



VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY®

Office of  
Postdoctoral  
Affairs

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021





# YEAR IN REVIEW

The 2020-2021 academic year was associated with many challenges and changes across the university. For the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, this was also a period of restructuring and change.

On July 1, 2020, OPA was moved from the Graduate School to the Office of the Provost. At that time, former Senior Assistant Provost, Sally Parker, assumed the role as Interim Director of OPA. Additionally, Faith Bishop, who was currently working with postdoctoral fellows in the School of Medicine, joined OPA as the Interim Program Manager on July 1, 2020. In September of 2020, a new Program and Communications Manager came on board, Caitlin Haskell, and immediately jumped into her work, making connections across Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

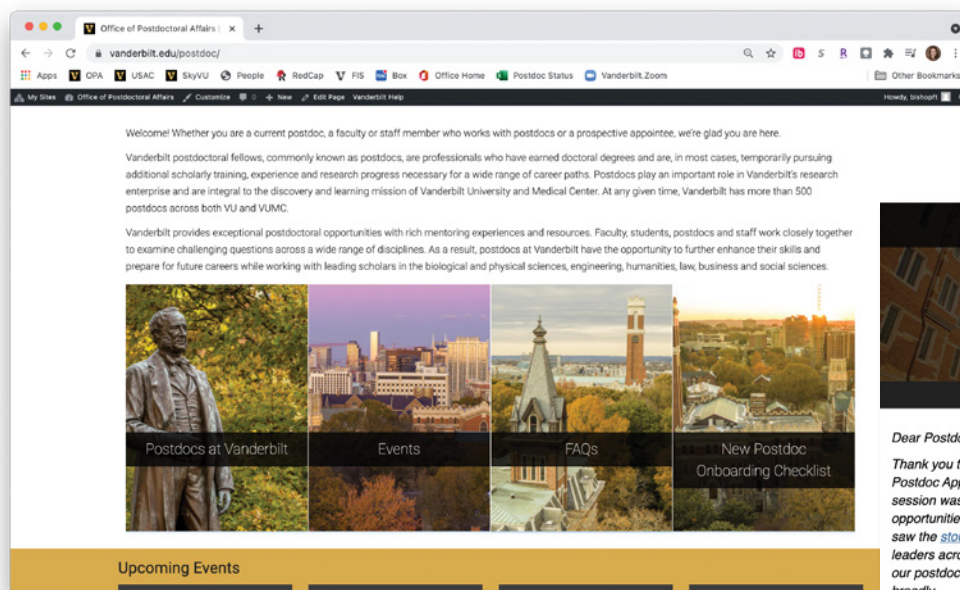
There were several innovations put in place so that OPA communications were streamlined and more effective. To this end, the OPA website was revamped and moved to **[vu.edu/postdocs](https://vu.edu/postdocs)**. OPA monthly newsletters also received an HTML format to match other university newsletters and established branding guidelines. Further, a dedicated page was added to the website to archive past communications. Additionally, OPA New Postdoc Orientation was revamped, and many improvements were made to the REDCap system for appointments and reappointments.

As a small, but centralized office, the OPA aims to leverage resources across the university and

Medical Center and incorporate these events and programming into the postdoc experience. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the OPA and the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association partnered with eight campus departments and offices for 19 events.

Similar to the rest of the university, OPA had to quickly pivot to meet the needs of our postdoctoral fellows during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a virtual, masked-up, and physically distant world, our office had to be creative as we celebrated our postdocs during National Postdoc Appreciation Week. Leadership from around the university and Medical Center provided their gratitude to the community via short videos, postdocs had the opportunity to sit for (physically distanced) new headshots, and a virtual social hour celebration took place for postdocs to network. In addition, a special "Wellness Wednesday" seminar was offered in the middle of the week and an article regarding Postdoc Appreciation Week was featured in MyVU.

Due to the uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic, the annual VPA Postdoctoral Symposium was moved from its scheduled date in April to a virtual format in October. The symposium utilized technologies, including



Zoom and Gather.town, to create a successful and interactive symposium with lightning round talks, a keynote address by Mathematician and Statistician, Chad Topaz, a poster session and open house, and even a networking happy hour.

