

FELLOWS ANNUAL UPDATE



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Keystone Symposia Fellows Program is a key initiative in our Program Enrichment portfolio that complements the organization's scientific conferences. This special programming is designed to build professional skillsets, showcase innovative scientific viewpoints and perspectives, and support next-gen biomedical workforce development.

The Fellows Program is a unique, cutting-edge, life science fellowship for postdoctoral and early-career scientists in the U.S. who are engaged in independent biological or biomedical sciences research. This one-year program is designed around key programmatic elements to enhance confidence, leadership skills, networking opportunities, and visibility of Fellows within the biological and biomedical research community. It positions Fellows to successfully pursue leadership and decision-making roles.

Fellows participate in monthly virtual career-development sessions where they receive guidance in key areas tailored to address early-career challenges and optimize their success at this critical career stage. Fellows are also paired with a distinguished member of the Keystone Symposia Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) for one-on-one mentorship, personalized guidance and feedback tailored to each Fellow's individual goals and career aspirations.

In addition, Fellows participate in twice-yearly meetings with the SAB where they engage with roughly 100 scientific thought-leaders to discuss the frontiers of biomedical research. At these meetings, Fellows work with SAB members to curate a conference portfolio that represents state-of-the-art research in the biomedical sciences.

Since its inception in 2009, the Fellows Program has enhanced the professional and career development of more than 100 early-career investigators. Graduates of the Keystone Symposia Fellows Program become members of a unique cadre of scientists who are well-connected, knowledgeable and capable members of the life sciences community, and active proponents of inclusive excellence in life science research.



DID YOU KNOW

Fellows' social media handles can be found in the Fellows Directory. Be sure to follow these rising stars!
<https://keysym.us/FellowsDirectory>



2024 FELLOWS UPDATE

Keystone Symposia welcomed 14 rising scientists to the Keystone Fellows Class of 2024, the first class to extend support to include both early career and postdoc researchers. Fellows represent a range of scientific research interests, including Bioengineering, Biochemistry, Structural Biology, Cell Biology, Neurobiology, Developmental & Regenerative Biology, Metabolic Diseases, Microbiome and Cancer.

In January 2024, incoming Fellows participated in their first Keystone Symposia SAB meeting in Boulder, Colorado. Fellows' activities kicked off with a pre-SAB Professional Development Workshop facilitated by internationally acclaimed expert on inclusive leadership, Dr. Brenda Allen (former Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Colorado Denver and the Anschutz Medical Campus). Dr. Allen led an interactive session designed to empower Fellows to make the most of their experience, with a particular focus on leveraging Fellowship connections and resources in service to their professional goals. The session served as a springboard for day two, when Fellows were immersed in SAB committee discussions with academic and industry field leaders to determine the most promising emerging research areas for Keystone Symposia's 2026 conference portfolio.

Fellows participated in the virtual SAB meeting that took place June 6-8, 2024. This meeting provided SAB members and Fellows with the opportunity to review the 2026 conference programs and provide feedback to improve meeting scopes, organization and speaker rosters. Fellows were highly engaged in these discussions, including recommending scientists in their networks to be considered as speakers. Such recommendations are invaluable in helping to grow Keystone Symposia's database of experts, ensuring conferences showcase rising stars and groundbreaking scientific approaches, viewpoints and perspectives.

In January 2025, the Class of 2024 returned to Colorado for their second in-person SAB meeting experience, where they also had the opportunity to connect with incoming 2025 Fellows. In all, a total of 23 Fellows from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts gathered in Keystone, Colorado. Both classes participated in a pre-SAB Breakout Session designed to introduce the Fellows to one another and facilitate crowdsourcing of strategies for making the most of the SAB experience. Incoming Fellows shared what they hoped to gain, while graduating Fellows imparted lessons learned from their first SAB meeting that informed how they planned to engage a second time around.

