

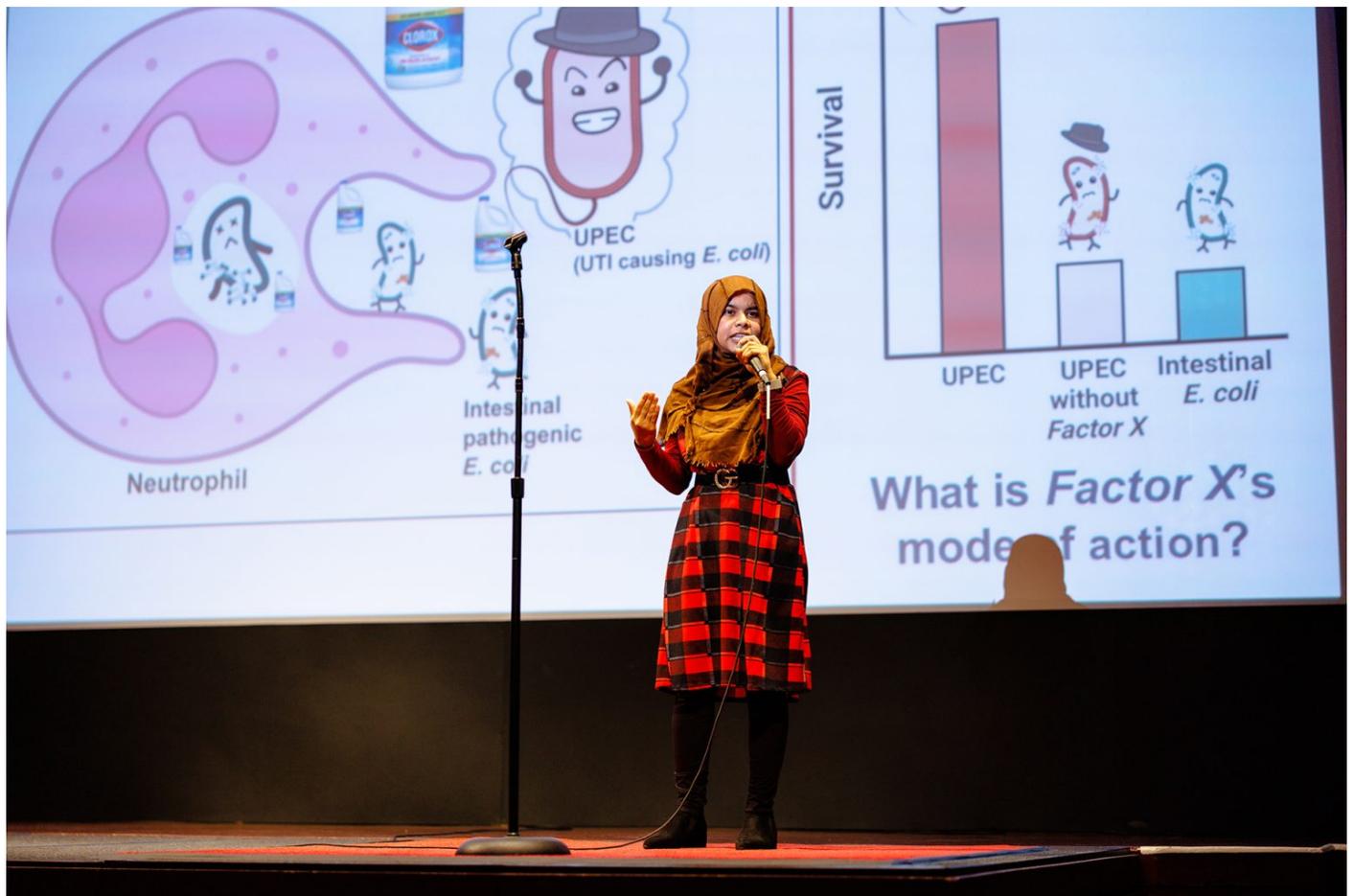
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Graduate students educate, entertain crowd at Three Minute Thesis competition

By Kevin Bersett February 24, 2023



Biological Sciences doctoral student Sadia Sultana took the top prize at Illinois State University's Three Minute Thesis competition February 23 at the Normal Theater.

Sadia Sultana momentarily posed in a fighting stance, while delivering a verbal knockout punch during her award-winning presentation Thursday night at Illinois State University's [Three Minute Thesis competition](#).

"We have a very sophisticated immune system to fight invading pathogens. An important member of our immune system is neutrophil. So neutrophils are present in our blood searching for pathogens, and whenever they recognize the pathogen, they engulf the pathogen and kill it."

