

# ANNUAL REPORT

**2023-2024**



**VANDERBILT**  
Office of Postdoctoral  
Affairs

# OPA LEADERSHIP



## **C. André Christie-Mizell**

Vice Provost for Graduate Education  
Dean of the Graduate School  
Director, Office of Postdoctoral Affairs  
Centennial Professor of Sociology



## **Faith Bishop**

Associate Director,  
Office of Postdoctoral Affairs  
Special Project Director for Graduate  
Education and Postdoctoral Training



## **Annie Evans**

Program and  
Communications Manager





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# YEAR IN REVIEW

This past year marked the 150 anniversary of Vanderbilt University. This sesquicentennial year was an exciting year for the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA). During the 2023–2024 academic year, the OPA worked closely with postdocs, campus partners, faculty, and staff to ensure postdoctoral fellows received support during their postdoctoral training. Finding opportunities to bring STEM, social sciences, and humanities postdocs together, OPA supported the continued community-building efforts of the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association (VPA). Career and professional development workshops were hosted throughout the year to prepare postdocs for their next steps. To better assist faculty and postdocs in securing funding, additional data collecting and reporting mechanisms were implemented across the academic year in accordance with National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) requirements.

In the 2023–2024 academic year, OPA welcomed more than 230 new postdocs to campus and held 25 new postdoc orientations. More than 50 meetings with

administrative staff, faculty, and current or prospective postdocs were scheduled to support research and scholarship on Vanderbilt's campus..

## LOOKING FORWARD

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs aims to increase postdoctoral fellow and faculty participation in postdoctoral initiatives and programming. Of particular importance is fostering a sense of belonging among all members of the postdoc community from the time they begin their Nashville appointments until the time they leave for their next adventures.

**We are your OPA. We are working on your behalf!**



The planning committee plans the symposium each year.



The family picnic is a favorite activity during National Postdoc Appreciation Week.



Poster Sessions highlight the research of Vanderbilt postdocs.



New postdocs meet at the monthly coffee break.



Postdocs enjoy the 2024 Postdoc Awards.



Postdocs enjoy networking during the symposium.



Vice Provost and Dean C. André Christie-Mizell gives opening remarks.