To determine the needs of the postdoctoral community and how the office would best be structured, a Postdoctoral Working Group was created in the fall of 2020. Additionally, in collaboration with the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, OPA gathered postdoc feedback from a survey that spanned one month at the end of 2020.

Based on feedback from the Postdoctoral Working Group and the postdoc community survey, it was determined that the OPA would move into the portfolio of Vice Provost of Graduate Education, André Christie-Mizell, who became Director of OPA on February 15, 2021. In March 2021, Faith Bishop was hired as the Assistant Director of OPA, bringing knowledge from working with postdocs in the School of Medicine, spanning both VU and VUMC, as well as her experience as Interim Program Manager of OPA since July 2020.

OPA and VPA wrapped up the end of this academic year with the annual Postdoctoral

Awards Ceremony, with the addition of one new award category, Postdoc Mentor of the Year. The ceremony was held virtually, as was everything this past year, but the excitement for the nominees and winners was no less thrilling. We had 47 nominees over four categories, with four award winners and four honorable mentions showcasing the strong research work, as well as the resiliency of our postdoc community, over the past year. We utilized InfoReady, a university system that had not been used previously by OPA, to collect nominations and score the nominees.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

OPA looks forward to normalcy as we are planning a return to campus in the coming months. In the meantime, we are continuing to plan for in person and virtual programming, including a fall VPA Symposium. Upcoming programming includes Health and Wellness topics as we partner with Work/Life Connections, focused programming for international postdocs, and continued partnerships with other departments, centers, and institutes around Vanderbilt.

# OPA

# LEADERSHIP

## 2020-2021



**Sally Parker**

Interim Director

July 2020 – February 2021



**C. André Christie-Mizell**

Director

February 2021 – present



**Faith Bishop**

Assistant Director

March 2021 – present

Interim Program Manager

July 2020 – March 2021



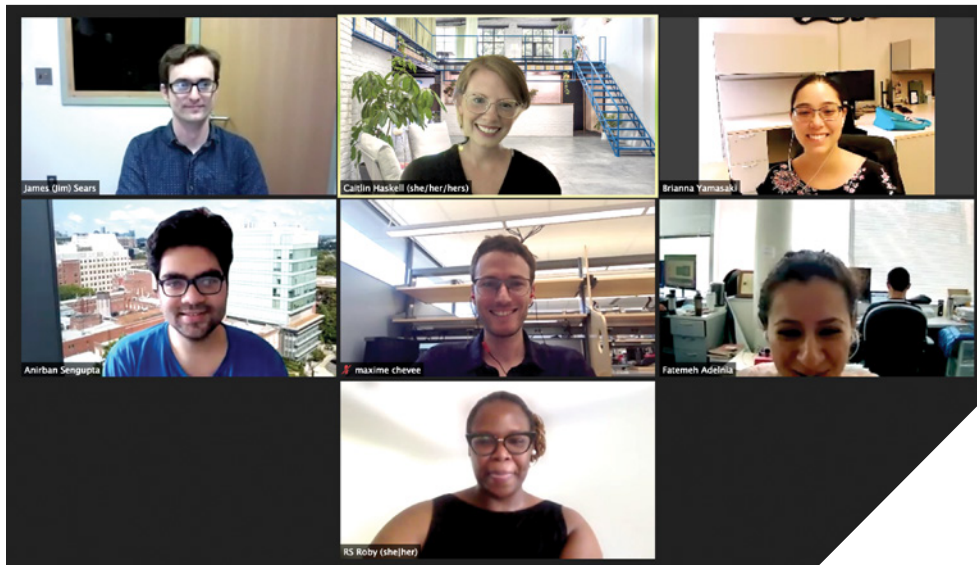
**Caitlin Haskell**

Program and Communications Manager

September 2020 – present

# VPA BOARD MEMBERS

2020-2021



**Jim Sears**  
Senior Co-Chair

**Rei Ukita**  
Junior Co-Chair

**Mariya Kovaleva**  
Scholarly Learning Chair

**ReAnna Roby**  
Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion Chair

**Hiral Master**  
Treasurer

**Maxime Chevee**  
Secretary

**Katelyn Poole**  
Social Activities and  
Community Building Chair

**Fatemeh Adelnia**  
Postdoc Advocacy Chair

**Anirban Sengupta**  
Communications Chair

**VACANT**  
Community Outreach Chair

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## VPA VOLUNTEER LEADERS

Brianna Yamasaki  
Neelima Wagley  
Sam Centanni

# BY THE NUMBERS

## POSTDOC POPULATION

**AY 2020-2021**

### SCHOOL NUMBERS

Blair	1
Arts and Science	152
Divinity School	2
Law School	1
Owen	6
Peabody	44
School of Engineering	61
School of Medicine	431
School of Nursing	3