On day two of the January 2025 meeting, Fellows from both classes were embedded in intensive SAB committee discussions to peer review conference concepts for Keystone Symposia's 2027 conference season to help shape program guidance according to the organization's highest standards for quality. In reviewing concepts, Fellows learned the key factors that distinguish Keystone Symposia's internationally acclaimed conferences, including: scientific quality and scope; inclusion of innovative scientific viewpoints and approaches; a balance of academic and industry perspectives; and the integration of basic, translational and clinical science. To conclude the day, graduating 2024 Fellows presented their research to the SAB and Board of Directors to cap off their Fellows Program experience and receive feedback from this esteemed group. Early-career Fellows presented Lightning Talks while Postdoc Keystone Symposia Fellows gave poster presentations.



"The program was truly excellent – I really enjoyed working with everyone involved. One of the most valuable aspects for me was the opportunity to reflect on my own mentoring and leadership style. It helped me realize areas where I could continue to grow, which has inspired me to take proactive steps toward improvement."

Antentor Hinton, Jr., PhD
Assistant Professor Vanderbilt University
Class of 2024



<https://keysym.us/DirectoryAJHinton>



**Click to learn more about the
Fellows Program**

<https://keysym.us/fellows>

LIGHTNING TALKS:

Oleta Johnson, PhD

Can Chemistry Be Used to Direct Cellular Traffic?

LaQuita Jones, DO

Kinase-Independent Mechanism of Resistance to FLT3 Inhibitors in Relapsed/Refractory AML

Catera Wilder, PhD

Systems Biology of Innate Immunity

Yvon Woappi, PhD

Functional Genomics for Wound Regeneration at Organ-Scale

POSTER PRESENTATIONS:

Biafra Ahanonu, PhD

Long-term Spinal Imaging and Pain Neuroaxis Proteomic Analysis in Chronic Pain States

Christian Cazares, PhD

Leveraging the Neural Power Spectrum to Identify Translational Biomarkers and Understand Circuit Dysfunction in Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Abigael Cheruiyot, PhD

Mechanism of mRNA Translation in Pancreatic Beta Cells

Naima Dahir, PhD

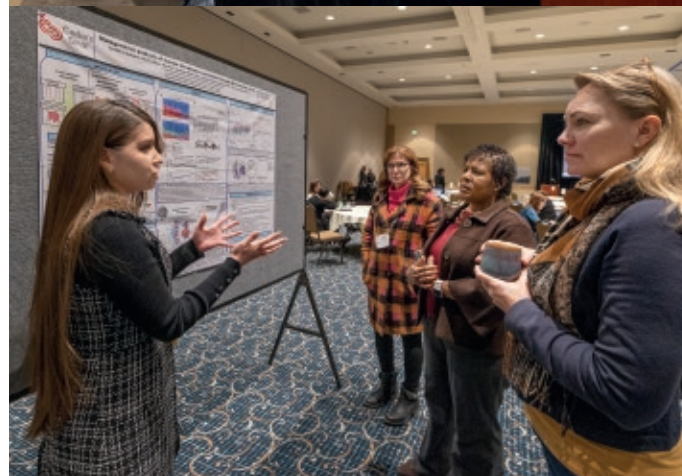
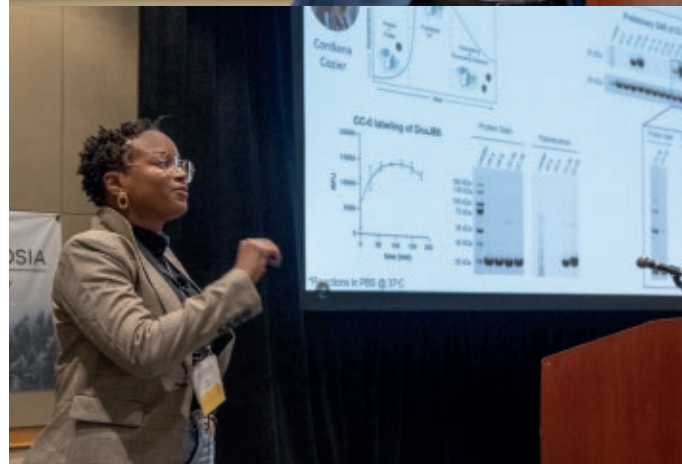
Melanocortinergic Activation in the Parabrachial Nuclei Modulates Ingestive Behaviors