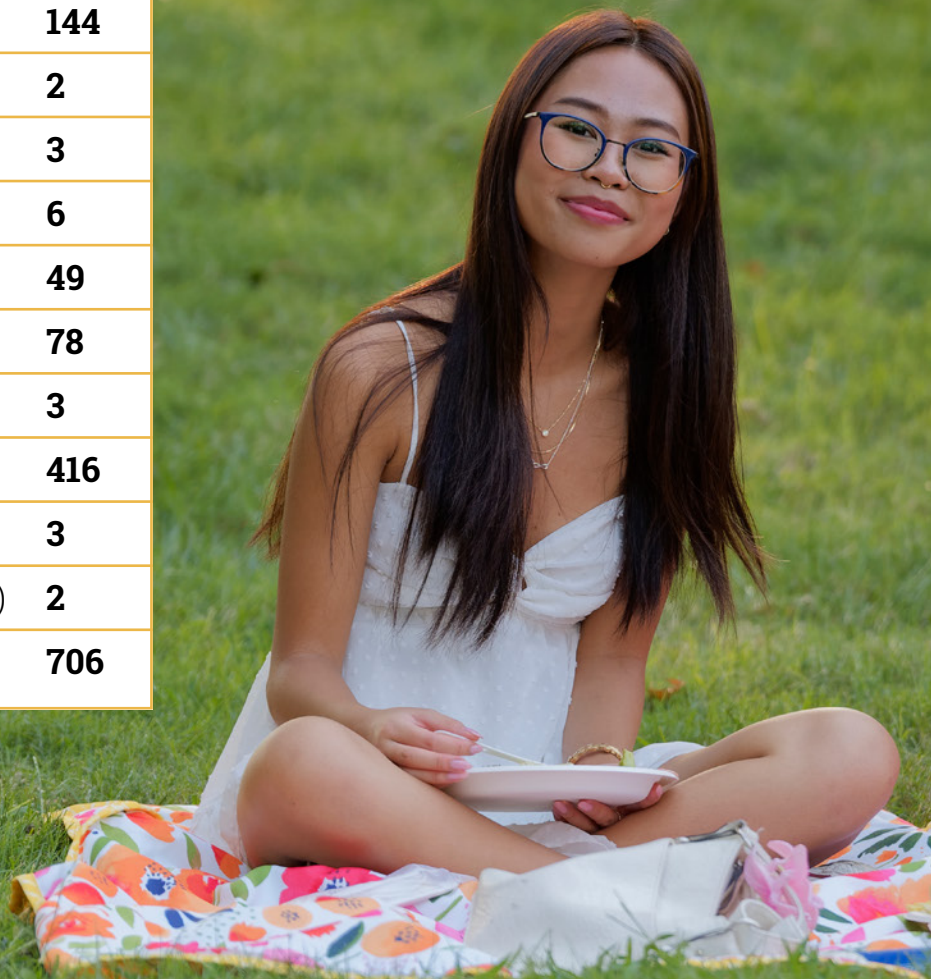
# BY THE NUMBERS

## POSTDOC POPULATION

AY 2023–2024

### SCHOOL NUMBERS

Arts and Science	144
Divinity	2
Law	3
Owen	6
Peabody	49
Engineering	78
Graduate School	3
Medicine	416
Nursing	3
Other (Centers/Institutes)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>706</b>