International **321** | US Citizens **380**

**9**

**SCHOOLS**

**60**

**DEPARTMENTS**

**133**

**POSTDOCS ON  
TRAINING  
GRANTS OR  
INDIVIDUAL  
FELLOWSHIPS**





# WHAT IS A POSTDOC?

Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellows, commonly known as postdocs, are professionals who have earned doctoral degrees and are, in most cases, temporarily pursuing additional scholarly training, experience and research progress necessary for a wide range of career paths.

Postdocs play an important role in Vanderbilt's research enterprise and are integral to the discovery and learning mission of Vanderbilt University and Medical Center. At any given time, **Vanderbilt has around 500 postdocs across both VU and VUMC.**



## MISSION

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs is responsible for planning and managing programs and services for Vanderbilt's postdoctoral community. OPA supports Vanderbilt-affiliated postdocs as well as faculty and staff administrators who work with the postdoctoral population. OPA is the central resource for postdoctoral services and serves as a liaison among postdocs and central university administrative offices. OPA also works closely with the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association, formally known as the Postdoctoral Association, to address the interests and concerns of postdocs.

# EVENTS

## 2020-2021

2020



*Cole Zmurchok, Ph.D.*

**Jul 30**

**Postdoc Listening Session**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs*

**Aug 12**

**Immigration Updates for Postdocs**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs in collaboration with  
International Student and Scholar Services and  
Office of Immigration Services*

**Sept 21-25**

**National Postdoc Appreciation Week**

Sept 23 | Professional Headshots

Sept 24 | Mindfulness Workshop with  
Lauren Dattilo, Work/Life  
Connections

Sept 25 | VPA Happy Hour

**Oct 29**

**Annual VPA Postdoctoral Symposium**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association*

**Oct 21**

**Wellness Wednesdays with  
Work-Life Connections**

*Lauren Dattilo, Work-Life Connections*

**Nov 10**

**Writing a Diversity Statement  
Workshop**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association in collaboration  
with Center for Teaching*

**Nov 18**

**Wellness Wednesdays with  
Work-Life Connections**

*Lauren Dattilo, Work-Life Connections*

**Dec 16**

**Wellness Wednesdays with  
Work-Life Connections**

*Lauren Dattilo, Work-Life Connections*

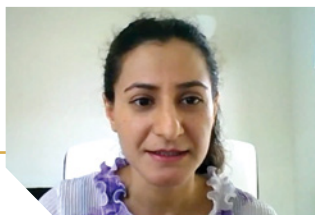
**Dec 17**

**VPA Town Hall**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association*



2021



*Fatemeh Adelnia, Ph.D.*

**Feb 2**

**J1 Visa Insurance Information Session**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs in collaboration with Biomedical Research Education and Training, International Student and Scholar Services, Vanderbilt University Human Resources, and Aetna*

**Feb 19**

**Managing Personal Finances for Postdocs**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association*

**Feb 25**

**Writing a Diversity Statement Workshop**

*A collaboration between Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association and Center for Teaching*

**Mar 23**

**Unapologetically taking up space in the workplace**

*A collaboration between Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association and Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center*

**May 24**

**Postdoc Awards Ceremony**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association*

**June 8**

**Changing the VISA Status of the International Postdoc**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association and Office of Postdoctoral Affairs in collaboration with International Student and Scholar Services and Office of Immigration Services*

**June 11**

**VPA Town Hall**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association*

**June 22**

**Internal Grant Opportunities for Biomedical Postdocs at Vanderbilt**

*Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association and Office of Postdoctoral Affairs in collaboration with Edge for Scholars and Vanderbilt Institute for Clinical and Translational Research*

# 14TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

The Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association held its 14th Annual VPA Symposium on October 29. The event featured a keynote seminar, poster sessions, presentations and talks by Vanderbilt University, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Oak Ridge National Laboratory and University of Kentucky consortium postdoctoral fellows.

