

MPA 2026

YOUNG INVESTIGATOR
TRAVEL AWARDEES





KATIE BESSETTE, PH.D.

SEMEL INSTITUTE – UCLA

Dr. Katie L. Besette, PhD, is a pediatric neuropsychologist with research interests and extensive experience using an integrated systems approach including neuroimaging and behavioral methods to understand the developmental psychopathology, treatment, and prevention of mood disorder trajectories and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in developmental populations. Dr. Besette earned her Clinical Psychology PhD from the University of Illinois Chicago in 2022 and completed her first postdoctoral co-fellowship in Pediatric Neuropsychology and NIMH T32 in Child Mental Health at UCLA's Semel Institute. She currently works as a postdoctoral scientist in Dr. Tiffany Ho's CANDY lab within UCLA's Psychology Department, where she has enjoyed contributing to an R01 study examining anterior cingulate glutamatergic contributions following psychosocial stressors to suicidal behavior in a unique cohort of unmedicated depressed adolescents using ultra-high field imaging. Dr. Besette is currently working to incorporate molecular neurobiological methods into her integrated scientific approach, which aims to guide early identification of and mechanism-based treatments for high-risk youth before or shortly after suicidality and depression onset, thereby promoting an improved whole-system trajectory for adolescent functioning.



SELENE BONNET-ZAHEDI, M.SC.

AIX-MARSEILLE UNIVERSITY, FRANCE

Sélène Bonnet-Zahedi, M.Sc. is a Ph.D. candidate in Neuroscience at Aix-Marseille University (France), conducting her dissertation work in co-direction with the University of California San Diego (USA). She holds an M.Sc. in Neuroscience and B.Sc. degree in Animal Physiology & Neuroscience from the University of Poitiers. Her research focuses on understanding how addictive substances like nicotine affect brain-wide functional connectivity and behavior. Her current dissertation investigates changes in whole-brain activity across different stages of nicotine dependence using behavioral assays and advanced neuroimaging techniques. Sélène's work integrates behavioral neuroscience, cellular mapping, and computational analysis to uncover novel biomarkers and therapeutic targets for substance use disorders. Sélène is committed to translational neuroscience and aims to pursue a research career focused on uncovering circuit-level mechanisms underlying addiction and relapse vulnerability.





EMILY BROWN, B.S.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Emily Brown is a Ph.D. candidate in the Neuroscience Graduate Program at the University of Washington, where she investigates how PI3K/mTOR signaling pathways regulate synaptic communication and plasticity in neurodevelopmental disorders using molecular, biochemical, and network-level approaches in Dr. Stephen E.P. Smith's lab at Seattle Children's Research Institute. Emily earned her B.S. in Molecular and Cellular Biology from the University of Puget Sound and brings several years of experience from Seattle Children's and NanoString Technologies, where she helped develop multiplexed assays, spatial multiomic tools, and data-driven analytical workflows in collaborative R&D settings. She is passionate about integrating molecular neuroscience with scalable technologies to advance therapeutic discovery and hopes to build a career at the intersection of translational neuroscience, assay development, and quantitative biology.



P.J. MICHAEL DEANS, PH.D.

YALE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Dr. P.J. Michael Deans is a molecular neuroscientist with a keen interest in the genetic and environmental mechanisms underpinning neurodevelopmental and neuropsychiatric disease. He completed his PhD in Neuroscience Research at King's College London in 2018, with a research project focused on the functional characterisation of the schizophrenia-linked gene ZNF804A in human neurons. He currently works as an Associate Research Scientist in the Department of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine, leading functional genomics efforts in the Brennand lab in the context of a wide range of neuropsychiatric disorders. His research is centred around the combination of hiPSC-derived cellular models, high-throughput phenotyping platforms and CRISPR screens to study the joint impacts of genetic variation and environmental exposures on the development of psychiatric disorders.





ARTEMIS IATROU, PH.D.