**95**

**POSTDOCS ON  
TRAINING  
GRANTS OR  
INDIVIDUAL  
FELLOWSHIPS**



**72**

**DEPARTMENTS**

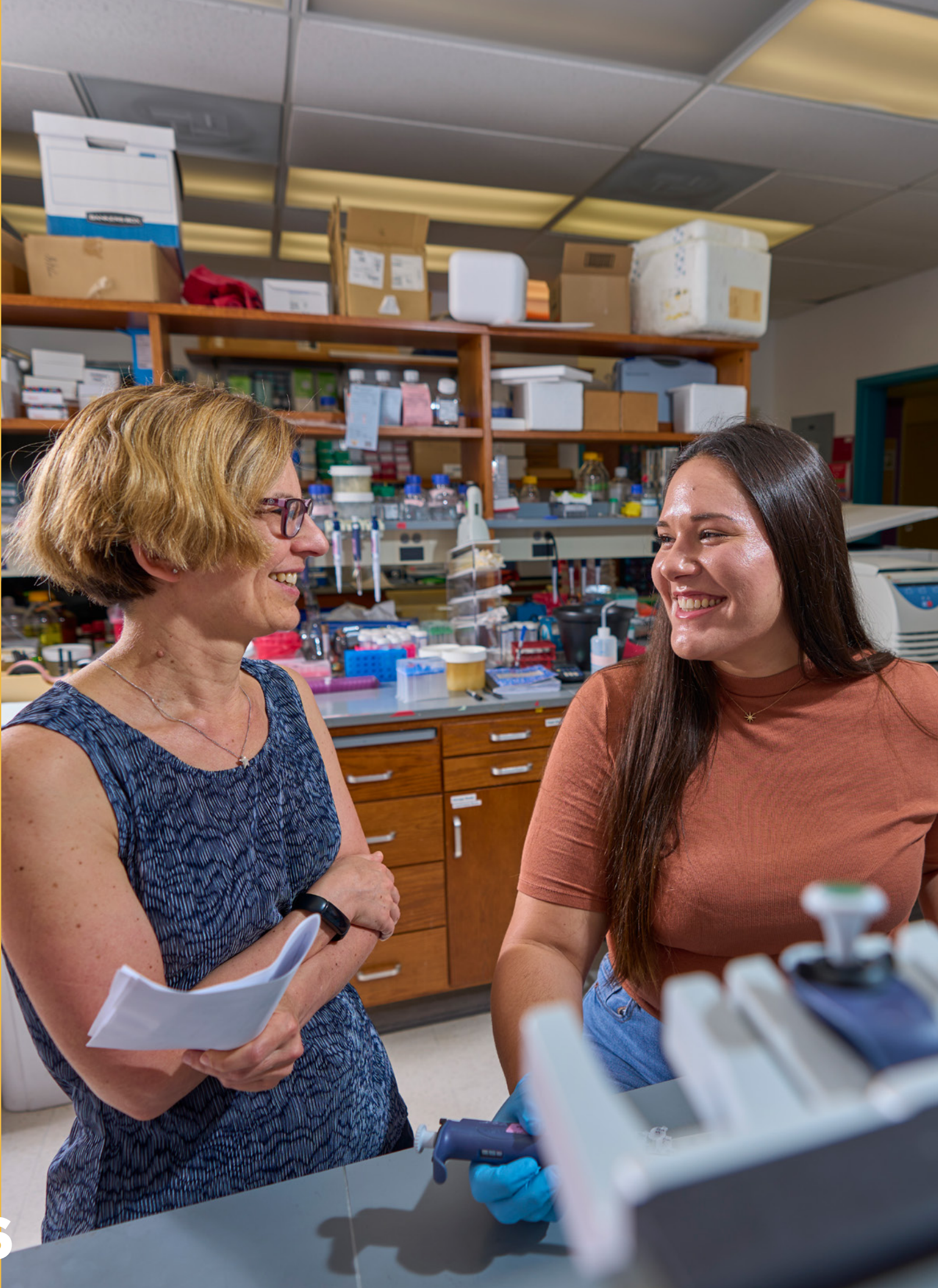
**352**

**INTERNATIONAL  
POSTDOCS**

**354**

**US CITIZEN  
POSTDOCS**







# WHAT IS A POSTDOC?

Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellows, commonly known as postdocs, are professionals who have earned doctoral degrees and are temporarily pursuing additional scholarly training, experience, and research that is 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 Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

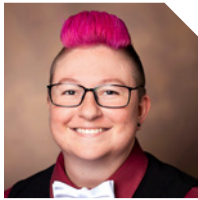
## MISSION

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 and medical center administrative offices. OPA also works closely with the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association to address the interests and concerns of postdocs.



# VPA BOARD MEMBERS

2023-2024



**Tor Nasci**  
President



**Jayden Lee**  
Community Building



**Katherine Young**  
Vice President



**Yasmina Mekki**  
Community Building



**Vanessa Cerda**  
Advocacy and Diversity,  
Equity, and Inclusion



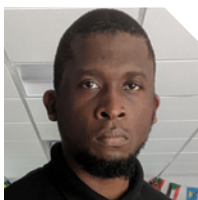
**Madeline Searcy**  
Scholarly Advancement



**Taseer Ahmad**  
Career Development



**Madushika  
Wimalarathne**  
Scholarly Advancement



**Abdul-musawwir  
Alli-oluwafuyi**  
Career Development

# VANDERBILT POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION

Formed in 1998, the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association (VPA) brings together and supports the Vanderbilt postdoctoral community. Led by the president and vice president, the executive board is comprised of four committees.



The **Scholarly Learning Committee** organized and executed the 17th Annual Postdoc Symposium in November. They will provide the preliminary groundwork for the 2024 symposium and support the ongoing preparations in the 2024-2025 academic year.



The **Career Development Committee** organized a faculty mentoring panel featuring faculty from various schools and colleges across the university and medical center. They also launched a Monday Motivation email series, a monthly digest providing tips and resources for postdocs.



The **Community Building Committee** continued the highly successful bi-monthly *Speak Easy* Talk Series and planned Postdoc Happy Hours for postdocs to relax, play games, and get to know each other. They also re-launched the postdoc Slack channel to enhance digital engagement.



