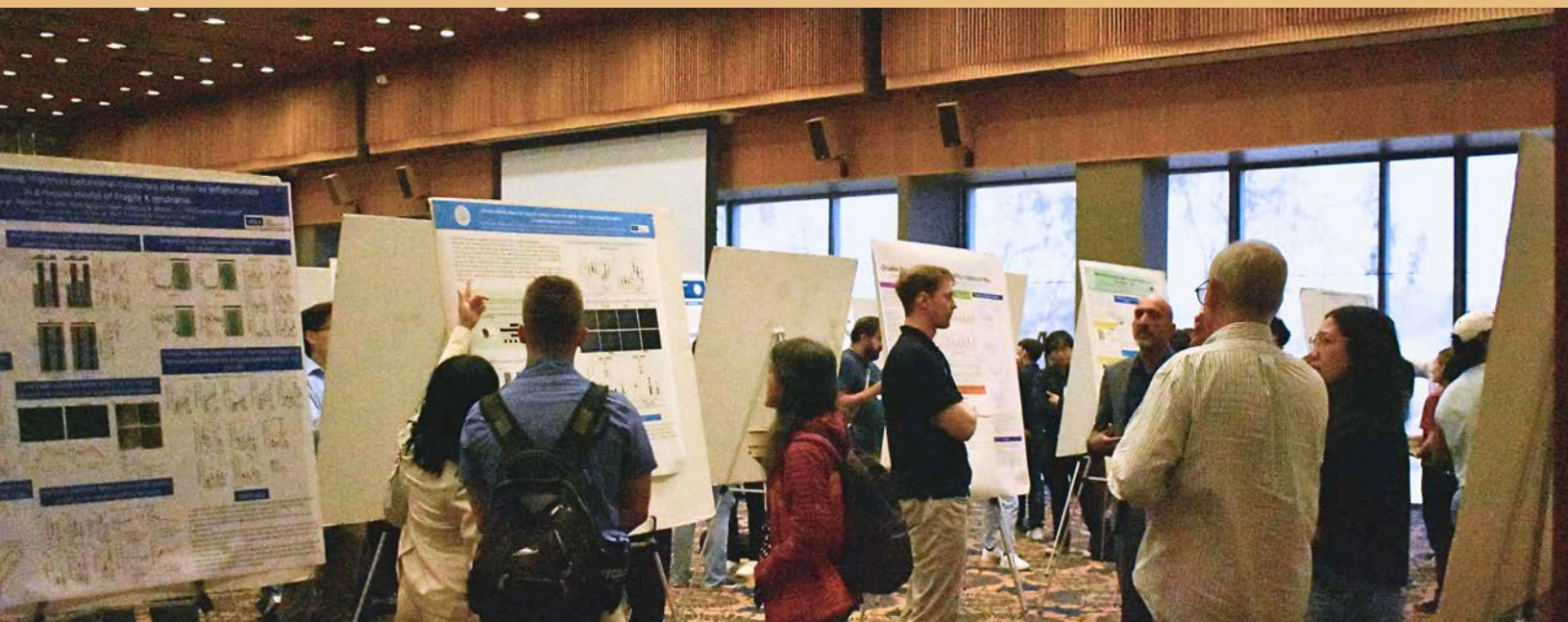


UCLA BRI NEWSLETTER



This Issue at a Glance

Research Roundup	2
Student Stars	4
Schweizer Professional Development Award	5
Undergrad Showcase	7
BRI Staff Spotlight	9
New BRI Member Short talks	10
Science in the Spotlight	11
Distinguished Recognitions	13
Sleep & Performance Symposium	15
Community Connections	16
A Note from Our Director	18
Funding Alerts	18
BRI Resources & Opportunities	19
Poetic Inspiration	20

On the Cover:
A glimpse into the vibrant exchange of ideas at the Integrative Center for Sleep and Performance's Spring Symposium, where engaging discussions explored the science of sleep and its impact on brain health.

LATEST DISCOVERIES



The BRI community continues to advance neuroscience through impactful research that advances our understanding of the brain—its intricate connectivity and the mechanisms behind neurological conditions such as autism. The studies highlighted here showcase the breadth, depth, and collaborative spirit that define our work. We hope these discoveries spark new ideas and inspire meaningful collaborations across UCLA.



The Mystery of Autism

How Autism Alters Social Perception

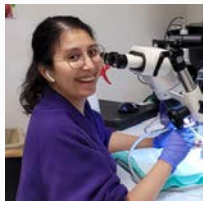
Touch helps us navigate the social world—but in autism, this sense may be altered. A new study led by Dr. Trishala Chari and Dr. Portera-Cailliau, found that mice with a mutation linked to autism couldn't distinguish between social and non-social touch, unlike typical mice. Their work uncovered differences in brain circuit activity that may explain why social touch can feel aversive, shedding light on mechanisms behind social withdrawal in autism.

[Read the article](#)

Early Brain Differences in Autism

A recent study led by Dr. Lauren Wagner and Dr. Mirella Dapretto shed light on early neural differences in infants at high familial likelihood for autism. They examined language processing in 9-month-old infants, revealing that those at high likelihood exhibited attenuated responses to speech and lacked neural discrimination between native and non-native languages, suggesting atypical language development in the autistic brain. Lauren has received a postdoctoral training grant, T15 Fellowship, to continue her research as a postdoctoral scholar at UCLA.

