

## FALL 2023 Newsletter



### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Welcome back from summer break!

The last few months have been a bit quiet for most of our committees and members. Summer is a time when we at AWIS-SD like to slow down and enjoy ourselves, but we are starting to get back into the swing of things. I would like to acknowledge our communications, website, and corporate sponsorship committees who have continued to work throughout the summer.

The website committee has been working diligently on getting our new website up and running. We are optimistic that it will be functional by our fall open house. Corporate sponsorship was able to secure funding from Hologic and Vertex and is working on bringing in new investors for our open-house event.

Speaking of the open house, we will begin planning this event soon and will need help with organizing it. This will be a larger event than we have had in the past due to the postponement of WIST, which typically takes place biannually. We are hoping to bring in panelists or outside speakers to discuss various topics related to women in science, transitioning from academia to industry, job market-related topics, etc. If you would like to get involved or have any suggestions about possible speakers or areas you would be interested in learning more about, please reach out to me.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in the activities of our chapter, check out the description of all our committees [here](#). All are actively recruiting new members and the chapter, overall, would love to get more people involved. Meetings and any upcoming events can be found on our [website calendar](#).

Best,

*Rose*

Rose Presby, PhD  
President, AWIS-SD  
[president@awissd.org](mailto:president@awissd.org)

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## AWIS-SD Celebrates 2023 Scholarship Recipients

By Rose Presby

The AWIS-SD Scholarship Committee, chaired by Bharti Garg, Ph.D. awarded the winners of five \$1000 AWIS-SD scholarships at a brunch held on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at the Come on In Café in beautiful La Jolla. The five scholarship recipients were chosen from a field of 59 applicants. The funds are intended to help support research projects or cover educational expenses.



Congratulations to the following scholarship recipients:

### **Community College Student Awardee**



#### **Anne Kelley**

Anne is a math major at MiraCosta College. She is deeply passionate about mathematics and intends to continue her mathematical studies at one of the UC schools. After earning her Bachelor's degree, Anne plans to work toward her Ph.D. and eventually become a math professor. Her main interest in mathematics is number theory, as there are many fascinating conjectures waiting to be proven in that field. In her free time, she enjoys writing proofs, creating poetry, and hiking.

### **Undergraduate Student Awardee**



#### **Emma Rae Topolcsik**

After completing her Bachelor's in Aerospace Engineering at San Diego State University in May 2023, Emma will be pursuing a Master's degree in computational science at SDSU. Her undergraduate experience included serving as Secretary and Chair for AIAA SDSU. Through her leadership and teamwork with the Vice-Chair, they successfully revitalized the chapter, expanding its membership and collaborating with other student organizations, such as Women of Aeronautics and Astronautics (WoAA) and the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE). Additionally, Emma contributed to the Biomimetic Fractal Inspired Porous Structures Project in Dr. Satchi Venkataraman's Aerospace Composite Structural

Mechanics Lab. Inspired by biomimicry, she studied the structural capabilities of ant hills and their potential applications in lunar habitats and vented porous structures.

Emma was a member of the Removal of Debris in Earth Orbit (RODEO) senior design project during 2022-2023. This project assessed the escalating orbital debris issue and devised a mission to mitigate associated hazards. Her team recently presented their work at SDSU's Design Day on May 3. Beyond her academic endeavors, Emma is deeply committed to mentoring and inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers. She has tutored pre-college and undergraduate students for over seven years and currently serves as a teaching assistant for Dr. Venkataraman's Aerospace Structural Mechanics and Materials class. Emma is currently living in Florida for an internship with a startup company called Space Perspective, working as a part of the Launch and Recovery Team. She is excited to be a part of a team that simultaneously values space exploration and the conservation of resources to protect our planet. Emma's enduring fascination with space, cultivated since childhood, fuels her dedication to engaging in projects aimed at enhancing space safety. She is driven to make meaningful contributions to the aerospace field and is dedicated to promoting research and interdisciplinary approaches within the industry.

### **Graduate Student Awardees**



#### **Josefa Rivera Alfaro**

Josie is a Master's degree student at San Diego State University in the Cell and Molecular Biology program with the Shikuma Lab. She earned her Bachelors of Science in Biochemistry/Chemistry degree with a minor in Biology from the University of California, San Diego. Previous research experience includes genetic engineering of marine diatoms to identify new promoter elements at the J. Craig Venter Institute and investigating the relationship between dinoflagellates and bacterial chemotactic response at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. She

also worked in the messenger RNA vaccine and therapeutic space with Arcturus Therapeutics, where she designed and produced synthetic mRNA for various disease projects. Currently at SDSU, she studies contractile injection systems in the human gut microbe *Bacteriodes cellulosilyticus* and how this tool is used to conduct host-microbe interactions in the gut. In her spare time, Josie enjoys exploring coffee shops, indoor gardening, and baking.