Nicholas Martinez, PhD

Substrate Recruitment by Protein Phosphatase 6 (PP6)

Cynthia Rodriguez, PhD

Metagenomic Analysis of Human Microbiome Succession through the First Year of Life

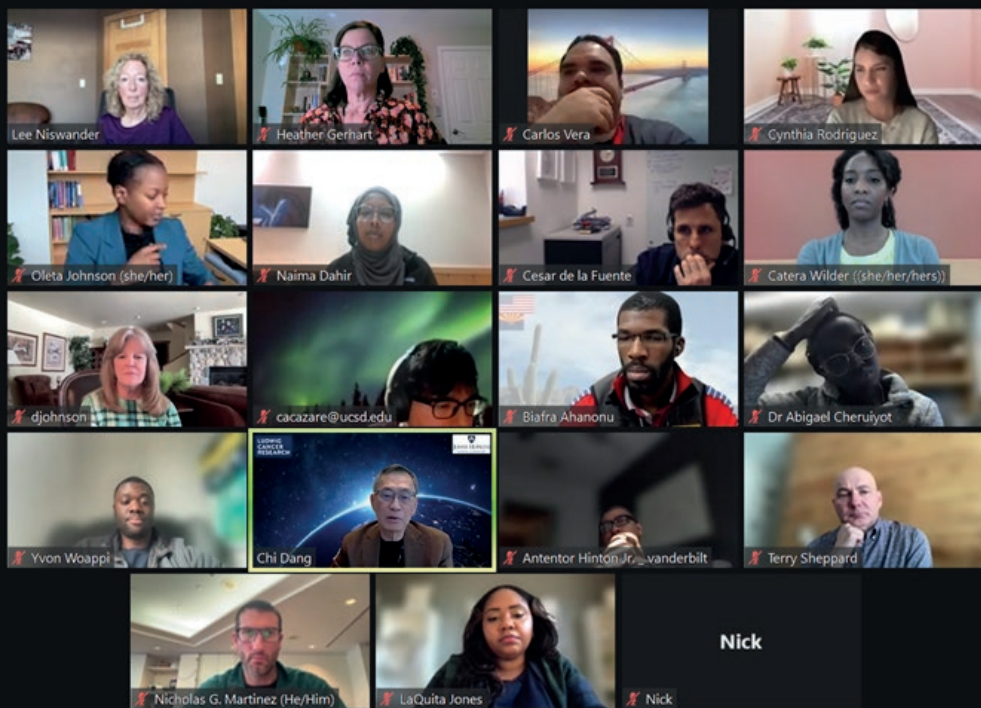


"Getting to know other Keystone Fellows demonstrated to me different ways of achieving success, which is inspiring as I enter the academic job search. ...I was paired with a career development and scientific mentor that I needed in this particular stage of my career. I am on the faculty job market and I have received a lot of valuable advice in this area, including an invitation for a seminar! My mentor has instilled tremendous confidence in my ability to secure a faculty job of my choice."

Abigael Cheruiyot, PhD | Postdoctoral Fellow | Joslin Diabetes Center | Class of 2024



<https://keysym.us/DirectoryAbbyCheruiyot>



FELLOWS AMONG KEYSTONE SYMPOSIA LEADERSHIP

Fellow alumni remain integral members of the Keystone Symposia community, serving as conference speakers and organizers, as mentors to current Fellows, and as strategic advisors on the organization's Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Board, thereby further advancing the mission to promote inclusive excellence in the life sciences.

Seven Keystone Symposia Fellow alumni have served in leadership roles on Keystone Symposia's Board of Directors (BoD), Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and Health Equity Working Group (HEWG) since the program's inception.