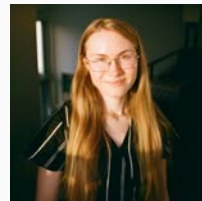
[Read the article](#)



Trishala Chari, Ph.D.
Former Ph.D. Student,
NSIDP, UCLA



**Carlos Portera-Cailliau,
M.D., Ph.D.**
Professor,
Neurology & Neurobiology,
UCLA



Lauren Wagner, Ph.D.
Former Ph.D. Student,
NSIDP, UCLA



Mirella Dapretto, Ph.D.
Professor
Psychiatry and Biobehavioral
Sciences, UCLA



Behind Neural Networks and Brain Activity

Mapping Brain Network Organization and Body-Brain Interaction

A series of new studies led by Dr. Lucina Uddin and collaborators is advancing our understanding of how brain networks communicate—both at rest and in action. Their research group introduced a new toolbox for evaluating brain network correspondence that enables cross-method comparison of neuroimaging results ([read more](#)). Their new research reveals that the global fMRI signal, often characterized as respiratory-driven fluctuations, is tightly coupled with autonomic physiology and arousal, suggesting it carries meaningful information about body-brain coordination ([read more](#)).

Complementing these technical advances, a new NIH-funded project will track how bilingualism and executive function shape brain organization in children with autism.

[Read more](#)



Lucina Uddin, Ph.D.
Professor,
Psychiatry, UCLA

How Unseen Movements Shape Brain Activity

A new study led by Chaoqun Yin (NSIDP), Max Melin (MSTP) and Gabriel Rojas-Bose (NSIDP) in Dr. Anne Churchland's group (accepted at *Neuron*) reveals that spontaneous, task-unrelated movements significantly influence neural activity during disengaged states in decision-making tasks. While average neural responses appear similar between engaged and disengaged states, during states of disengagement, animal movement patterns change, driving up neural variability. This study highlights the importance of considering internal engagement states when interpreting brain activity.

[Read the article](#)



Music and The Brain

How Music Modulates Mood and Memory

A new study led by Dr. Stephanie Leal (accepted at *Journal of Neuroscience*) explores how music can modulate mood and memory, offering potential as a therapeutic tool for individuals with disorders like Alzheimer's or depression. The study examined how emotionally arousing music played after learning influences subsequent memory, using a mnemonic discrimination task that probes hippocampal processes. Results showed that more drastic changes in emotional arousal led to better general memory but worse detailed memory, while moderate arousal improved detailed memory but reduced general recognition, highlighting the need for personalized music-based interventions.

[Read the article](#)



Stephanie Leal, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
Integrative Biology & Physiology
UCLA



Brain Response to Pain and Adversity

Discrimination affects the Social Brain

Discrimination can deeply affect how we experience the world and interact socially. A new study led by Dr. Xiaobei Zhang and Dr. Arpana Church reveals how discrimination impacts the brain's social networks and contributes to psychological symptoms. Their findings reveal neural changes in social and emotional brain regions that may explain how discrimination contributes to mental health challenges, highlighting the social brain's vulnerability.

[Read the article](#)



Xiaobei Zhang, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Scholar,
UCLA



Arpana Church, Ph.D.
Associate Professor,
David Geffen School of
Medicine, UCLA

Chronic Pain Rewires the Brain's Response to Opioids

Pain shapes how we pursue rewards—but not all rewards are equal. A new study led by Dr. Catherine Cahill found that mice with chronic pain were less motivated to work for opioids like remifentanyl, while their drive for food remained intact. The team traced this shift to reduced dopamine release in brain reward circuits, revealing how chronic pain may alter drug-seeking behavior by dampening the brain's response to opioids. [Read the article](#)



Catherine Cahill, Ph.D.
Professor,
Psychiatry & Biobehavioral
Sciences, UCLA

Our breakthroughs in the lab are only half the story—turning discovery into impact also demands strong outreach and advocacy. See what Dr. Cahill has to say about why this work matters:

“Advancing our understanding of the brain—the very essence of who we are—requires not just brilliant minds in the lab, but the generous hearts of those who believe in the power of discovery. Outreach and philanthropy are the bridges that connect curiosity to cure, and knowledge to hope. In a time of growing uncertainty around federal research funding, we cannot afford to remain silent. The future of discovery—and our ability to train the next generation of scientists—depends on how effectively we communicate the value of our work.

Outreach is not optional; it is essential. As researchers at public institutions, we have a responsibility to engage, to advocate, and to make the case for why science matters—why public dollars invested in basic research are investments in human progress. If we do not tell this story, no one will tell it for us. Now more than ever, the scientific community must rise to this challenge—together.”

-Dr. Catherine Cahill

Professor, Psychiatry & Biobehavioral
Sciences, UCLA



Motor planning and execution

Brain encoding of locomotor preparation and performance

A new study led by Deepak Singla and Dr. Sotiris Masmanidis, reveals how the brain encodes movement-related information. This paper highlights a new neural coding scheme for locomotion preparation and performance in cortical and striatal circuits.

[Read the article](#)



Deepak Singla
Ph.D. student
Bioengineering, UCLA



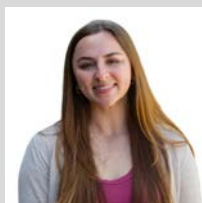
STUDENT HIGHLIGHT

SCAN FOR DIGITAL COPY OF THIS PAGE TO ACCESS LINKS



Fellowship Awards

Recipient of NRSA F31



Julia Adams
Ph.D. Student, NSIDP
Advisor: Baljit Khakh
UCLA

“The F31 will give me 3 years of funding to study how a subpopulation of astrocytes in the nucleus accumbens contribute to accumbens-related behavior and substance use disorder.”