The **Advocacy and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee** launched a Buddy Program focused on partnering current and incoming postdocs to build community before postdocs arrive on campus.

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Finally, under the leadership of the **president and vice president**, the VPA launched a postdoctoral experience survey to better serve postdocs through programming and community building in the coming years.

# EVENTS

## 2023

### Jul. 2

**Business and Entrepreneurship  
with Isaac Rodriguez, Ph.D.**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

### Jul. 20

**Speak Easy**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

### Jul. 24–28

**Collaborative Humanities  
Coaching Sessions**

*Career Center*

### Aug. 25

**VPA Happy Hour**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

### Fall Semester

**Academic Communication for Postdocs  
Fall Course**

*English Language Center*

### Sep. 14–Nov. 9

**Peak Performance Series**

*Graduate and Postdoc Academic Success*

### Sep. 15

**Dore Passport: Opening Doors to  
Graduate Students and Postdoc Success**

*Vanderbilt Graduate Development Network*

### Sep. 18–22

**National Postdoc Appreciation Week  
Events**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Campus Partners*

### Oct. 4

**Immigration Workshop**

*International Student and Scholar Services*

### Oct. 24

**Individual Development Plan  
Workshop presented by Duco Jansen**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs*

### Oct. 27

**Halloween Social**

*International Student and Scholar Services*

### Nov. 17

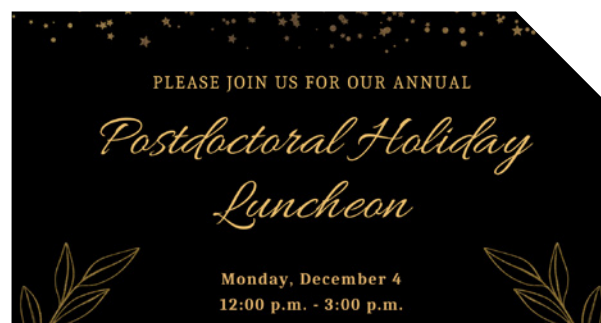
**17th Annual VPA Symposium**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

### Dec. 4

**Postdoc Holiday Luncheon**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs*



# 2024

**Jan. 18**

**Speak Easy**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

**Jan. 25–Mar. 31**

**Peak Performance Series**

*Graduate and Postdoc Academic Success*

**Spring Semester**

**International Postdoc Workshop Series**

*English Language Center*

**Feb. 22**

**VPA Happy Hour**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

**Feb. 29**

**Career Development Workshop:  
The Power of Effective Mentorship**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

**Mar. 12**

**Diversity Statement Workshop**

*Office of Education Design and Development*

**Mar. 21**

**Speak Easy**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*



**Apr. 19**

**VPA Happy Hour**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*



**May 16**

**Speak Easy**

*Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

**May 23**

**Annual Postdoc Awards Ceremony  
and Reception**

*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Vanderbilt Postdoc Association*

