

JEFFPOST

Empowering Postdoctoral Careers

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JPA Executive Board Members

Introducing the members of the 2024-2025 Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA) Executive Board! The JPA is dedicated to delivering excellence in organizing professional and recreational activities for postdocs at Jefferson. Some activities include career panel discussions, the Technical Skills Seminars Series (TSSS), cultural events, and meet and greets with the JPA board. Our commitment remains unwavering as we strive to uplift the postdoctoral community's spirit through a series of events throughout the academic year.



Joice Thomas Gavali, PhD
President

Joice Thomas Gavali earned her doctorate in Pharmacology at the Centro de Investigacion y de Estudios Avanzados (CINVESTAV-IPN) in Mexico. Her graduate studies focused on regulation by reactive oxygen species of store-operated calcium release in adult rat cardiomyocytes preconditioned with diazoxide. She moved to the United States in October 2020. Before joining Thomas Jefferson University, she worked as a postdoctoral scientist at Smidt Heart Institute, Cedar Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in Dr. Jianxin Sun's lab. Her research focuses on understanding the regulation of EC coupling in cardiac hypertrophy, cardiac fibrosis, and pulmonary artery hypertension.



Arun Kumar Jannu, PhD
Senior Vice-President

Arun Kumar Jannu is a native of Warangal, a small city in Telangana, located in the southern part of India. He did his masters at the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) - Hyderabad, and then pursued his PhD in the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology from NIPER - Guwahati in 2021. His studies focused on finding a novel carrier system for the targeted delivery of anticancer drugs. Later in 2021, Arun joined Thomas Jefferson University as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Center for Translational Medicine under the supervision of Dr. Raymond Penn. Arun's research focuses on identifying the cellular and molecular mechanisms by which G protein-coupled receptors regulate significant functions in human airway smooth muscle cells.



Elham Javed, PhD
Co-Vice-President, Communications

Elham Javed is the current Co-VP of Communications of the JPA and the Chair of International Task Force at the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). The objectives of the NPA International Taskforce are to (i) advocate for international postdocs training in the US, (ii) recommend and develop resources, (iii) communicate and network with postdoctoral offices, associations and other non-profit organizations, and (iv) monitor policies that affect international postdocs. Elham is passionate about advocating for the issues associated with international students and postdocs, and believes in raising her peers.



Melissa Molho Medina, PhD
Co-Vice-President, Communications

Melissa Molho is originally from Mexico, where she got her bachelor's degree in Genomic Sciences from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. In 2014, she moved to the United States to do her PhD in the Plant Pathology Department at the University of Kentucky (UK). During her PhD, she studied virus-host interactions in plants, specifically the role of the actin network in viral infection. She was also part of the UK Graduate Student Congress leadership team and an advocate for international students. In 2021, she joined Dr. Ramage's lab as a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Microbiology Department at Thomas Jefferson University. Currently, she is studying virus-host interactions of emerging infectious diseases, focusing on flaviviruses such as Dengue, Zika, West Nile, and Powassan viruses.



Sabrina Ben Hamed, PhD
Vice-President, Career Development

Sabrina Ben Hamed is originally from Djerba, a Mediterranean island in Tunisia, which is classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site known for its authenticity and tolerant community. She earned a bachelor's degree in Cell and Molecular Biology and a master's degree in Genetics and Cell Physiology from the Higher Institute of Biotechnology Monastir, Tunisia. She then earned her PhD in Virology and Immunology at the University of Monastir in Tunisia and the University of Justus Liebig Giessen in Germany; there she worked on novel antiviral approaches against the influenza virus. Sabrina was also an Erasmus PhD Scholar at the University of Padova in Italy. After graduation, she moved to the United States and joined Thomas Jefferson University as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Dr. Schnell's lab, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, where she works on developing next-generation vaccines and therapeutics. Sabrina is a nature lover who enjoys hiking, camping, and scuba diving.



Shamaila Zafar, PharmD, PhD
Vice-President, Social Affairs

Shamaila Zafar is a Neuroscientist and registered Pharmacist from Pakistan. She earned her PhD in Physiology from Government College University of Faisalabad (GCUF) in Faisalabad, Pakistan, in 2021. Her past research focused on exploring alternative therapeutic moieties to instigate and accelerate axonal regeneration and full functional recovery following nerve injuries. As a Postdoctoral Fellow, she is working with Dr. Jay Schneider on understanding the influence of socioeconomic and environmental factors on the developing brain regarding neurocognitive functioning, behavioral changes, and the risk of dementia associated with neurodegeneration in later life. Shamaila has had opportunities to present both as an invited speaker and as a presenter in multiple international and national science meetings supported by travel grants.



Casey Stefanski, PhD
Secretary

Casey received her PhD in Biological Sciences from the University of Notre Dame, where she studied chemotherapy-resistant mechanisms in APC-deficient breast cancer. In September 2022, she joined Dr. Andrew Aplin's lab as a postdoctoral researcher investigating metabolic drivers of therapy resistance through their effect on the tumor immune microenvironment.



Simon Thibault, PhD
Vice-President, Nominations and Elections

Simon Thibault completed his PhD in cognitive neuroscience at the University of Lyon in France. In his dissertation research, he investigated how tool use relates to different cognitive functions, such as language. Specifically, his work has demonstrated that the ability to process complex syntactic structures in language and the ability to use a tool are linked, such that training one ability improves the other ability. Simon Thibault joined Thomas Jefferson University and Moss Rehabilitation Research Institute in 2022 to work under the mentorship of Drs. Aaron L. Wong and Laurel J. Buxbaum. His work aims at understanding the neurocognitive mechanisms supporting deficit in using tools in population suffering from a left hemisphere stroke.