Recipient of NSF GRFP



Abigail Yu
Ph.D. Student, NSIDP
Advisor: Laura DeNardo
UCLA

“I am a second year NSIDP graduate student in the DeNardo lab studying the circuit and cellular properties of memory engrams in the developing brain. I am very honored and grateful to receive this award.”

Honorable Mention NSF GRFP



Michael Apostol
Ph.D. Student, NSIDP
Advisor: Nicole Petersen
UCLA

The 33rd Samuel Eiduson Student Lecturers

The Samuel Eiduson Student Lectureship was initiated in 1993 to recognize extraordinarily meritorious contributions by a neuroscience graduate student. This lectureship was named in honor of Dr. Samuel Eiduson for his many years of dedication to the Neuroscience Program and the Brain Research Institute. [Read more](#)

“Behavioral Timescale Synaptic Plasticity in the Hippocampus Creates Non-Spatial Representations During Learning and Is Modulated by Entorhinal Inputs”



Conor Dorian, Ph.D.
Postdoctoral Scholar, UC Berkeley
Former NSIDP Graduate Student,
Laboratory of Dr. Peyman Golshani
Department of Neurology
David Geffen School of Medicine
at UCLA

“Hardwired by Hardship: A Stress-Sensitive vmPFC-BLA Circuit Fuels Adolescent Avoidance Following Early Adversity”



Caitlin Goodpaster
Ph.D. Student, NSIDP
Laboratory of Dr. Laura DeNardo
Department of Physiology
David Geffen School of Medicine
at UCLA



SCHWEIZER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

We're proud to introduce this year's recipients of the inaugural Schweizer Professional Development Award, honoring Dr. Felix E. Schweizer, Professor in Neurobiology and the Director of Neuroscience PhD program. This award supports BRI graduate students and postdocs as they attend conferences, workshops, and specialized trainings—fueling their growth, collaboration, and excellence in neuroscience. [Read more about the award here.](#)

Below, meet our scholars and see where their Schweizer Awards will take them this year!



Carolyn Amir
Ph.D. Student
Society of Biological Psychiatry
Annual Meeting



Megan Chappell
Ph.D. Student
XVIIth European Meeting on
Glial Cells in Health and Disease



Hamid Chorsi
Ph.D. Student
European Conferences on
Biomedical Optics



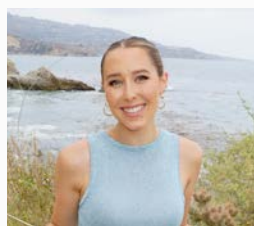
Leonardo Dionisio
Ph.D. Student
Gordon Research Conference
on Commonalities and
Differences to Decipher the
Pathogenic Mechanisms and
Develop Effective Therapies



Caitlin Goodpaster
Ph.D. Student
Gordon Research Conference
on Amygdala Function in
Emotion, Cognition and
Disease



Maxwell Melin,
M.D-PhD Student
Oxford University Cortex Club



Katelyn Mooney
Ph.D. Student
Training in Advanced Statistical
Methods in Neuroimaging and
Genetics Course



Kaia Sargent
Ph.D. Student
International Summer Institute
on Network Physiology



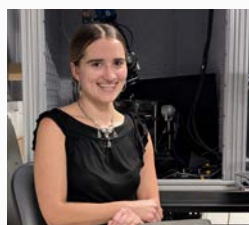
Lisa Shen
Ph.D. Student
Social and Affective
Neuroscience Society Annual
Meeting



Amy Than
Ph.D. Student
International Society for Autism
Research Annual Meeting



Lauren Wagner
Former Ph.D. student
Current Post-Doctoral Scholar
2025 Flux Congress Meeting



Lillian Wilkins
Ph.D. Student
Vision Sciences Society Annual
Meeting

SCHWEIZER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARDS



Michelle Wu
MD-PhD Student
Gordon Research Conference
on Inhibition



Bar Yosef
Ph.D. Student
Timing Research Forum



Lewis Yu
Ph.D. Student
Gordon Research Conference
on Neuroimmune
Communication in Health and
Disease



Soraya Dunn, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
Spring Hippocampal Research
Conference



Sammy Alhassen, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
Gordon Research Conference
on Circuit and Cellular
Mechanisms



Zachary Zeidler, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
Pavlovian Society Annual
Meeting



Fanny Etienne, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
XVIIth European Meeting on
Glial Cells in Health and Disease



Akila Kadambi, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
28th Annual Meeting of the
Association for Scientific Study
of Consciousness



Vidya Saravanapandian, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
European Sleep Research
Society



Kathia Ramirez-Amenta, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
Gordon Research Conference
on Amygdala Function in
Emotion, Cognition and
Disease



Ceazar Nave, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
Cold Spring Harbor Drosophila
Neurobiology Biennial
Conference



Saray Soldado-Magraner, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Scholar
TReND-CaMinA: Computational
Neuroscience and Machine
Learning in Africa



UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

SCAN FOR DIGITAL COPY OF THIS PAGE TO ACCESS LINKS



UCLA Undergraduate Neuroscience Program Showcases Diverse Training, Research, and Outreach Opportunities

Scheibel Scholars Shindig

On May 2, incoming and current 2024–25 Scheibel Scholars gathered for our Annual Scheibel Shindig. Over lunch, students mingled with uNSIDP faculty—Dr. Rafael Romero, Dr. Stephanie White, and Dr. Kate Wassum—presented their capstone research, and voted on the best abstract. This networking event builds community and showcases the depth of our scholars’ work.