Sponsored by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, Oak Ridge Associated Universities, and the Office of Biomedical Research Education and Training

## 14th Annual VANDERBILT POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION SYMPOSIUM Keynote Speaker



### Dr. Chad Topaz

Professor of Mathematics, Williams College  
Co-Founder and Executive Director of Research,  
Institute for the Quantitative Study of Inclusion,  
Diversity, and Equity

<https://chadtopaz.com/>

### Quantitative Approaches to Social Justice

Civil rights leader, educator, and investigative journalist Ida B. Wells said that "the way to right wrongs is to shine the light of truth upon them." In this talk, I demonstrate how quantitative and computational approaches can shine a light on social injustices and help build solutions to remedy them. One project uses data science tools to study gender representation on mathematics journal editorial boards, finding that of 13,000 editorial positions studied, a mere 8.9% are held by women. A second project constitutes a large scale study of gender and ethnic representation amongst artists whose works are held in the collections of major U.S. museums. We estimate that 85% of these artists are white and 87% are men. We find that the relationship between museum collection mission and artist diversity is weak, suggesting that a museum wishing to increase diversity might do so without changing its emphases on specific time periods and regions. Finally, I will mention other quantitative social justice projects underway in the realms of criminal justice, music, education, and more.

The event was originally scheduled to be held at the end of April, but was rescheduled due to COVID-19 and took place on the platforms Zoom and Gather.town. The keynote seminar, led by Chad Topaz, professor of mathematics at Williams College and co-founder and executive director of research for the Institute for the Quantitative Study of Inclusion, Diversity and Equity, was titled "Quantitative Approaches to Social Justice." The symposium featured study topics such as social science, materials science and biomedical science.

October 29, 2020 | 12:30 - 1:30 pm CST

Register to attend at  
[vanderbilt.edu/vpa/symposium/vpa-symposium.php](https://vanderbilt.edu/vpa/symposium/vpa-symposium.php)

In addition, a number of award winners were recognized during the symposium. The complete list is as follows:

## SYMPOSIUM AWARD WINNERS

### BEST LIGHTNING TALK

**Inga Saknite** (VUMC)  
Cutaneous Imaging

**Stephanie Moore-Lotridge** (VUMC)  
Pediatric Diagnosis

### BEST POSTER PRESENTATION

**Andrew Patterson** (VUMC)  
T Cell Development

**Kakali Ghoshal** (VUMC)  
Insulin Resistance

**Jessica Thomas** (VU)  
Autism Spectrum Disorder Modeling

**Tomas Rush** (ORNL)  
Biotic Stress Factors

### 2020 AWARD WINNERS

Postdoc of the Year Award  
**Karan Jani**

Postdoc Service Award  
**Carlyn Mueller**

Postdoc Honorable Mention Awards  
**Sam Centanni** and **Katie Leaptrot**

Mentor of the Year Award  
**Jennifer Ufnar**



"I would like to extend thanks to Ashley Brady and the BRET office for holding the career advising session and for the partnering science and policy panel discussion during the symposium," said Jim Sears, senior co-chair of the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association. "I also greatly appreciate the participation and partnership of all the faculty judges, the Division of Communications, the OPA, ORAU, the BRET office and all of the booth representatives and organizations."





# 2021 SPRING POSTDOC AWARDS CEREMONY

The Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association and Office of Postdoctoral Affairs announced its 2021 award winners at the Spring Postdoc Awards Ceremony on May 24.



## POSTDOC OF THE YEAR

The Postdoc of the Year award recognizes a postdoctoral scholar who demonstrates excellence in research and scholarship since January 2020. The nominee must demonstrate excellence in several criteria, including publications, presentations, awards/honors, service, and mentoring. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs solicited nominations from faculty in each school, and the Postdoctoral Fellow Advisory Committee reviewed and voted on all nominations.



The recipient was **Lindsey Seldin, PhD**, mentored by Dr. Ian Macara, Chair of the Department of Cell & Developmental Biology, Professor of

Cell & Developmental Biology and Louise B McGavock Chair.

Dr. Seldin can be described as a *"fearless experimentalist who has boundless enthusiasm, and shows unusual brilliance in her thinking about cell and developmental biology."*



An honorable mention was awarded to **Dr. James Muchira**, mentored by Dr. Mariann Piano, Senior Associate Dean for Research, Postdoctoral Fellowship Director, and

Nancy and Hilliard Travis Chair in Nursing.