**Jun. 27**

**Effective Mentoring Strategies for  
Postdocs**

*Graduate and Postdoc Academic Success*

**Jun. 27**

**Coffee Break**

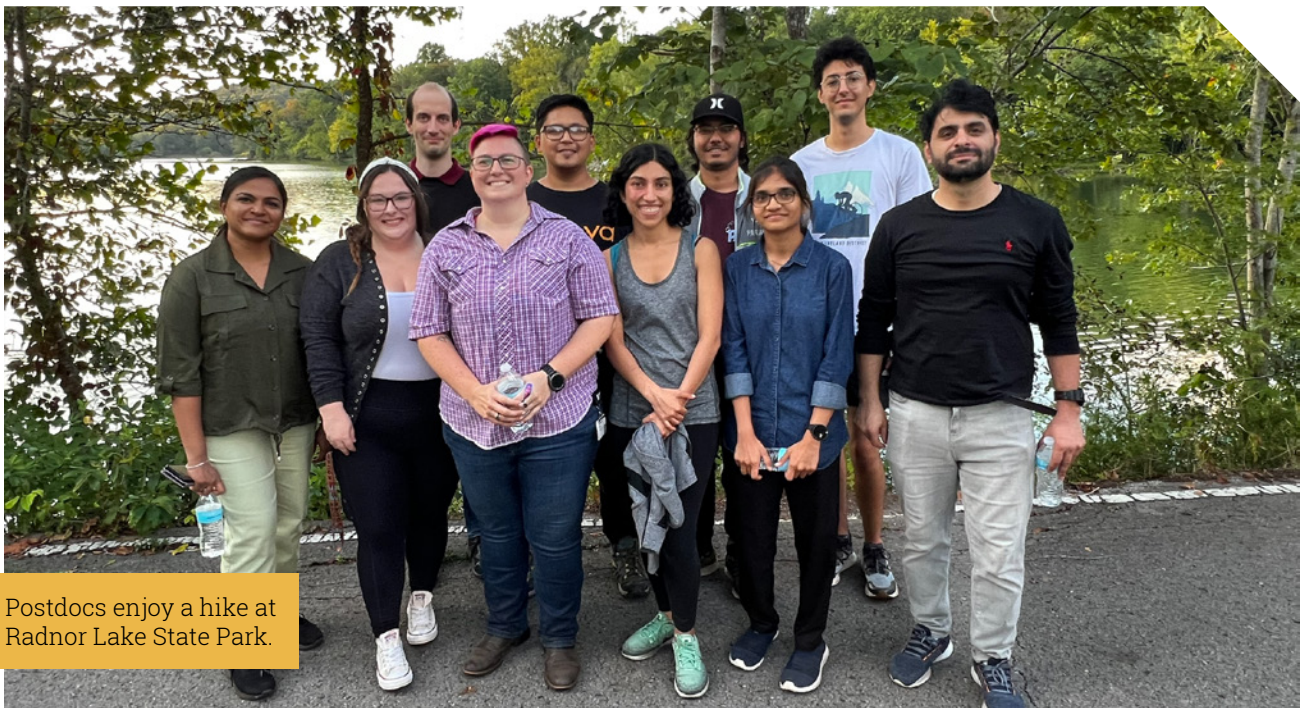
*Office of Postdoctoral Affairs*



# NATIONAL POSTDOC APPRECIATION WEEK

## September 18–22, 2023

National Postdoc Appreciation Week (NPAW) recognizes the significant contributions that postdoctoral fellows make to research and discovery. The 14th Annual National Postdoc Appreciation Week was held September 18–22, 2023. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs partnered with other campus departments to host daily events for the postdoc community.



Postdocs enjoy a hike at Radnor Lake State Park.



The annual postdoc picnic is a favorite during NPAW.



Breakfast with the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs.

## EVENTS INCLUDED:

### **Monday:**

Refreshments and Research Support with the Career Center

Group Hike at Radnor Lake State Park

### **Tuesday:**

Complimentary Postdoc Headshots

Annual Postdoc Appreciation Picnic at Fannie Mae Dees Park

### **Wednesday:**

Treats at the Women's Center

Complimentary Postdoc Headshots

Wellness Workshop with Graduate and Postdoc Academic Success

### **Thursday:**

Postdoc Coffee and Catered Breakfast at Alumni Hall

VPA *Speak Easy* Talk Series

### **Friday:**

Massage Chairs for Postdocs

Ice Cream Social on Alumni Hall Terrace with The Wond'ry



The VPA hosts a *Speak Easy* event during NPAW.



Chair massages during NPAW.

# ***SPEAK EASY TALK SERIES***

## **A POSTDOC TALK SERIES TO TELL YOUR SCIENTIFIC STORY**

Hosted by the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association (VPA), the *Speak Easy* Talk Series seeks to offer a casual venue for scientific presentations that are accessible and digestible to the public through an evening happy hour event at Alumni Hall. *Speak Easy* presenters discuss a variety of topics including biology, neuroscience, mathematics, data science, health-related science, and more.

