

## Diversity | Inclusion | Community | Excellence

bioscience.ucla.edu

Fall 2016

### Graduate Programs in Bioscience

Graduate Programs in Bioscience is a consortium of 10 Home Areas and their affiliated Ph.D. programs, organized to provide the best possible research training and professional development for graduate students pursuing Ph.D.s in the life and biomedical sciences. Students are offered the flexibility to pursue their interests across the wide range of bioscience fields. At the same time, they benefit from individually tailored education in smaller training communities, defined by today's research themes, not traditional departments.

### Home Areas

- Biochemistry, Biophysics & Structural Biology
- Bioinformatics
- Cell & Developmental Biology
- Gene Regulation
- Genetics & Genomics
- Immunity, Microbes & Molecular Pathogenesis
- Molecular, Cellular & Integrative Physiology
- Molecular Pharmacology
- Neuroscience
- Physics & Biology in Medicine

### 2016 Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship Recipients

UCLA Graduate Programs in Bioscience is committed to diversity and inclusion. Our commitment is central to cultivating a community that nurtures creativity and intellectual curiosity. These core values enhance research training and promote research innovation. In this edition of our newsletter, we proudly celebrate students who received the prestigious Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship. These students recently completed their first year of training and are shining examples of the diverse talent in the UCLA bioscience community.



#### Marcus Alvarez

**UCLA Home Area:** Genetics & Genomics

**Undergraduate Institution:** UC Los Angeles

**Research Programs:** NIH IMSD

As a graduate student, Marcus is continuing in the lab of his undergraduate advisor Dr. Paivi Pajukanta. His passion for science and skill in the lab have resulted in four publications to date. He is currently working on a new project analyzing transcriptomic mechanisms of dyslipidemia. Marcus chose to stay at UCLA because he enjoys the "collaborative environment, with a breadth of sciences concentrated close together on campus." First-year highlights include getting to know faculty more personally and meeting students from other disciplines. *"The best help came from faculty and other students."*



#### Taylor Brown

**UCLA Home Area:** Immunity, Microbes & Molecular Pathogenesis

**Undergraduate Institution:** UC Los Angeles

**Research Programs:** NIH-MARC, NIH-IMSD, HHMI-EXROP, BISEP

As an undergraduate, Taylor conducted research in the lab of Dr. Heather Christofk where she investigated human and herpesvirus ribonucleotide reductase. Taylor is currently working in Dr. Elissa Hallem's lab on factors affecting the development and infectivity of parasitic nematodes. Last year, she found the support of her home area director

## Meet our Associate Director for Recruitment & Diversity



### Dr. Diana Azurdia

Dr. Diana Azurdia (center of photo) leads UCLA's effort to enhance diversity in the biomedical graduate student population by cultivating a strong inclusive graduate training culture focused on personal well-being, professional development, mentorship and leadership. She also directs the UCLA Bridge to the Doctorate and mentor training programs and serves as Co-Director of the SPUR-LABS summer program and as the SACNAS Chapter Advisor. Diana earned her Ph.D. in Molecular Biology & Biochemistry from UCLA, where she was a NIGMS Pre-doctoral Fellow; and she graduated with a B.S. in Biochemistry from CSU Los Angeles, where she was a NIH MARC trainee. Diana is a first generation Guatemalan-American and the first in her family to attend college. She credits much of her success to the influence of her mentors, who have shaped her focus on the propagation of effective mentoring of underrepresented individuals in STEM.

and grant writing workshops very useful. By pursuing her Ph.D., she hopes to help create a better world for minorities in science. *"I hope that one day my future mentees will look at me and think, 'It is possible; if she can do it, I can do it too.'"*



### Anthony Jones

**UCLA Home Area:** Molecular Pharmacology

**Undergraduate Institution:** Cal State Dominguez Hills

**Research Programs:** NIH MBRS RISE

As an undergraduate, Anthony conducted research in the lab of Dr. Kenneth Rodriguez where he designed an independent project that studied "Aloe vera and nopal cactus for possible health treatments by comparison of antioxidant properties and free radical inhibition." He currently conducts research in the lab of Dr. David Shackelford. Anthony chose to come to UCLA because he "believed it would be a great place to flourish as a researcher and a person." As a first year graduate student, Anthony found the workshops in the Competitive Edge program to be particularly useful. Another highlight was the opportunity to see "many leaders in the cancer field present their research by simply attending seminars on campus." *"I am looking forward to deepening my understanding in my field and making a meaningful contribution to the existing body of research."*

## Fall 2016 Enrollment Facts

**Total Enrollment:** 72

**California Residents:** 34

**Out-of-State Students:** 19

**Underrepresented Groups:** 16 (22%)

**International Students:** 19



### Andrew Lopez

**UCLA Home Area:** Biochemistry, Biophysics & Structural Biology

**Undergraduate Institution:** UC Irvine

**Research Programs:** NIH MBRS-IMSD, NIH PREP

As a post baccalaureate researcher, Andrew worked in the lab of Dr. Ronald Breaker at Yale University on "riboswitches in *Bacillus anthracis* using RNAseq" which helped him develop an "appreciation for the complex dynamics of science." Andrew currently conducts research in the lab of Oliver Fregoso where he investigates the effects of variable HIV Vpr on cell cycle arrest. He has "found support at UCLA at every corner, "from having a writing coach for [his] NSF GRFP application, to having an amazing diversity director." *"UCLA has made my first year an amazing experience. Although the road hasn't been easy, I know I made the right choice coming here."*



## Cynthia McKee

**UCLA Home Area:** Molecular, Cellular & Integrative Physiology

**Undergraduate Institution:** Cal Poly Pomona

**Research Programs:** NSF LSAMP, McNair Scholars, Sally Casanova Predoctoral Scholars

Cyn's undergraduate research experience "contributed to increased self-reliance, telling a story through scientific data, and learning how to balance time spent in the lab with academic and social responsibilities." She currently conducts research on muscle stem cells in the lab of Dr. James Tidball. *Cyn chose to attend UCLA based on her "research interest in muscle regeneration, campus wide resources such as the wide variety of core technology centers, and the mentorship and collaborative environment."* As a first year graduate student, Cyn found the on-campus fitness centers and local hiking trails to be very useful for exercise and stress relief.