[Learn more about the Scheibel Scholarship.](#)



2024–25 Scheibel Scholars

Rachel Fox · Ellie Hilgert · Sai Anish Kuppili · Matthew Li · Gabrielle Malte · Syon Mansur · Mauricio Maravilla · Sanjana Somepalli · Gabby Vilchez · Mathilda Buhlfreiin Von Und Zu Gut · Stafford Williams · Angela Yang

2025–26 Scheibel Scholars

Angela Yang · Daniel Lee · Jay Bhatnagar · Haley Willem · Yixin Wu · Daniel Leal · Irina Kryukov · Emily Lee · Dowson Yang · Olivia Fong · Daniel Jeon · Anjana Shriram · Raquel Schlichting · Elena Kong



26th Annual Neuroscience Poster Day

Ninety-one neuroscience majors and minors—all completing the independent research capstone (NS 199A/199B & NS 198A/198B)—presented their work at our 26th Annual Neuroscience Poster Day. Guided by faculty mentors across 30 departments, students showcased diverse projects and insights. The broader UCLA neuroscience community joined to learn and celebrate.

Nine students earned *Best Poster* awards for their outstanding contributions: Russel Ahmed, Karrin Evans, Mathilda von Guttenberg, Ashley Hiti, Grace Kretzer, Jess Liu, Jessica Nguyen, Aidan Smith, Alex Yeghikian

Commencement Ceremonies

On Saturday, June 14th, over 200 students celebrated the completion of their neuroscience major or minor at the Neuroscience IDP Commencement in UCLA Ackerman Grand Ballroom. Congratulations to all graduates on this tremendous achievement!

“This was the largest class of graduating students—244 participated in the event.”
-Aftin Whitten
Student Affairs Officer, uNSIDP



COMMUNICATING SCIENCE TO THE PUBLIC

Neuroscience Outreach Day

On May 21, 2025, sixteen neuroscience majors from DOPA and Project Brainstorm showcased their outreach projects to the BRI community. Their hands-on demos and engaging presentations highlighted everything from synaptic signaling to the neurobiology of addiction—bringing brain science alive for both peers and public.

Project Brainstorm is a two-quarter outreach and research project offered to departmental juniors and seniors, in which students have an opportunity to develop teaching lessons on neuroscience that are presented to local K-12 students.



DOPA Team is also a two-quarter outreach and research project, where students first take the course: NEUROSC C177 Drugs of Abuse: Translational Neurobiology. DOPA Team students are given the opportunity to choose a drug category and translate the academic knowledge acquired in C177 into an age-appropriate and interactive presentation and hands-on activity for high school students.

One group of DOPA Team students and one pair of Project Brainstorm students were selected for their outstanding achievement in neuroscience outreach: Lynette Andreasyan · Natalia Isabella Bucio · Sophia Dominguez · Haven Roper · Riya Sharma · Emma Yang

A huge thank you to the BRI for their support in providing the poster day and outreach day prizes. Students selected received a \$75 Amazon gift card, courtesy of the BRI.

A New Undergraduate Science Communication Course Brain, the Final Frontier: Communicating the Secrets of Our Inner Cosmos

Led by Dr. Stephanie White and Dr. Vidya Saravanapandian, this engaging 10-week Fiat Lux Course welcomed UCLA undergraduates from across disciplines to hone their skills in translating complex neuroscience into compelling public narratives. Through interactive discussions, lectures on science communication, policy, and outreach, and hands-on workshops, students acquired the tools needed to share brain science with any audience.

"We gained invaluable insights into science policy and communication—skills that feel especially timely given today's political divide."

— Undergraduate Student Participant



Students tackled topics ranging from the neurobiology of friendship and sleep-deprivation among college students to screen addiction and destigmatizing schizophrenia—crafting original projects that showcase the power of clear, compelling science communication. Stay tuned for their featured work!

"You could tell both instructors truly cared about each of us. Their pride in the seminar & desire for us to enjoy it made the experience feel supportive—they both seem very well respected in their field"

— Undergraduate Student Participant

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR BRI STAFF

In this edition, we shine a light on two more of our exceptional BRI staff—master organizers, problem-solvers, and community builders—whose dedication powers everything we do.

SABRINA SHANGE AMANI

*Administrative Director
UCLA-CDU Dana Center, BRI*



Sabrina Amani serves as the Administrative Director of the UCLA-Charles R. Drew University for Science and Medicine (CDU) Dana Center for Neuroscience and Society which is housed in the BRI. Her team works to develop a practice of community partnered neuroscience, influencing education, research, and systems change through centering the knowledge of local communities in neuroscience research.

Outside of her work, Sabrina's life is filled with making and enjoying art, as much dancing and travel as possible with her husband and sharing food and wine with friends who are like family.

