

“Izzo” Ahmed prepares to present drug interaction research at national conference

A-STATE NEWS

PRESS RELEASE

Arkansas State University senior Izzeldin Ahmed is headed west where he will be among researchers making presentations at a national conference.

Ahmed, better known on campus simply as ‘Izzo,’ will present a research poster on his studies of interactions between the prescription medicine Xanax and synthetic cannabinoids. The event is the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists (ABRCMS) in Anaheim, Calif.

A double major in biological sciences and chemistry, he was selected in 2021 for the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. He secured a second SURF award this year to continue his work.

“The research I performed at UAMS revolved around metabolism. Specifically, we studied the drug-to-drug interactions between synthetic cannabinoids and Xanax by examining kinetic

assays using human liver microsomes,” Ahmed explained.

According to his abstract, depression, anxiety and isolation caused by lockdowns and economic hardships drove substance abuse of both illicit and prescribed drugs to record high levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alprazolam, brand named Xanax, is a frequently prescribed medication for anxiety. Synthetic cannabinoids, commonly known as K2 and spice, induce a high similar to cannabis but cause significant adverse side effects, such as cardiovascular and gastric issues.

“The values and profiles can help us understand the metabolism of these drug-to-drug interactions and potentially explain clinical toxicities observed in patients who overdose with these two drugs in their system,” he also said.

Addressing the scientists in Anaheim will be a familiar process, as the native of Sudan has already presented at several academic conferences regarding his work with Dr. Fabricio Medina-Bolivar, professor of plant metabolic engineering, at the Arkansas Biosciences Institute on the A-State campus. Earlier this year, he

was among 14 A-State students whose work was selected for presentation to the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR).

“I became interested in Arkansas State University due to its strong biology and chemistry programs and the depth of research here,” he added. Ahmed’s involvement in ABRCMS is a primary example of the type of research opportunities that can open up to undergraduate students at A-State.

“We are hoping to regularly send students to this national conference to gain a national reputation as a university that embraces diversity as part of their research enterprise,” said Dr. Tom Risch, vice provost for research and technology transfer. “Izzo will be our first A-State student presenting at ABRCMS as far as we know.”

His first SURF experience developed his interest in drug interaction research, and he decided to pursue the second fellowship because of the excellent mentorship provided by Dr. Grover P. Miller.

“I was able to be one of the authors on a recent paper, which compares human and

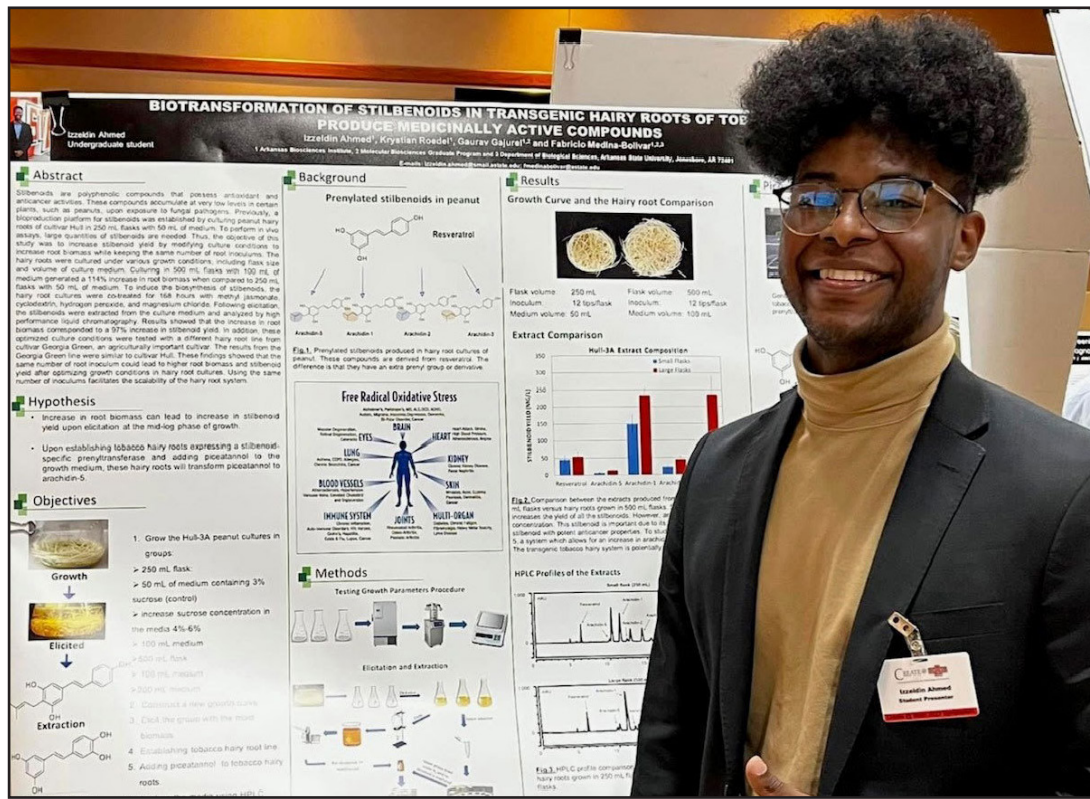


PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Izzo Ahmed at Create@ASate in April.

mice metabolisms to answer a key question in the field of drug studies, ‘can mice really be suitable models for human metabolism?’