Sophia Lazar, PhD
Treasurer

Sophie Lazar graduated with her PhD in Biomedical Sciences from the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, in December 2022. There she studied the role of AGO2-dependent RNAi on platelet function. As a Postdoctoral Fellow at Thomas Jefferson University, she chose to remain in the field of hematologic research, joining The Cardeza Foundation in the laboratory of Drs. Steve McKenzie and James Michael. Currently, her studies are focused on the role of 12-HETE in thrombocytopenia, using various ex-vivo and in-vivo models in addition to human patients.

National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week

Our Office of Postdoctoral Affairs along with the Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA) did justice to Philadelphia's tagline, City of Brotherly Love, by showering our postdocs with appreciation during National Postdoctoral Appreciation Week (NPAW) with week-long festivities centered around social and career development events.

The week kicked off with a much-needed social, **Donuts & Discussion: Postdoc Coffee Break**. Fueled by the coffee and donuts, our postdocs were ready for Tuesday's **Mentors and Minds: Postdoc-PI Trivia Lunch**. The fun-filled event began with the **2024 Outstanding Postdoc Award**, which was awarded to *Dr. Francesco De Pascali* for his achievements in scientific research, mentoring, and community involvement, along with two honorable mentions: *Drs. Kristen Davis and Melissa Molho*. The lunch

Donuts & Discussion: Postdoc Coffee Break



ended with a brain-teasing trivia game that really tested the postdocs' and faculty's knowledge, since we wanted to make sure that we stimulated their minds along with their taste buds.

Outstanding Postdoc Award Winner



From left: Jeffery Benovic, Elham Javed, Francesco De Pascali (Winner), Joice Gavali and Lisa Kozlowski

Outstanding Postdoc Award Honorable Mentions



From left: Elham Javed and Kristen Davis



From left: Elham Javed and Melissa Molho

After two days de-stressing, it was time to orient everyone toward their future, as Wednesday was the **2024 NPAW Virtual Career Panel**. Our postdocs got an opportunity to get inspired by four remarkable panelists from different scientific career paths. Panelists included *Dr. Zarna Pala*, Assistant Director, Biological Sciences Graduate Program at University of Maryland, College Park; *Dr. Caitlyn Cardetti* (former JPA board member), Associate Editor at BMC Biology and BMC Immunology for Springer Nature; *Dr. Digpal Gour*, Senior Scientist at Mount Sinai, New York; and *Dr. Gaurav Shrivastava*, Research Scientist at National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH. The recorded session is now available to view on demand here:

NPAW Virtual Career Panel



From left: Zarna Pala, Caitlyn Cardetti, Digpal Gour and Gaurav Shrivastava

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7UvOjGio00>. Connect with the panelists through LinkedIn, and reach out to them to learn more about their jobs and professional paths.

The postdocs' mettle was really put to the test on Thursday during the **18th Jefferson Postdoctoral Research Symposium**, which included Research Lightning Presentations, a Research and Early Discoveries Poster Session, and Research In-depth Presentations. After the postdocs' presentations was the riveting **Keynote Address**, "*Immune-mediated mechanisms of tissue adaptation and maladaptation*," by *Dr. Shruti Naik*, Associate Professor, Immunology and Dermatology and Director, Tissue Repair Program, at Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai, New York. The scientifically engaging day ended with the **Awards Ceremony** with winners in the following categories: *Dr. Joice Thomas Gavali* for Research Lightning; *Drs. Arun Kumar Jannu, Emily Wakschal, Lakhikumar Sharma Adhikarimayum, Sarah Newton, and Victor Hugo Sanchez-Vazquez* for Research Posters; *Drs. Deepu Dowarha and Sowmya Shree Gopal* for Early Discoveries Posters; and *Dr. Marilen Federico* for Research In-Depth. Lastly, the 2024 Distinguished Mentor Award Winner, *Dr. Deepak Deshpande*, was commended for his exceptional mentoring and commitment to support the professional development of the postdoctoral fellows both in his laboratory and department.

**18th Postdoctoral Research Symposium
Winners**



From top left: Emily Wakschal, Sarah Newton, Victor Hugo Sanchez-Vazquez, Marilen Fedrico, and Deepu Dowarha. From bottom left: Lisa Kozlowski, Sowmya Shree Gopal, Arun Kumar Jannu, Shruti Naik, Deepak Deshpande, Joice Thomas Gavali, Lakhikumar Adhikumariyum and Zheng Ruan

**18th Postdoctoral Research Symposium
Committee**



From left: Benjamin Cartes Saavedra, Shamaila Zafar, Lisa Kozlowski, Chazmyn Riley, Casey Stefanski, Dawn Berkbigler, and Elham Javed

The eventful 2024 NPAW came to an end on Friday with the **Postdoctoral Editing and Reviewing Team (PSERT): Intro & Training Session** presented by *Pamela Walter, MFA, and Dr. Ankita Srivastava*. You can watch the session on demand here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xbrtITzQI>. If you are interested in improving your reviewing and communication skills, you can reach out Dr. Srivastava to be part of PSERT.

While NPAW may be over, the JPA will continue to engage our postdocs in social events and career development opportunities all year round. Stay tuned for future professional and recreational events and do not miss the opportunity to meet and network with other postdocs in Jefferson and the Philadelphia area. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, reach out to the JPA team at jpa@jefferson.edu.

**Postdoctoral Editing & Reviewing Team:
Intro & Training session**



For more information, please visit the following website: <https://www.jefferson.edu/academics/colleges-schools-institutes/life-sciences/postdoctoral-affairs/postdoctoral-association.html>

By,
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