SAMIRA ASGARI

Class of 2023

- HEWG (2024-present)

CHERIÉ BUTTS

Class of 2009

- BoD & SAB (2017-present)

KIZZMEKIA CORBETT

Class of 2018

- SAB (2022-present)

VINICIO DE JESUS PEREZ

Class of 2024

- HEWG (ad hoc member)

STACEY FINLEY

Class of 2016

- SAB (2023-present)

DE'BROSKI HERBERT

Class of 2009

- BoD (2020-2021)
- SAB (2015-2021)

MANU PLATT

Class of 2016

- SAB (2022-present)

FELLOWS FRIDAYS

As part of their fellowship experience, Fellows attend monthly virtual meetings – “Fellows Fridays” – that are designed to build community among Fellows, elevate confidence and knowledge, and provide resources and mentorship to support the Fellows' professional development.

Fellows Friday expert panels include members of our Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Board, as well as alumni Fellows and other key thought-leaders in the Keystone Symposia community, who are invited to share their expertise and career advice with the Fellows. With the expansion of the Program to postdocs, Fellows Fridays now include a 4-part series specifically designed to guide the Postdoc KS Fellows towards their transition from a trainee to an independent researcher, whether in academia or industry. Trainees receive guidance on career options, the job application process, interviewing, negotiating and preparing for their next position.

Additional topics covered with the 2024 class included:

- Grant Strategies
- Building a Positive and Productive Lab Culture
- NIH All of Us Research Program with Chief Medical and Scientific Officer Dr. Geoff Ginsburg
- Tenure Strategies
- Publication Strategies & Demystifying the Editorial Process
- Cultivating Successful Scientific Collaborations
- Overcoming Imposter Syndrome
- Promoting Your Science & Gaining Visibility as an Independent PI
- Mentorship

In addition to supporting Fellows' professional development, Fellows Fridays also provide critical networking experiences. These sessions connect Fellows with SAB members beyond their one-on-one mentors, providing additional expertise and perspectives from those who may not have been able to serve as formal mentors but have an interest in supporting the program and its participants. In addition, these informal meetings throughout the year lower the barriers for Fellows to engage with these thought-leaders at the in-person SAB meetings.

Fellows Fridays also connect current Fellows with alumni as subject matter experts and potential peer mentors and collaborators. In 2024, the following alumni served as Fellows Friday panelists to mentor this next generation of Fellows:

- Esperanza Arias-Perez (Fellows class of 2023)
- Breann Brown (2020)
- Michael Johnson (2017)
- Uri Manor (2023)
- Thomas Martínez (2022)
- Erika Moore (2022)
- Sonya Neal (2023)
- Evan Scott (2018)
- Christie Towers (2022)
- Ray Whitson (2020)



"The fellowship has given me access to an extraordinary network of colleagues and mentors, allowing for invaluable idea exchange. This opportunity to collaborate and cross-pollinate ideas with remarkable individuals is already influencing the science we do in my lab."

César de la Fuente, PhD
Presidential Assistant Professor
University of Pennsylvania
Class of 2024



<https://keysym.us/DirectoryDeLaFuente>



FELLOWS ATTEST TO PROGRAM VALUE

Fellows' feedback and recommendations continually improve programming. In a post-program survey, the class of 2024 reported the following key benefits from their experience:

- Increased professional competence
- Enhanced confidence in pursuing career goals
- Expanded professional networks
- Access to a new professional support system

According to the survey, the Program has inspired Fellows to be better mentors to others. All plan to recommend the Fellows Program to eligible scientists in their networks and are likewise interested in supporting future Fellows as peer mentors and Fellows Friday panelists.