Gayane Hovhannisyan serves as an Assistant Graduate Advisor and Assistant Program Coordinator for the Interdepartmental PhD Program in Neuroscience (NSIDP). Gayane assists with logistics, coordinating social events, and educational activities such as recruitment, orientation, graduation, conferences and assessments. She offers personalized advising with an emphasis on career development and connects graduate students with resources available at UCLA to support their needs. Gayane provides course support for faculty members (we have over 150 faculty members in the gNSIDP). She communicates with prospective students regularly through the departmental email, in addition to hosting weekly office hours during the Fall quarter to address inquiries from potential candidates. Gayane is passionate about fostering a positive and collaborative atmosphere and plays an active role in supporting gNSIDP, BRI, uNSIDP, and GPB.

In her leisure time Gayane volunteers by serving as the Communications Liaison for the Administrative Management Group (AMG). Gayane enjoys listening to music, attending live concerts, and has a passion for photography capturing landscapes, portraits, still life, pets and nature.

GAYANE HOVHANNISYAN

*Assistant Graduate Advisor
Assistant Program Coordinator, BRI*





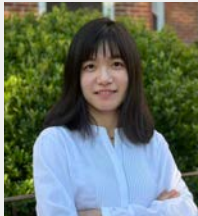
NEW BRI MEMBERS: SPRING SHORT TALKS

On June 10, 2025, the BRI welcomed some of our newest members from the past year at the special *Joint Seminars in Neuroscience: New Member Short Talks*. Each speaker delivered a concise, 15-minute overview of their cutting-edge research—followed by lunch and conversation on the NRB patio. Here's a look at their featured presentations:

Sleep in the Cortico-Cerebellar Loop: A Novel Target for Stroke Rehabilitation

Tanuj Gulati, Ph.D.

Assistant Adjunct Professor, Department of Medicine (DGSOM)
Assistant Professor, Center for Neural Science & Medicine (Cedars-Sinai)



Neural Specialization Development in Phonology, Semantics, and Syntax

Jin Wang, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, SOEIS

Developmental Transitions in Sleep Times & Synapse Formation

Van M. Savage, Ph.D.

Professor, Computational Medicine & Ecology/Evolutionary Biology



Cortical Dynamics & Facial Expressions as Depression Predictors

Austin A. Coley, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of Neurobiology (DGSOM)

Feathers & Feelings: Cross-Generational Birding Sanctuaries

Sung-Jae Lee, Ph.D.

Professor-in-Residence, Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences (DGSOM)



Want to learn more about the incredible scientists who've joined us? Check out the full [BRI members list!](#)

Are you interested in becoming a BRI member?





MEMBERS IN THE MEDIA

Royal Society Recognition

Dr. Baljit Khakh—Eleanor I. Leslie Chair in Neuroscience and Professor of Physiology & Neurobiology at UCLA—was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 2025, one of the highest honors in science. Prof. Khakh's pioneering work has transformed our understanding of astrocytes—the star-shaped glial cells once thought to play only support roles—by revealing how they bidirectionally signal with neurons and regulate neural circuits and behavior. His laboratory's discoveries into astrocyte diversity and function are opening new therapeutic avenues for brain disorders. Please join us in congratulating Prof. Khakh on this remarkable achievement!

[Read the announcement](#)



BALJIT S. KHAKH, PH.D.



CARRIE BEARDEN, PH.D.

Teens, Cannabis, & Psychosis

Dr. Carrie Bearden, professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences and BRI member, dives into emerging evidence that adolescent cannabis use can increase psychosis risk. In her *Scientific American* article, she outlines how teenage brains are uniquely vulnerable—and why early intervention and education are key. Dr. Bearden also discussed these findings on NPR's *Cool Science Radio*, bringing critical insights to a broad audience.

[Read the article](#) | [Listen to the podcast](#)

Micron-Scale Brain Mapping

CBS Los Angeles recently showcased UCLA's pioneering one-micron-resolution 3D mouse brain atlas, highlighting the work of Dr. Hongwei Dong, BRI member and Professor of Neurobiology. In the segment, Dr. Dong walks viewers through how this ultra-high-resolution mapping—created with international collaborators—will deepen our grasp of neural circuitry, enhance the precision of anatomical research, and fast-track new treatments for neurological disorders.

[Watch the full story on CBS News](#)



HONGWEI DONG, PH.D.



MEMBERS IN THE MEDIA



**LINDA LIAU, M.D.,
PH.D., MBA**

Alumni Gift Powers Stroke Rescue & Tumor Research

UCLA alumni Heidi and Larry Canarelli have donated \$10 million to expand UCLA’s Stroke Rescue Program and advance oligodendroglioma research. Their gift will fund a third mobile stroke unit—an ambulance outfitted for immediate on-site diagnosis and treatment—broadening rapid access to life-saving therapies. It also underwrites new studies into oligodendroglioma under the leadership of Dr. Linda Liu, BRI member and W. Eugene Stern Chair in Neurosurgery.



Heidi & Larry Canarelli

This transformative gift honors Dr. Liu’s dedication to patient care and scientific innovation. [Read the press release](#)

Emerging Leader in Health & Medicine

Dr. Enrico Castillo, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the David Geffen School of Medicine and BRI member, has been named an Emerging Leader in Health and Medicine Scholar by the National Academy of Medicine. His work blends social medicine and health-services research to bolster public systems’ capacity to address the intertwined health and social needs of individuals with serious mental illness—particularly those who are incarcerated or experiencing homelessness.

[Read the press release](#)



ENRICO CASTILLO, M.D.