The doctoral student in the School of Biological Sciences was explaining how her research with [Dr. Jan-Ulrik Dahl](#) has found that uropathogenic *E. coli* (UPEC), a bacterial pathogen that is the leading cause of urinary tract infections, is significantly more resistant to humans' natural defense mechanisms than *E. coli* in the intestines.

"We all have bleach-producing factories in our bodies that protect us from invading pathogens. But some pathogens like UPEC have evolved a resistance and are able to evade our immune surveillance. Whereas research like mine is shedding light on this resistant mechanism and will eventually enable therapeutic options," Sultana concluded during her speech titled *Survival of the Fittest – A Bleach Defense System in Bacterial Pathogens*.

The energetic and concise presentation of a complex biomedical topic earned Sultana first place in the event, which challenges graduate students to see who can best explain their research to a general audience in 180 seconds or less with the aid of only a single static slide.

"I don't have words right now to express (how I feel), but definitely thank you to everyone," Sultana said. "Thank you to the audience and my advisor (Dr. Dahl). He really guided me throughout this. He was like, 'You need to engage people. We need to let people know this is exciting.' Life sciences is exciting, and we need other people to know it so that the next generation is coming up in biological science research and doing this exciting job."

Sultana beat out 11 fellow graduate students—the largest field in the event's seven-year history—before an enthusiastic crowd, which included Interim President Dr. Aondover Tarhule and Acting Provost Dr. Ani Yazedjian and filled the Normal Theater in Uptown with cheers following each presentation. The top prize earned Sultana \$750 and qualification into the [Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools'](#) Three Minute Thesis contest.



The three winners of the Graduate School's 2023 Three Minute Thesis competition: Nicholas Steffenhagen (second place), Sadia Sultana (first place), and Sanhawich Meateanuwat (People's Choice)

Nicholas Steffenhagen, of the School of Music, placed second and won \$500 for the presentation *Musical Mastery: How Students Become Professionals*. Sanhawich Meateanuwat, of the School of Theatre and Dance, took home the \$750 prize for the People's Choice award as voted on by those attending the competition for a speech titled *From Eurocentric to Global: Flipping Canonical Western Texts to Create Global Conversations*. Check out all of the winners' speeches in this video recap:

Three Minute Thesis at Illinois State University



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The Graduate School organizes the University's [Three Minute Thesis competition](#)—similar academic competitions are held worldwide—as a way to showcase the wide range of research conducted by master's and doctoral students at Illinois State. This year's participants represented the Department of Economics, the Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment, and the School of Biological Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences; the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Criminal Justice Sciences in the College of Applied Science and Technology; the School of Music, the School of Theatre and Dance, and the Wonsook Kim School of Art in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts; and the Department of Special Education and the School of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education.

“(The competition) is important because our students spend a lot of time working on research,” said Dr. Noelle Selkow, director of the Graduate School. “This event is an opportunity for students to explain their research in general language in 3 minutes. Oftentimes that is a skill that’s needed in an interview. Also, we provide this opportunity for them to share their research to the general population and the community around Bloomington-Normal so they know what our students are doing.”



Here are the 2023 Three Minute Thesis participants, *from left*: Holly Filsinger, Wonsook Kim School of Art; Whitney Spencer, Department of Special Education; Kathryn Keithley, Department of Economics; Nicholas Steffenhagen, School of Music; Sanhawich Meateanuwat, School of Theatre and Dance; Savannah Thielbar, Department of Geography, Geology, and the Environment; Rebecca Chicosky, School of Biological Sciences; Thunsinee Muangthong, School of Teaching and Learning; Bothwell Piason, Department of Criminal Justice Sciences; Sadia Sultana, School of Biological Sciences; and Reagen Tibbs, Department of Agriculture.

The participants were judged on communication, delivery, and organization by a three-member panel composed of representatives from three of the University's community partners: Dr. José Leboreiro, vice president of process and chemical research, ADM; Brad Drake, executive vice president and chief financial officer, GROWMARK Inc.; and Dr. John Vozenilek, chief medical officer and vice president for innovation and digital health, OSF Health Care System. R.C. McBride '99, general manager at WGLT radio, served as master of ceremonies.



R.C. McBride, master of ceremonies, presents the 2023 Three Minute Thesis participants as a group following the competition: "We've done several of these now, and this is as good or maybe our best group ever," McBride told the crowd.

View the complete livestream of the event on the [Graduate School's YouTube channel](#).

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