Thank you to the Keystone Symposia board members and community experts who volunteered as Fellows Friday panelists in 2024:

Morrie Birnbaum

Chief Scientific Officer, Pfizer Internal Medicine

Richard DiMarchi

Distinguished Professor of Chemistry and Gill Chair in Biomolecular Sciences, Indiana University

Stacey Finley

Gordon S. Marshall Early Career Chair & Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Biological Sciences, University of Southern California / 2016 Fellow

Steve Mao

Editor-in-chief, Cancer Cell

E. Dale Abel

William S. Adams Distinguished Professor of Medicine Chair and Executive Medical Director, Department of Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine and UCLA Health

Chi Dang

Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Cancer Medicine, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Jessica Dunne

US Medical, Autoimmune Diabetes Medical Director, Sanofi

Aron Jaffe

Senior Vice President, Curie.Bio

Laura Michael

Associate Vice President, Eli Lilly and Company

Anne Murphy

Vice President, Scientific Affairs, Cytokinetics, Inc.

Manu Platt

Director, Biomedical Engineering Technology Acceleration, National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, NIH / 2012 Fellow

Carla Rothlin

Dorys McConnell Duberg Professor of Immunobiology and Professor of Pharmacology, Yale School of Medicine

Lori Sussel

Director of Basic and Translational Research, Barbara Davis Center, Sissel and Findlow Family Chair, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Joseph C. Wu

Director, Stanford Cardiovascular Institute & Simon H. Stertzer, MD, Professor of Medicine and Radiology

Lee Niswander

Professor & Chair, University of Colorado Boulder

Chris Rhodes

Chief Scientist, AstraZeneca

Boris Striepen

Mark Whittier and Lila Griswold Allam Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine

Stephanie Watts

Professor, Michigan State University

These dedicated members of Keystone Symposia's Scientific Advisory Board and the Keystone Fellows Community have contributed their time and expertise to mentoring and advising these Fellows – Thank you!





AT THE PODIUM

The 2024 and 2025 conference seasons featured many Keystone Symposia Fellows and alumni, who shared their scientific expertise as invited speakers:

MANU PLATT Class of 2009

Unraveling Vascular Layers to Understand Human Disease Speaker & Career Roundtable Panelist.

Talk Title: "Vascular Remodeling by Proteases in Sickle Cell Disease"

DIGNA VELEZ EDWARDS Class of 2013

Regenerative Biology of the Female Reproductive System Speaker.

Talk Title: "Leveraging Clinical Biobanks to Identify Novel Treatments for Uterine Fibroids and Shared Genetic Architecture with Blood Pressure"

VINICIO DE JESUS PEREZ Class of 2013

Fibrosis: Inflammation, Drivers, and Therapeutic Resolution Speaker.

Talk Title: "Targeting Hyaluronan in Pulmonary Hypertension Associated with Lung Fibrosis: Insights from the SATURN Study"

STACEY FINLEY Class of 2016

Tumor Metabolism: Environmental Influences and Therapeutic Vulnerabilities Speaker.

Talk Title: "Systems Biology Modeling of Metabolic Interactions in the Tumor Microenvironment" & Panelist for "Advancing Understanding in Tumor Metabolism: Bridging Research and Patient Care"

AVERY POSEY, JR. Class of 2016

Emerging Cellular Therapies Speaker

Talk Title: "Novel Targets for CAR-T Cell-Based Therapy"

Cancer Immunotherapy: Beyond Immune Checkpoint Blockade and Overcoming Resistance Speaker

Talk Title: "Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-Cells and Carbohydrate-Based Cancer Targets"



MICHAEL BURTON Class of 2018

Neuroimmune Interactions: Nervous System and Immune Cell Heterogeneity in Health and Disease

Speaker. Talk Title: "Neuroimmune Regulation of Pain and Depression"

KIZZMEKIA CORBETT-HELAIRE

Class of 2018

Positive Strand RNA Viruses: Interdisciplinary Advances in Virology, Pathogenesis, Immunology, and Technology Development Lead Organizer.

RACHEL ROTH FLACH Class of 2020/2021

Unraveling Vascular Layers to Understand Human Disease Lead Organizer & Career Roundtable Panelist.