The Brain on Menopause — Featured on Oprah



**RHONDA
VOSKUHL, M.D.**

ABC Los Angeles (KABC-LA) recently aired “An Oprah Winfrey Special: The Menopause Revolution,” featuring BRI member Dr. Rhonda Voskuhl of UCLA’s Comprehensive Menopause Care Program. Dr. Voskuhl discussed how estrogen decline during menopause can trigger region-specific brain changes—leading to “brain fog,” word-finding pauses, and dips in confidence—and stressed that early intervention may safeguard long-term cognitive health. Watch the full segment on ABC News!



[Listen to the broadcast](#)

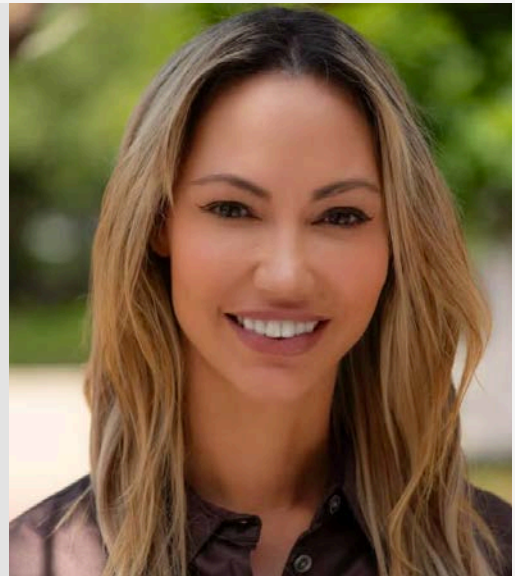
MEMBERS IN THE MEDIA



Stress Check: Why Breaks Matter for Your Brain—and How to Reset

In recognition of National Stress Awareness Month, CBS Los Angeles interviewed BRI member Dr. April Thames, who discussed how to identify the early warning signs of stress—such as irritability, fatigue, and trouble concentrating—and why giving yourself permission to take breaks is crucial. Dr. Thames emphasized that recognizing stress and anxiety early helps prevent their harmful effects on physical, mental, and emotional health—from chronic inflammation to impaired cognition. She shared practical tips for self-care, from brief “micro-breaks” during the workday to scheduling fun, restorative activities. Her insights underscore that managing stress isn’t a luxury—it’s essential brain maintenance.

[Watch the full segment on CBS News!](#)



APRIL THAMES, PH.D.

UCLA EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

Congratulations to Jenny Lee, Graduate Advisor for UCLA’s Neuroscience Ph.D. Program, on receiving the UCLA Academic Management Group’s (AMG) Excellence in Leadership (EXCEL) Award!



JENNY LEE

Graduate Advisor, UCLA NSIDP

The AMG Excellence Award honors staff and administrators who demonstrate outstanding leadership, innovation, and commitment to creating a positive work and learning environment. Recipients are selected based on their ability to drive program improvements, foster collaboration, and champion the success of students and colleagues.

[Read more about the UCLA AMG Awards!](#)

“Jenny’s leadership is the heart of the NSIDP. She creates a sense of belonging, anticipates every challenge before it arises, and fiercely advocates for students’ success. Her unwavering support has shaped not just my graduate experience, but the entire culture of our program.”

- Katelyn Mooney
NSIDP Graduate student

UCLA DISTINGUISHED TEACHING AWARDS



The UCLA Distinguished Teaching Awards celebrate teaching excellence and educational innovation, helping to elevate the practice of teaching. The awards recognize deserving instructors for their creativity in the classroom, dedication to helping students thrive, and commitment to continually enhancing the educational experience. Six Senate Faculty and six non-Senate Faculty were awarded the Distinguished Teaching Award this year, three of them are BRI members! [Read more here.](#)



IDAN A. BLANK, PH.D.

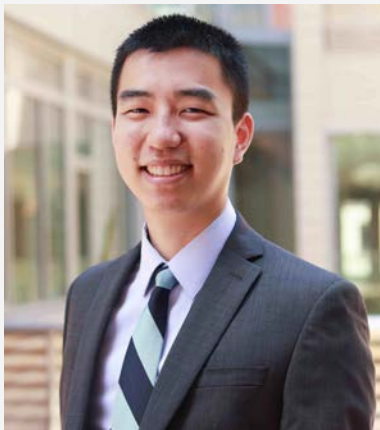
Dr. Idan A. Blank is an Assistant Professor of Psychology, with a courtesy appointment in the department of Linguistics.

Dr. Blank teaches the following courses:

Introduction to Cognitive Science: Minds in Brains and Machines (PSYCH 85)

Language as a Cognitive Science (PSYCH 124A)

Psycholinguistics (PSYCH 263)



JONATHAN KAO, PH.D.

Dr. Jonathan Kao is an Associate Professor in Electrical and Computer Engineering at UCLA.

At UCLA, Dr. Kao has taught:

Signals & Systems (ECE 102)

Undergraduate Advanced Honors Seminar (ECE 189)

Neural Networks and Deep Learning (ECE C147/C247; formerly ECE 239AS)

Neural Networks and Deep Learning 2 (ECE 239AS)

Neural Signal Processing & Machine Learning (ECE C143A/C243A; formerly ECE 239AS)



RAFAEL ROMERO, PH.D.