## Jessica Ochoa

**UCLA Home Area:** Biochemistry, Biophysics & Structural Biology

**Undergraduate Institution:** Whittier College

**Research Programs:** Department of Homeland Security Summer Research Team Program

Jessica's undergraduate research on *C. elegans* with Dr. Sylvia Vetrone inspired her career goal to "work as a research scientist and as a mentor to other young curious minds." She currently conducts research in the lab of Dr. Todd Yates where she studies supramolecular protein structures. In her first year she found support from the the Maximizing Success in the First Year workshops and her program's faculty and student retreat. *"I was most impressed by the numerous resources and the endless list of talented PIs [at UCLA] who are so open to collaboration. I was also attracted to its proximity to LAUSD schools, because the ability to conduct outreach with this particular community is very important to me."*



## Mariel Rios

**UCLA Home Area:** Neuroscience

**Undergraduate Institution:** New York University

**Research Programs:** NIH BP ENDURE

Mariel studied an animal model for *Anorexia Nervosa* while an undergraduate in the lab of Dr. Chiye Aoki. She received the Cajal Neural Science Thesis Prize and her first publication based on the project she designed. She is currently conducting research on the development of the prefrontal cortex under the mentorship of Drs. Susan Bookheimer and Carrie Bearden. Mariel appreci-

## Bioscience PhD Facts

### Research Excellence

UCLA is among the nation's top recipients of research funding (over \$1B awarded in 2015-2016).

### Opportunity

Over 400 members of the basic science and clinical faculty are potential mentors to students in the program.

### Flexibility

Students can rotate with any Bioscience faculty member, provided that at least one is in their Home Area, and they can change Home Areas if evolving research interests dictate.

### Support

All Ph.D. students receive full financial support during the course of their study, including a living allowance (\$32,000 in 2016-17), all tuition and fees, and student health insurance.

## Bioscience-Wide Training Opportunities

### Maximizing Student Success

Workshops designed to help incoming Bioscience students acclimate and thrive during the first year of their graduate education. Sessions provide students with strategies for effectively integrating into Ph.D. programs, and labs, as well as a space for sharing experiences with peers and building community.

### "Get Connected" Events

A quarterly curated list of events designed to enrich the academic experiences of graduate students through career and professional development.

### Entering Mentoring Program

Mentorship, leadership, and diversity sensitivity training for graduate students and post-doctoral trainees.

ates the high caliber of research and level of collegial collaboration at UCLA. *"It was also very important to me that UCLA seems to sincerely care about its minority students, apparent both in the actions of the administration and of the student body."*



## Christopher Robles

**UCLA Home Area:** Genetics & Genomics

**Undergraduate Institution:** UC Santa Cruz

**Research Programs:** NIH MARC, NIH Academy Fellows, Broad Institute Summer Research Program

Christopher conducted research for two years at the NIH National Human Genome Research Institute under Dr. Larry Brody. His research on congenital heart defects was pivotal to his growth as a scientist. He currently conducts research on depression in East Asian populations in the lab of Dr. Sriram Sankararaman. As a first year graduate student he participated in the Competitive Edge summer transition program, which he found to be "really useful in building a community with other students." *He looks forward to continuing his research and "learning new biological and analytical concepts."*



## Kamal Singhrao

**UCLA Home Area:** Physics & Biology in Medicine

**Master's Institution:** University of Alberta

**Undergraduate Institution:** UC Santa Barbara

**Research Programs:** Staff Researcher at UCSB & UCSF

Kamal's work as a staff researcher at UCSF with Dr. Jean Pouliot and Dr. Neil Kirby, was "the most pivotal project for [his] development as a scientist." The project addressed imaging methodology for adaptive radiotherapy and resulted in a patent, three conference presentations, and a feature on the cover of Medical Physics. Kamal currently conducts research on magnetic resonance in the lab of Dr. John Lewis. He says: *"Just think about nothing but winning. And you will."*

## Undergraduate Summer Research

### SPUR-LABS

**Applications due: February 1, 2017**

The UCLA SPUR-LABS summer program provides a rigorous research training experience for undergraduates with interests in a broad range of bioscience disciplines. Exceptional research training, integrated with professional development activities, will prepare students to succeed in leading PhD and MD/PhD programs.

**Website:** [bioscience.ucla.edu/spur-labs](http://bioscience.ucla.edu/spur-labs)

**Email:** [spurlabs@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:spurlabs@mednet.ucla.edu)

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UCLA

## Graduate Programs in Bioscience

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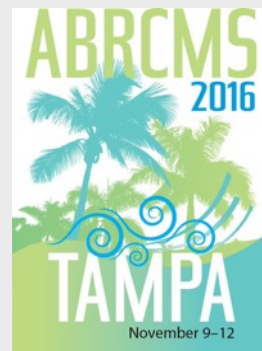
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