THOMAS F. MARTÍNEZ Class of 2022

Microproteins: from Discovery to Applications Lead Organizer & Speaker.

Talk Title: "Investigation of Oncogenic KRAS-regulated Microproteins in Pancreatic Ductal Adenocarcinoma"

XAVIER REVELO Class of 2022

MASH Pathogenesis and Therapeutic Approaches Speaker & Chair.

Talk Title: "Immune Mechanisms in MASH"

QUINTON SMITH Class of 2022

Stem Cells and Regeneration Speaker & Career Roundtable Panelist. Talk Title: "Regenerative Vascular Tissue Engineering"

Organoids: Engineering Innovative Approaches for Basic and Translational Insight Lead Organizer, Speaker.

Talk Title: "Microfluidic Models of Vascularization" & Panel Chair for "Advances in Single Cell Biology and Organoids for Precision Medicine"

CHRISTINA TOWERS Class of 2022

Autophagy and Disease Speaker & Chair. Talk Title: "Metabolic Adaptations to Autophagy Inhibition in Cancer"

Organelle Membrane Contact Sites in Health and Disease Speaker. Talk Title: "Metabolic Adaptations to Autophagy Inhibition in Cancer"

Autophagosomes and Endolysosomes: From Fundamental Mechanisms to Disease Implications Lead Organizer & Speaker. Talk Title: "Targeting Autophagy in Cancer"

CATERA WILDER Class of 2024

Systems and Engineering Immunology: Advancing Immunological Insights in Health and Disease Workshop Presenter. Talk Title: "Dynamic Control of Signaling Networks: Uncovering Specificity in Interferon-Mediated Cellular Responses Through Coordinated Positive Feedback Loops"

YVON WOAPPI Class of 2024

Fibrosis: Inflammation, Drivers, and Therapeutic Resolution Workshop Presenter & Career Roundtable Panelist. Talk Title: "Delineating the Complexity of Mammalian Skin Wound Healing at Organ-Scale"



In total, six Fellows served as a Career Roundtable panelists in the 2024/2025 conference seasons, including **Henry Ruiz** (Class of 2023) and **Ramon Whitson** (Class of 2020), as well as those listed above. These individuals played a vital role in these events by supporting trainees and exposing them to near-peer role models with unique perspectives on career development and the breadth of scientific opportunities available.

STAY TUNED!

Keystone Symposia Fellows will be stepping up to the podium at several conferences in the 2026 conference season! Of note, **Stacey Finley** (Class of 2016) is on the organizing team for the upcoming conference on *From Systems Immunology to Immunoengineering*, which will be held January 11-14, 2026 in Vancouver, BC. In addition, the SAB recently approved a proposal by **César de la Fuente** (Class of 2024) who will lead the 2027 conference on *Progress in Antibiotic Discovery and Development*.

Seven Fellow alumni are also among the invited speakers in the coming season:

LaQuita Jones - *Spotlight on the Cancer Cell: Intrinsic Properties and Vulnerabilities for Therapeutics*

Kizzmekia Corbett-Helaire - *Predicting and Responding to Emerging Viral Infections*

Tamia Harris-Tryon - joint meetings on *Microbiome Metabolism and Metabolites and Human Microbiome*

Samira Musah - *Stem Cell Models in Embryology and Chronic Kidney Disease: Emerging Mechanisms, Consequences and Targeted Treatments*

Sonya Neal - *The Ubiquitin Family in Biology and Disease*

Rachel Roth Flach - joint meetings on *Obesity Therapeutics: Unlocking Benefits and Minimizing Side Effects and Cardiometabolism in Health and Disease*

Catera Wilder - *From Systems Immunology to Immunoengineering*



FELLOWS IN THE NEWS

Keystone Symposia consistently works to amplify Fellows' accomplishments to extend their reach and impacts. Check out the hashtag [#KSFellows](#) for social media highlights! Below we feature Fellows in the News with a sampling of recent achievements by the 2024 Fellows.