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL, MCLEAN HOSPITAL

Dr. Artemis Iatrou, PhD, is an Instructor in Psychiatry at McLean Hospital and Harvard Medical School. She received her PhD in Neuroscience in the Netherlands from Maastricht University, where she focused on epigenetic modifications in neuropsychiatric and neurodegenerative disorders. During her postdoctoral training at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center (RADC) in Illinois, she profiled the human leptomeninges at single-cell resolution for the first time, uncovering novel non-neuronal contributors to aging and Alzheimer's disease. In her current role, Dr. Iatrou's research focuses on glial, vascular, and immune cell contributions to the pathophysiology of stress-related disorders, including depression and PTSD. She integrates multiomic approaches, including single-cell and spatial transcriptomics as well as proteomics, in postmortem human brain tissue to map neurovascular and neuro-glial interactions. Her work has contributed to large-scale initiatives such as PsychENCODE and PTSD Brainomics. She ultimately aims to bridge systems biology and clinical neuroscience to identify molecular mechanisms and biomarkers of psychiatric illness.



JULIA KRAFT, M.SC.

CHARITÉ – UNIVERSITÄTSMEDIZIN BERLIN

Julia Kraft received her Bachelor's degree in Biology from Humboldt University Berlin and holds a Master's degree in Neuroscience from the Humboldt Graduate School of Mind and Brain. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Laboratory for Statistical Genetics at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin under the supervision of Prof. Stephan Ripke. Her research focuses on the genetics of complex traits, with a particular emphasis on psychiatric disorders and treatment outcomes, including treatment resistance and lithium response in major depression, as well as clozapine response in schizophrenia. Using statistical genetics and clinical phenotyping, she aims to elucidate the molecular mechanisms underlying psychiatric disorders and drug response, with the goal of informing potential therapeutic strategies.





KEIKO KUNITOKI, M.D., M.P.H.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON

Keiko is a PGY3 psychiatry research track resident at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, where she currently works under the mentorship of Dr. Elliot Hong. She received her MD and PhD from the Tohoku University School of Medicine in Japan. She also holds a Master of Public Health from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Keiko completed a postdoctoral research fellowship and served as an instructor at Massachusetts General Hospital. During this time, she worked under the mentorship of Dr. Joshua Roffman, focusing on neuroimaging and child development. Her research focuses on data-driven development of interventions for negative symptoms in schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD), utilizing neuroimaging to understand their underlying mechanisms.



FLORIANA MILAZZO, M.P.H

ICAHN SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT MOUNT SINAI

Floriana Milazzo, MPH, is a biostatistician and clinical research coordinator at the Women's Mental Health Center at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She received her MPH in Epidemiology in 2022 from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and her BA in English Literature from Barnard College in 2021. Her work in the lab of Dr. Anna Rommel focuses on maternal immune activation, with an emphasis on the prenatal period as a critical neurodevelopmental window. As she applies to medical school, she looks forward to continuing to integrate humanistic, lifecourse, and intergenerational perspectives to improve psychiatric health outcomes as a future clinician-researcher.





TOMOKI NOMAKUCHI, M.D., PH.D.

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA

Tomoki Nomakuchi, MD, PhD, is an Instructor and Attending Physician in the Division of Human Genetics at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). He received his MD and PhD degrees from Stony Brook University School of Medicine in New York, where his graduate research focused on RNA therapeutics for rare neurogenetic diseases. Dr. Nomakuchi subsequently completed the combined Pediatrics-Medical Genetics residency at CHOP. His research program integrates clinical genetics, patient-derived induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), and large-scale biobank analyses to investigate how perturbations in the c-Jun N-terminal kinase (JNK) signaling pathway contribute to neurodevelopmental disorders. Using CRISPR-edited iPSC-derived neurons and organoids, he examines how JNK pathway dysregulation alters neuronal differentiation, maturation and survival. He also uses genomic and phenomic data from large biobanks including the Penn Medicine Biobank, to gain translational insights into genotype-phenotype relationships and therapeutic targets. Ultimately, Dr. Nomakuchi's goal is to define the molecular underpinnings of neurodevelopmental syndromes and develop precision therapies for affected children and families.



AXEL ROSADO, M.SC.