The goal of the *Speak Easy* Talk Series is to provide an opportunity for postdoctoral scholars to discuss their science with a broader audience, including postdoc peers, and to provide speakers the opportunity to highlight the amazing scientific discoveries happening across Vanderbilt.



Postdocs enjoy pizza and drinks during the *Speak Easy*.





Dr. Madushika Wimalaratne presents at the *Speak Easy* event.

**7/20/23**

**Tyler Toledo, Ph.D.**  
Mindfulness and Pain

**7/20/23**

**Aditya Nanda, Ph.D.**  
Using Synthetic Data to Test Hypotheses about Brain Function

**7/20/23**

**Lénie Torregrossa, Ph.D.**  
Schizophrenia and the Body

**9/21/23**

**Isabella Starling Alves, Ph.D.**  
The Mathematical Brain

**9/21/23**

**Wesley Richerson, Ph.D.**  
Detecting White Matter Perfusion in the Brain

**1/25/24**

**Chitrang Dani, Ph.D.**  
From Dusk til Dawn: Evolution of Circadian Clocks

**1/25/24**

**Noah Fram, Ph.D.**  
From Lighting Design to Cognitive Mechanisms of Temporal Prediction in Autism

**3/21/24**

**Madeline Searcy, Ph.D.**  
Determining the Role of Myeloid Immune Checkpoint Signaling in Bone Microarchitecture and Metastasis

**3/21/24**

**Kanchana Devanathan, Ph.D.**  
Shedding Light on Pre-Term Labor

**5/16/24**

**Mitun Nag Karadi Giridhar, Ph.D.**  
Structure-Function Relationship in Nuclear Receptor Proteins

**5/16/24**

**Madushika Wimalaratne, Ph.D.**  
Glutaminase Promotes Amino Acid-Induced Alpha Cell Proliferation



Scan to sign up to speak at the next *Speak Easy* event



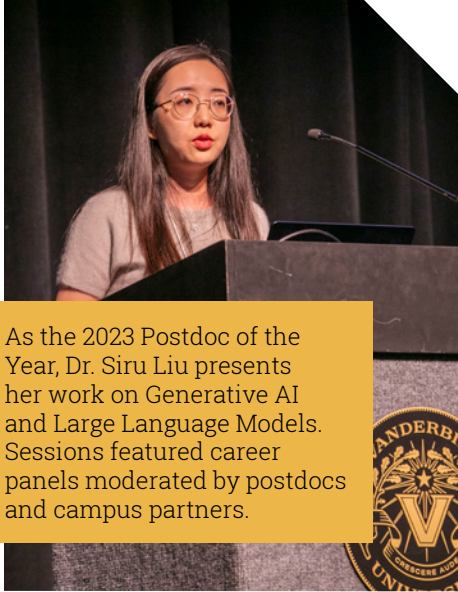
Two breakout sessions featured career panels moderated by postdocs and campus partners.

# 17TH ANNUAL VPA SYMPOSIUM

Written by Tor Nasci

*Dr. Nasci is the President of the Vanderbilt Postdoc Association for the 2023–2024 Academic Year.*

Planning for the 17th Annual VPA Symposium began in February 2023 and was led by the 2022–2023 VPA Scholarly Advancement Co-Chairs Markie Sneed and Nestor de la Visitación Pastor. Under Markie and Nestor’s leadership, a Symposium Planning Committee was organized and included postdocs from both Vanderbilt University (VU) and Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC). In August 2023, the newly-elected 2023–2024 Scholarly Advancement Co-Chairs Madeline Searcy and Madushika Wimalarathne began leading the Symposium Planning Committee. Over 150 attendees were present at the Symposium, including postdocs, presenters, faculty judges, panelists, and campus partners.



As the 2023 Postdoc of the Year, Dr. Siru Liu presents her work on Generative AI and Large Language Models. Sessions featured career panels moderated by postdocs and campus partners.