Dr. Rafael Romero is the Associate Director of Program Development and Student Engagement for the undergraduate Neuroscience Interdepartmental Program at UCLA, and the Assistant Director of Outreach for the BRI.

At UCLA, Dr. Romero has taught:

Drug Abuse and Society: Conveying Concepts to High School Students (NS 192C)

Honors Seminar: Neuroscience (NS 191H)

Introductory Neuroscience: The Art and Science of Studying the Brain (NS 20)

Biomedical Research: Concepts and Strategies (BR 5HA)

Integrative Center for Sleep and Performance (ICSP) Inaugural Spring Symposium



On Monday, June 2, 2025, the inaugural ICSP Spring Symposium brought together researchers, trainees, and sleep science enthusiasts for a full day of exploring the science of sleep and its impact on human performance.

The day began with a warm welcome and opening remarks, followed by a keynote from Dr. Lucia Peixoto (Washington State University), titled "Sleep, Transcription, and Chromatin Regulation in Neurotypical Development and Autism." A dynamic datablitz session showcased emerging sleep research from trainees across multiple labs.

During lunch, attendees connected informally before transitioning to an afternoon poster session featuring nearly 30 innovative research projects. The symposium concluded with a compelling keynote by Dr. Ying-Hui Fu (UCSF), "Understanding Sleep through Behavior and Genetics: Insights into Regulation and Function," which sparked lively discussion around sleep quality and its broader implications.

"Our inaugural Spring Symposium was a tremendous success, bringing together a dynamic community of researchers, clinicians, educators, and trainees for an inspiring day of keynote talks, posters, and a fun Data Blitz event. This marks a strong beginning for the Integrative Center for Sleep and Performance at UCLA, setting the stage for continued collaboration and innovation in sleep and performance research."

- Dr. Ketema Paul
 Director of ICSP, Professor, Integrative Biology & Physiology, UCLA





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Interaxon

In the Spring quarter, Interaxon, Undergraduate Neuroscience Outreach Club at UCLA, reached a large number of students from Title I schools and campus visitors through 22 engaging events, including the Bruin Experiment Science Fair, NUS Networking Event, and Explore Tech LA.

Their biggest and signature event—the InterAxon Annual Science Fair—welcomed Title I students for a day of hands-on neuroscience: presentations, brain dissections, and showcases by UCLA campus organizations. Guest speaker Dr. Vidya Saravanapandian energized the crowd with an inspiring talk on the science and impact of sleep.



The fair not only ignited a passion for science but also offered a glimpse of college life and STEM careers. said Harshi, who is the co-president of the team.

“Overall, it was a very successful quarter continuing the impact we have as InterAxon.”

-Harshi Kellampalli
Co-President, InterAxon



Ameya Balaji Shines at National Brain Bee

As the winner of this year’s Los Angeles Brain Bee—co-hosted by UCLA and USC—high school student Ameya Balaji earned the right to represent the region and placed 10th among 12 national finalists (from a field of 48 contestants) at the National Brain Bee Competition. The championship was held at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School on May 3, 2025.

“Competing at the USA Brain Bee was inspiring—I loved the lectures on neuro research and felt honored to represent LA. It’s motivated me to keep pursuing neuroscience.”

“The LA Brain Bee’s format—written test then Jeopardy—perfectly prepared me. I recognized similar anatomy questions and felt confident tackling the new scientific reasoning round.”

-Ameya Balaji
Winner of 2025 LA Brain Bee

[Read more about the National Brain Bee](#)



Pint of Science 2025: UCLA science goes out to the people!

On three evenings in mid-May interested crowds coalesced at different neighborhood bars in West Los Angeles to marvel at the great unresolved questions of science and get a glimpse into the work of local researchers. The international science outreach festival Pint of Science was held once again in LA and attracted over 200 curious minds from mixed background. The guiding principle behind Pint of Science is that for science to be accessible and engaging to everyone, it has to come out of the auditorium. And so, between May 19th and 21st, 13 UCLA graduate students, postdocs and faculty went out to local bars to share and discuss their work on solar storms, evolutionary genetics, everyday decision-making or the future of urban mobility with the LA community in a cozy ambiance.



Event Organizers: Michael Ryan, Tanya Gupta, Kathia Ramirez, Lukas Oesch (LA coordinator), Fanny Etienne (US coordinator), Jaicy Vallpurackal, not pictured: Denisse Paredes, Linfan Gu

"Sharing science with a diverse audience is not only fun, it also helps me reflect on my role as a scientist and find deeper meaning in the work I do."

-Linfan Gu

Ph.D. Student, Bioengineering, UCLA

The events were highly engaging and interactive, and well received by all the members in the audience, with multiple of them requesting to hold Pint of Science more frequently. Stay tuned!



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Hello friends!

Big changes to science funding, including the freeze of Federal grant dollars to UCLA, compel us to turn to one another to learn, adapt, and survive. Our Town Halls, Affinity Group and Integrative meetings, seminar series, workshops, and outreach activities allow us to share best practices and experiences, mentor one another, and build relationships that lead to new studies, novel collaborations, unforeseen breakthroughs, and lifelong friendships.

We will not back down from any of it. Our commitment to advancing great neuroscience remains steadfast. Now is the time for true ingenuity and grit. We are redoubling our efforts to strengthen our community and engage with society, so that together we will continue to stand strong.