YALE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

Axel Rosado is a Fulbright Ph.D. candidate in Neuroscience at Yale University, working under the supervision of Dr. Alfred Kaye. He investigates how neuromodulators shape neural circuit dynamics and behavioral plasticity, using approaches such as in vivo fiber photometry, optogenetics, and two-photon imaging. His current research focuses on the interaction between norepinephrine and serotonergic systems in the modulation of learning, memory, and the behavioral effects of psychoactive compounds. Originally from Brazil, Axel earned his M.Sc. in Neuroscience (2022) and B.Sc. in Biology (2019) from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, where he studied stress resilience, neuroinflammation, and antidepressant mechanisms using rodent models. He has received multiple awards, including a Fulbright Scholarship, travel awards from the Max Planck Florida Institute and the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society, and recognition for scientific presentations in Brazil. Broadly, Axel's research bridges molecular, circuit, and behavioral neuroscience to understand how neuromodulatory systems regulate emotional learning and stress-related behaviors, with implications for mood and stress-related disorders.





JOHN LEE SOTO-VARGAS, B.S.

YALE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

John Lee Soto-Vargas is a Ph.D. candidate in the Interdepartmental Neuroscience Program at Yale University School of Medicine, where he also pursues a Certificate in College Teaching Preparation. He holds a bachelor's degree in industrial biotechnology from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, with a minor in Project Management and a certification in Biochemistry. His current research in Dr. Matthew Girgenti's lab focuses on elucidating the dynamics of alternative splicing in postmortem human brains, particularly investigating transcriptomic differences across the cortico-amygdala axis in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder (MDD).



FUMIHIKO UENO, M.D., PH.D.

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Fumihiko Ueno, MD, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Ottawa. Clinically, he works in the Psychosis Stream at The Ottawa Hospital, providing care for individuals with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. His research focuses on the neurobiology of treatment-resistant schizophrenia, aiming to identify imaging-based biomarkers of treatment response through multimodal neuroimaging, including 1H-MRS, neuromelanin-sensitive MRI, and structural imaging. Dr. Ueno earned his MD and PhD in Medicine from Keio University in Tokyo, where he also completed psychiatry residency training. He subsequently served as a staff psychiatrist at Kurihama Medical and Addiction Center, Japan's largest addiction treatment facility, gaining extensive clinical experience in alcohol and behavioral addictions. In 2019, he moved to Toronto for a postdoctoral fellowship in neuroimaging at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, followed by a clinical fellowship in Geriatric Psychiatry at the University of Toronto. His research has advanced understanding of glutamatergic, GABAergic, and dopaminergic abnormalities in schizophrenia and their links to treatment response. He has authored over 30 peer-reviewed publications and received early-career awards from organizations including SIRS, SOBP, and ASCP. His work is supported by a Young Investigator Grant from the BBRF.





JENS VAN DALFSEN, PH.D.

UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER GRONINGEN

Jens van Dalfsen is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Psychiatry of the University Medical Center Groningen, within the research group “Psychedelic Treatment and Mechanisms” led by Prof. Dr. Robert A. Schoevers. Building on academic training in biological psychology (BSc), neuropsychology (MSc), and psychopharmacology (PhD), his research focuses on the neurobiological mechanisms underlying major depressive disorder and how these mechanisms can be reversed by both traditional and novel antidepressant agents. He has a particular interest in understanding how central processes in the brain are reflected in peripheral blood, with the aim of identifying biomarkers that can advance prevention and treatment from a pathophysiological perspective. In his current role, he has established an independent research line that includes clinical research aimed at identifying and validating blood-based biomarkers of antidepressant response and individual depressive symptoms, as well as preclinical research investigating the neurobiological effects of antidepressant agents in both blood and brain tissue. In addition, he holds a coordinating role in the Netherlands Network for Difficult-To-Treat Depression (NDTD), a multicenter observational cohort study evaluating the effectiveness of pharmacological treatments. He also serves as a junior board member in the Netherlands Study of Depression and Anxiety (NESDA), a multicenter naturalistic cohort study that integrates biological and psychological paradigms within an epidemiological framework.