## POSTDOCTORAL MENTOR OF THE YEAR

Recipients of the Postdoctoral Mentor of the Year Award must demonstrate a willingness to share expertise and advice; service to the community at large, including other mentoring activities; and scholarship within the mentor's own career, including publications, awards, presentations and honors. The Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association solicited nominations from all Vanderbilt postdocs, and the VPA Executive Board reviewed and voted.



The recipient was **Inga Saknite, PhD**, mentored by Dr. Eric Tkaczyk, director of the Vanderbilt Dermatology Translational Research Clinic, assistant

professor of dermatology, and assistant professor of biomedical engineering.

Dr. Saknite is described as *"an amazing mentor. Clinical collaborators and prospective team members often share that they enjoy working with her and appreciate her mentorship and compassion."*

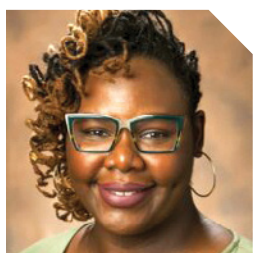


An honorable mention was awarded to **Dr. Saramati Narasimhan**, mentored by Dr. Dario J. Englot, Assistant Professor of Neurological Surgery, Radiology and Radiological

Sciences, and Biomedical Engineering.

## POSTDOC SERVICE AWARD

The Postdoc Service Award goes to a postdoctoral scholar who has demonstrated sustained service to Vanderbilt through service to the community at large—through professional societies, scholarly work outside regular lab responsibilities, or by leading within and promoting the postdoc experience at Vanderbilt. The Vanderbilt Postdoc Association solicited nominations from all postdocs, and the VPA Executive Board reviewed and voted.



The recipient was **ReAnna Roby, PhD** mentored by Dr. Nicole M. Joseph, Assistant Professor, Mathematics Education and Dr. Dina M. Stroud, Executive Director,

Fisk Vanderbilt MS-to-PhD Bridge Program.

Dr. Roby has served as the chair/co-chair for the VPA committee on Equity, Diversity, and Justice since the Fall 2019 academic year and has played a fundamental role in advocating for the needs of minoritized postdocs, while also aiding the organization in facilitating workshops to better equip the overall community with the tools to be more culturally competent and aware.



An honorable mention was awarded to **Dr. Brianna Yamasaki**, mentored by Dr. James R. Booth, Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor of Psychology and Human Development.

## FACULTY MENTOR OF THE YEAR

Recipients of the Faculty Mentor of the Year Award must demonstrate a willingness to share expertise and advice; service to the community at large, including other mentoring activities; and scholarship within the mentor's own career, including publications, awards, presentations and honors. The Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association solicited nominations from all Vanderbilt postdocs, and the VPA Executive Board reviewed and voted.



The recipient was **Borden Lacy, PhD**, Edward and Nancy Fody Chair in Pathology and professor of biochemistry and pathology, microbiology and immunology and director of the Vanderbilt Center for Structural Biology.

Dr. Lacy's mentees notably mention how she *"prioritizes supporting our research and career goals through regular meetings and an open-door policy. Meetings with Borden range between engaging scientific discussions to conversations about our goals, aspirations, and personal lives. As postdocs in her lab, it is clear to us that she is invested in our success and wellbeing as scientists and multifaceted people."*



An honorable mention was awarded to **Dr. Jane F. Ferguson**, Assistant Professor of Medicine.



# **POSTDOC** **ADVISORY** **COMMITTEE**

## **2020-2021**

**Faith Bishop**

**Caitlin Haskell**

**Gina Repas**

**James R. Booth**

**E. Duco Jansen**

**William H. Robinson**

**Tanya Brown**

**Amy Martinez**

**James Sears**

**Roger Chalkley**

**Laura Nairon**

**Kiley Stokes**

**C. André Christie-Mizell**

**Rick Ohmer**

**Chris Vanags**

**Ellen Goldring**

**Sally Parker**

**Richard H. Willis**

**Kathleen Gould**

**Mariann R. Piano**

**David W. Wright**

**Katherine E. Hartmann**

**Jennifer A. Pietenpol**



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