year-old who suffered a stroke. Regardless of life style choices, no one “deserves” vascular disease. And since it is a problem for so many individuals, my research is the way I can make a contribution that will help the lives of all of them.