The Symposium began with a talk from the 2023 Postdoc of the Year Award recipient Dr. Siru Liu, who discussed her work in generative artificial intelligence and large language models in healthcare. The keynote address was presented by Dr. Keivan G. Stassun, Stevenson Professor of Physics and Astronomy, Director of the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation, and Founding Director for the Fisk-Vanderbilt Masters-to-PhD Bridge Program. His talk was titled, "Head in the Stars, Feet on the Ground: Building on Where You Came From to Get Where You're Going and Make a Difference."

As part of the VPA's career development initiatives, Assistant Dean of Biomedical Career Engagement and Strategic Partnerships Dr. Ashley Brady joined the Symposium to give a career development talk. Symposium participants also attended one of two career panels that provided insight on both academic and non-academic career opportunities.

The Symposium poster session featured 50 posters during two engaging poster sessions. Concurrently, a resource fair showcased the vast campus resources available to VU and VUMC postdocs. The resource fair saw excellent engagement between postdocs and campus partners and was a highlight for many. Lastly, the symposium included six lightning talk presentations covering a wide range of topics. To end the day, an awards ceremony and social event were hosted where top presenters were celebrated.

The 17th Annual VPA Symposium was an excellent and engaging day. The VPA looks forward to coordinating an even bigger and better Symposium for Vanderbilt postdocs in 2024!



The Career Center tables at the Resource Fair.

# SYMPOSIUM AWARD WINNERS

## POSTER PRESENTATION WINNERS

1st Place:

**Ann Hanna**  
*Medicine*

“Longitudinal local and peripheral immunologic changes identify immune checkpoint inhibition response signatures in murine breast cancer models.”

2nd Place:

**Victoria Simon**  
*Cardiac Surgery*

“A novel evaluation of the effects of exercise on right ventricular hemodynamics in a chronic sheep model of right ventricular failure.”

3rd Place:

**Caitlyn Edwards**  
*Molecular Physiology  
and Biophysics*

“Adolescent-onset voluntary ethanol consumption and subsequent negative affective behavior and whole brain cFos expression during forced abstinence in mice.”



Poster Sessions highlight the research of Vanderbilt postdocs.

## PEOPLE'S CHOICE POSTER PRESENTATION WINNER

**Rafay Ahmed**  
*Orthopaedic Surgery*

"Assessing the glycation effect and mechanical damage in human cortical bone through Raman Spectroscopy"

**Yutaka Shishido**  
*Surgery*

"Dynamic organ storage at 10°C improves cholangiocyte function compared to static cold storage"



## LIGHTNING ROUND WINNERS

**1st Place:**

**Neelima Wagley**  
*Psychology and  
Human Development*

"Brain specificity during sentence processing in Spanish-English bilingual children"

**2nd Place**

**Timothy Harris**  
*Cardiac Surgery*

"Development of an Ex Vivo Heart Perfusion Platform to Assess Porcine Cardiac Function After Donation After Circulatory Arrest: Lessons Learned in Design"





Vice Provost and Dean C. André Christie-Mizell addresses the crowd at the awards ceremony.

# 2024 SPRING POSTDOC AWARDS CEREMONY

The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association announced their 2024 award winners at the Spring Postdoc Awards Ceremony on May 23. All winners were included in the Vanderbilt Graduate School sesquicentennial time capsule to be opened in 2074.

# POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW OF THE YEAR

The Postdoctoral Fellow of the Year award recognizes a postdoctoral scholar who demonstrates excellence in research and scholarship. The nominee must demonstrate excellence in several criteria, including publications, presentations, awards/honors, service, and mentoring. The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs solicits nominations from faculty across all schools and colleges, and the Postdoctoral Fellow Advisory Committee reviews and votes on all nominations.