The UC system's Washington DC representatives, counterparts from other universities and states, and the Society for Neuroscience are all working hard on Capitol Hill to make sure there is sustained biomedical research funding. They appear to be making headway, so keep contacting your Senator and encouraging your family and friends in other states and districts to do the same. Also, keep spreading the news about what you are doing and the good your research is doing for society so that others can realize where knowledge comes from and the value of our investment in science.

I hope you find inspiration in these pages and discover new ways to participate—whether times are good or rough.

Three things you can do right now:

1. Contribute to the BRI's Shared Community [Equipment Core](#) or [Library](#)
2. Work with your [Affinity Group](#) or [Integrative Center](#) to create your Science Profile and Project Wish List—so others can get excited about your work and choose to contribute
3. Explore the Funding Alerts sidebar to stay on top of upcoming grant deadlines—and if you spot opportunities that could benefit others, please send them our way!

No lab left behind. Together we stand, survive, and yes—even thrive.

—Dr. Gina Poe
Director, UCLA Brain Research Institute

Funding Alerts

Aug 7, 2025

The Greenwall Foundation: Faculty Scholars Program

Career development award to enable early-career faculty members to carry out innovative bioethics research.

Award supports 50 percent of a Scholar's salary plus benefits for 3 years

[Application Link](#)

Aug 8, 2025

California Health Care Foundation (CHCF)

CHCF is seeking to identify a grantee or grantees to update the [Mental Health in California](#) report, which provides an overview of mental health statewide: mental illness prevalence, suicide rates, supply and use of treatment providers, spending, quality and outcome measures, and mental health services in the criminal justice system.

[Application Link](#)

Aug 31, 2025

Elsa U. Pardee Foundation

Early-stage funding to support the establishment of capabilities of new cancer researchers or new cancer approaches by established cancer researchers.

\$75 K–\$200 K range for 1 yr

[Application Link](#)

Sep 2, 2025

Burroughs Wellcome Fund: Career Awards at the Scientific Interface

\$560 K over 5 yrs for early career development of researchers who have transitioned from graduate work in the physical/mathematical/computational sciences or engineering into postdoctoral work in the biological sciences.

[Application Link](#)

Sept 3, 2025

Kaiser Permanente Gun Violence Research

Up to \$300 K over 2 yrs for research on healthcare approaches to addressing community gun violence or firearm suicide

[Application Link](#)

Sept 4, 2025

Simons SFARI Data Analysis RFA

Up to \$300 K over 2 yrs for autism research that leverage existing publicly accessible datasets

[Application Link](#)

Oct 7, 2025

Burroughs Wellcome CAMS

\$700 K over 5 yrs for early-career physician-scientists

[Application Link](#)

Do you have questions or need guidance, please contact [Qjaquice Brantley](mailto:Qjaquice.Brantley@mednet.ucla.edu), Director of Development: qbrantley@mednet.ucla.edu

ADDITIONAL BRI RESOURCES & WAYS TO GET INVOLVED!

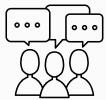
SCAN TO ACCESS ALL
LINKS ON THIS PAGE



BRI's shared equipment library—
borrow, lend, & discover tools
you didn't know you needed!
[BRI equipment-library](#)



Explore BRI's Cutting-Edge
Core Facilities
[BRI core-facilities](#)



Looking for a scientific forum to
exchange ideas?
[Explore BRI Affinity groups](#) and
[Join our Integrative Centers](#)



Elevate your research.
Discover our training grants!
[BRI Training Grants](#)



Inspired to be a Neuroscience
Ambassador?
[Join the BRI outreach squad!](#)



We value your feedback:
Share your thoughts on this
Newsletter!
[Feedback link](#)



Want to feature your research
or other success stories in the
next newsletter?
[Submit stories for Newsletter](#)



Want to support our mission?
[Give now!](#)

Access all BRI newsletters [here](#).

THE BRI NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vidya Saravanapandian
(Postdoctoral Scholar, Neurology, BRI)

Content Coordinator and Editor

Linfan Gu (Bioengineering Ph.D. student, BRI)

Design and Style Editor

Pin Hsuan (Jessica) Yeh
(Undergraduate Neuroscience major, BRI)

Content Reviewer

Priyanka Sigar
(Neuroscience Ph.D. student, BRI)

Content and Announcements Support

Joseph M. Quintero
(Programs and Operations Manager, BRI)
Priyanka Samra
(Financial Services Analyst, BRI)
Aaron Michner
(Financial Services Analyst, BRI)

Faculty Review Board

Dr. Gina Poe (Director of BRI)
Dr. Felix Schweizer (Director of Graduate Education,
Chair of Faculty Executive Committee, BRI)
Dr. Kate Wassum
(Associate Director of Research, BRI)



Inspired by Oliver Sacks

From The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (1985)

“For Dr. P., there was no ‘visual’ world.
He could speak, he could read,
he could recognize voices, and he could sing.
But what he lost was not just a faculty,
but a world.”

“It was not that he could no longer see faces, or trees, or houses—
it was that these no longer held meaning for him.
He saw them, but he could not perceive them.
The world had become featureless, abstract,
and strangely ungraspable.”

“Yet he was not lost.
He had constructed for himself
a new world of order and meaning—through music.
He lived in music.
It was his anchoring force, the rhythm and structure
that allowed him to navigate life.”

“His world, no less real for being different,
reminded me that people are not the sum of their deficits.
We must not look only at what is gone,
but at what remains—and more,
at what is created in its place.”