BIAFRA AHANONU

has accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine at Stanford. He also recently published in Nature Methods on his research to [enable long-term optical imaging of the spinal cord in awake animals](#).

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryAhanonu>

CHRISTIAN CAZARES

received the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Postdoctoral Diversity Enrichment Program Award (2024) and recently published a commentary in Nature Neuroscience to share [lessons learned from the Colors of the Brain summer research program](#) he established at UC San Diego.

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryCazares>



FELLOWS
SPOTLIGHT

NAIMA DAHIR

has accepted an Assistant Professor position at the University of Texas Southwestern in the Department of Internal Medicine. She joins UT Southwestern in January 2026.

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryDahir>

NICHOLAS FROST

whose clinical and research interests focus on understanding mechanisms that contribute to disorders of cognition, recently had a paper accepted for publication in Nature Communications on "[Context-Invariant socioemotional encoding by prefrontal ensembles](#)."

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryFrost>

CÉSAR DE LA FUENTE

received the 2025 [Fleming Prize](#) for his pioneering application of artificial intelligence to antibiotic discovery; in the same year, he was honored with the [ASM Award for Early Career Basic Research](#), named by [Newsweek en Español](#) América as one of the "25 Visionaries Shaping the Future of Artificial Intelligence," and awarded the [2024 Miklos Bodanszky Award](#) for outstanding advances in peptide science.

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryDeLaFuente>



FELLOWS
SPOTLIGHT

ANTENTOR HINTON, JR.

was named the [2023 ASCB Mentoring Keynote](#), in recognition of his significant contributions to mentoring next-gen scientists. He also recently published an Aging Cell April 2025 issue [cover research article](#) that integrates 3D electron microscopy, human muscle analysis, and mitochondrial biology. Additional high-impact review articles from 2024 synthesize current understanding of [mitochondrial shape regulation](#) in disease contexts and [mitochondrial dysfunction](#) in human heart failure.

<https://keysym.us/DirectoryAJHinton>

OLETA JOHNSON

became Affiliate Faculty at the Broad Institute and was among four rising scientists invited to speak at the [Black in Biophysics](#) Symposium at the Biophysical Society Meeting that showcases exciting new developments in biophysics and celebrates inclusive excellence in the biophysics community.
<https://keysym.us/DirectoryJohnson>



LAQUITA JONES

was recently promoted to Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. In addition, she was selected for membership to the [Society for Pediatric Research](#) for her research as a pediatric physician-scientist.
<https://keysym.us/DirectoryJones>



CYNTHIA RODRIGUEZ

took advantage of her Fellowship benefit to attend the Keystone Symposium on [Human Microbiome: Diversity, Selection and Adaptation](#) (February 2025). Her poster entitled "Metagenomic analysis of human microbiome succession through the first year of life" attracted a great deal of attention. Cynthia's PI, Suzanne Devkota, and five other lab members were also at the conference to support her!
<https://keysym.us/DirectoryRodriguez>

THE FELLOWS CLASS OF 2024 WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY SUPPORT FROM OUR PROGRAM PARTNERS, INCLUDING:

The Burroughs Wellcome Fund, Cytokinetics, Inc., Eli Lilly and Company, The Endocrine Society, and individual gifts from Cherié Butts, Aris Economides, Stephanie Watts, Bei Zhang and Mark Erion.

We welcome additional sponsors!

Join us in the mission to foster career development in the life-science community!

Contact DLSP@keystonesymposia.org



<https://keysym.us/FellowsDonate>



NEWS & SPOTLIGHT LINKS:



In order of appearance above

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Keystone Symposia serves as a catalyst for the advancement of life-science research and medicine by convening the world's leading researchers, clinicians, global health experts and other biomedical players to discuss and solve today's greatest biomedical challenges. This mission is made possible by financial support from organizations and individuals throughout the global life science community. These generous gifts and grants fund many aspects of our meeting programs and scholarship opportunities, as a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit organization.



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