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**Eric Moses  
Gurevitch, Ph.D.**

Gurevitch is a National Endowment for the Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow led by Professor of English Teresa Goddu. His scholarship focuses on the history of science in early modern South Asia. His first book, *Everyday Sciences: Making Knowledge Local in South Asia*, is currently under advance contract with the University of Chicago Press.

Gurevitch is described as “a meticulous and creative teacher, an energetic and dependable colleague, and a delightful conversationalist Vanderbilt is lucky to have.”



**Suzanne Nolan,  
Ph.D.**

Nolan is in the lab of Professor Cody Siciliano in the Department of Pharmacology. She established herself as an expert in understanding how presynaptic and postsynaptic adaptations to the mesolimbic dopamine pathway underlie contingency learning. She is regularly invited to give talks and chair symposia at national and international meetings. Her work is published in top outlets and is having high impact across her areas of study.

## POSTDOCTORAL MENTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

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 solicits nominations, and the VPA Executive Board reviews and votes.



**Zer Vue, Ph.D.**

Vue was nominated by Professor Antenor Hinton Jr. in the Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics. As a postdoc in the Hinton lab, Vue mentors five of 15 undergraduate students. Her previous students have continued in Ph.D. programs, dental schools and medical education. With Vue's guidance and encouragement, many of her undergraduate mentees have won distinguished research awards at conferences.

## POSTDOCTORAL SERVICE AWARD

The Postdoc Service Award is given to a postdoctoral scholar who has demonstrated sustained service to Vanderbilt by serving 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 solicits nominations, and the VPA Executive Board reviews and votes.



**Tor Nasci, Ph.D.**

Nasci is a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Professor Eman Gohar in the School of Medicine, Division of Nephrology. Nasci is described as a scientist dedicated to service locally and nationally. They have served on many committees including the Nephrology Faculty and Fellows Committee and the VUMC Pride Employee Resource Group Social Committee. Nasci has also contributed selflessly to the Vanderbilt Postdoctoral Association Executive Board, first as the chair of the Advocacy and DEI Committee and currently as president.



# FACULTY MENTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

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 solicits nominations from all Vanderbilt postdocs, and the VPA Executive Board reviews and votes.



**Antentor Hinton, Jr.  
Ph.D.**

Hinton is an assistant professor in the Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, an Ernest E. Just Early Career Investigator, and a Chan Zuckerberg Initiative Science Diversity Leadership Investigator. Hinton's research is remarkable, and to date he has published 99 papers, won more than 60 awards, and given 200 invited talks. He has worked to dramatically increase diversity in the scientific workforce by officially mentoring more than 95 individuals and hundreds of others in shadow and informal mentoring.

# OUTSTANDING CAMPUS PARTNER AWARD

This inaugural award recognizes a remarkable team whose dedication and collaboration has furthered the mission of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and provided outstanding support to our postdoc community. The Outstanding Campus Partner award is chosen by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. .



**International Student  
and Scholar Services  
(ISSS), led by Julie  
Wilbers**

ISSS supports university J1 postdoctoral scholars. They also provide guidance to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs as they work with the international postdoc population. ISSS has partnered with OPA to provide workshops for international students and postdocs across campus and information sessions for administrators to better support the international postdoc community. The knowledge and resources that ISSS provides to the OPA are immensely valuable. The ISSS team is constantly looking for more ways to provide resources to the international community and to advocate on behalf of Vanderbilt's international scholars.

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

## **2023-2024**

The Postdoctoral Fellow Advisory Committee serves as an advisory body to the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and includes faculty, staff, and postdocs from across Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

**Faith Bishop**

**Walter Chazin**

**John McLean**

**James Booth**

**C. André Christie-Mizell**

**Mariann R. Piano**

**Elizabeth C. Boyd**

**Annie Evans**

**Jennifer Pietenpol**

**Tanya Brown**

**Ellen Goldring**

**Chris Vanags**

**David Calkins**

**Annie Hornung**

**Julie Wilbers**

**Vanessa Cerda**

**E. Duco Jansen**

**Richard H. Willis**



V150



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