Ahmed also is an A-State Student Research and Creativity Ambassador and vice president

of the Student Research Council, according to Kari M. Harris, director of student research in the Office of Research and Technology Transfer. “His duties in both involve outreach to students regarding research opportunities, mentorship and

assisting with student research programs,” she explained. He also finds time to serve as president of the campus chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and vice president of the National Panhellenic Council.

Newly formed “First in the Pack” aims to help first generation Arkansas students

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PRESS RELEASE

First generation Arkansas State University students will have more support thanks to a new resource on campus. “The newly created First in the Pack (FITP) Resource

Center is designed to empower first-generation college students to effectively navigate their college experience and persist to graduation through resiliency coaching, supportive services and connections to community/campus resources,” said Jill Simons, dean of University

College and associate vice chancellor for Academic Affairs.

An open house for FITP will be held from 2-5 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 17. The resource center is in room 133 of the Dean B. Ellis Library.

“This is a unique and eclectic space for students to come and

relax between classes, charge their technological devices, and most importantly, gain support and encouragement,” said Simons.

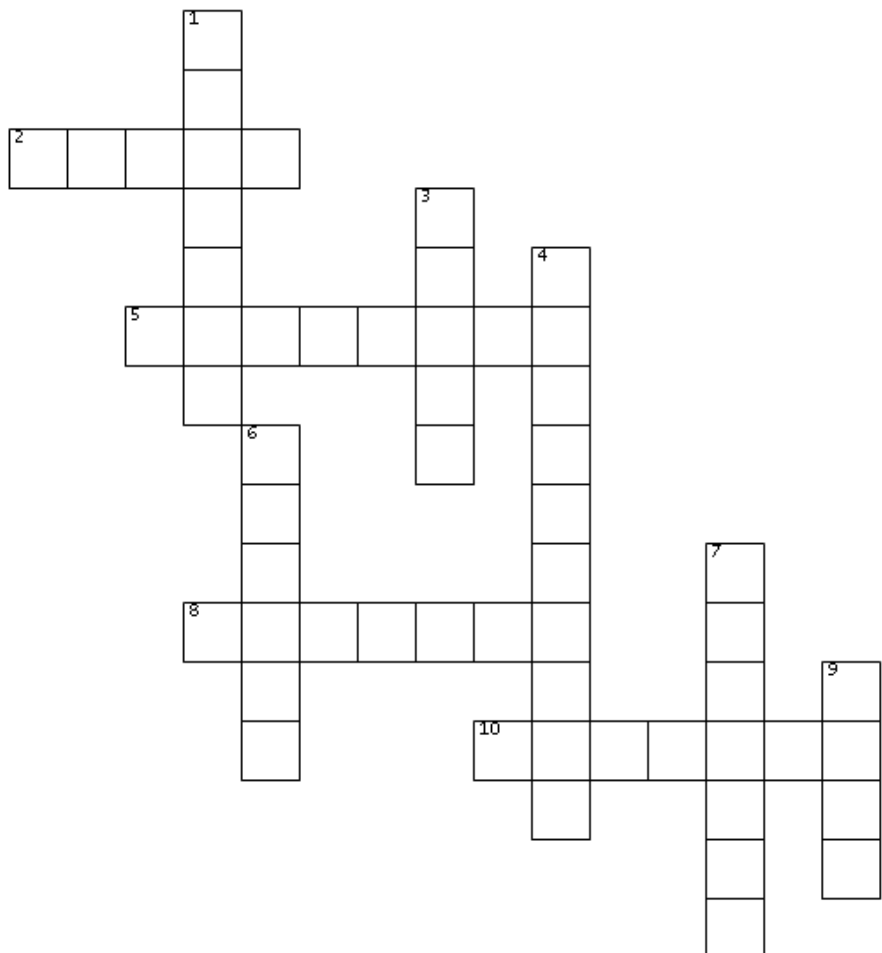
This expansion of services is a significant move for A-State as FITP will focus on students whose parents do not have a four-year college degree. Simons

said the center’s staff has a wealth of experience working with first generation college students.

This program is part of A-State’s Student Support Services (SSS), directed by Jerrod Lockhart, which promotes retention and academic success in college.

Services are free and include tutoring, academic advising, career coaching, mentoring, workshops and graduate school preparation. First in the Pack is also the name of the ongoing scholarship campaign by the Resource Center to support first generation college students.

This week’s crossword puzzle



ACROSS

- 2. a series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person’s mind during sleep
- 5. direct sunlight unbroken by cloud, especially over a comparatively large area
- 8. an imaginary creature that is typically large, ugly, and frightening
- 10. a fence or other obstacle that prevents movement or access

DOWN

- 1. a sports arena with tiers of seats for spectators
- 3. an edible bulb with a pungent taste and smell, composed of several concentric layers, used in cooking
- 4. a person who does not eat meat, and sometimes other animal products, especially for moral, religious, or health reasons
- 6. a wealthy, powerful person in business or industry
- 7. the time or date (twice each year) at which the sun crosses the celestial equator, when day and night are of approximately equal length (about Sept. 22 and March 20)
- 9. a tailless amphibian with a short squat body, moist smooth skin, and very long hind legs for leaping