### **Marisol "Dottie" Dothard**

Dottie is a second-year PhD student in Dr. Jack Gilbert's lab at the University of California, San Diego. Dottie completed Bachelor's degrees in Biology and Classical Voice from Bard College in 2017. She went on to complete a post-baccalaureate research program at the University of Pennsylvania, where she used bioinformatics and molecular biology approaches to hunt for novel viruses in the human lung. After finishing her post-baccalaureate studies in 2019, she earned a Master's degree in Molecular Biology, Cellular Biology, and Biochemistry from Boston University. Her thesis work focused on unique motility mechanisms of several marine microbe strains. During her Master's program, Dottie was awarded the prestigious National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program (NSF GRFP). Dottie is still fascinated by the sociological doings of microbes and aims to focus her PhD research at UCSD on increasing our understanding of the effects of gender-affirming hormone replacement therapy on the microbiomes of transgender individuals in order to better inform transgender healthcare. Dottie is a passionate community advocate and is involved in several community service projects including volunteer programs oriented to increase book access for incarcerated individuals and to send resources to detainees at Otay Mesa Detention Center. She is also passionate about increasing and supporting diverse populations in academia. She currently serves as President of the UC San Diego's Black Graduate and Professional Student Association. Her paid community advocacy includes serving as Community Liaison for the Black Graduate Education Living and Learning Community at UCSD. In her free time, Dottie is the editor of a small literary magazine through the Biomedical Sciences program at UCSD. In addition, she enjoys freelance writing gigs, reading, outdoor activities, and learning new things.



### **Katya Marchetti**

Katya is a PhD student in the Ocorr lab at Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute with a Bachelor's in Neurobiology from UC San Diego. Her research focuses on understanding the genetics behind congenital heart diseases with a particular emphasis on translational medicine to improve personalized patient care. Katya is working to create a gene panel to identify the underlying mechanism of pathology behind Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome that she hopes will provide a way to get patients earlier intervention and personalized treatment. She is also member of the Education & Training Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee at SBP, where her role is to foster inclusivity in trainees and provide resources to succeed. She hopes to establish tools for broadening representation in the biomedical sciences. Outside of the lab Katya is an avid hiker and rock climber who enjoys spending time exploring the Eastern Sierras and San Gabriel mountain ranges.

## **Undergraduate Student Honorable Mention**

**Rachel Khoury**

## **Graduate Student Honorable Mentions**

**Julia Soares Parreiras, Macall Hock**

## 2023 Scholarship Committee

Committee Chair: Bharti Garg

Committee Members: Kina Thackray, Satarupa Bhaduri, Elizabeth Trujillo, Ivy Tam, Emily Chan, Jamillah Murtafda, Rose Presby

## About AWIS-SD Scholarship Program

The AWIS-San Diego Scholarship Program encourages and rewards outstanding women pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at San Diego colleges and universities.

The Scholarship Program, now in its 23rd year, annually supports community college, undergraduate, and graduate student women in San Diego County pursuing degrees in STEM fields where women are underrepresented. Scholarship funds help support their research projects and/or assist with additional educational expenses. The fields of study of previous AWIS-SD Scholars include biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, engineering, mathematics, and experimental psychology. Each AWIS-SD Scholar receives a \$1000 Scholarship Award and 1-year complimentary AWIS-SD Chapter-only membership.

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## A2I Summer Happy Hour

By Shanna N. Lavalle

The Academia to Industry (A2I) committee is focused on helping students, postdocs, and early career professionals navigate the transition from academia to industry. Most of the events consist of Virtual Coffee Clubs where speakers from a variety of industry careers share their experiences making their transition and provide tips and answers to help attendees navigate their path forward.

While the virtual coffee clubs have been a hit within the AWIS community, there is nothing like connecting in person! Before departing on summer break, A2I hosted a Happy Hour at Hera Hub on June 8, 2023. Current and prospective AWIS members were able to connect with the A2I Committee and several of our former speakers. The night was filled with food, games, and laughter; strengthening a sense of community among members and providing encouragement and support to an ambitious group of like-minded individuals.

Check out the AWIS-SD calendar to see our upcoming A2I events. We would love to meet you!



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## A2I Coffee Club with Chief Operating Officer Dr. Kathryn Zavala

By Rose Presby

May's Academia to Industry (A2I) Coffee Club featured Dr. Kathryn Zavala discussing her journey towards becoming the Chief Operating Officer (COO) at MedTech Innovator (<https://medtechinnovator.org/>). There were 16 participants, excluding Dr. Zavala, with the discussion led by A2I committee member Carolyn McGrail. Dr. Zavala earned her Ph.D. in molecular biology from UCLA, where she was a former member of the AWIS LA chapter. Her decision to transition into an industry role from her Ph.D. was due to a message she was getting about the dire state of academic positions. This drove her to look around for other opportunities related to her science background. Dr. Zavala discovered careers in scientific consulting which gave her a newfound purpose in her job search and allowed her to tailor her résumé around this career path. She stated that companies tend to have pathways laid out for individuals pursuing a career in consulting, such as internship programs, and highly recommended taking advantage of these.

Dr. Zavala had several valuable tips on how one should go about finding a career path. As always, networking, networking, networking was her number one recommendation. Spending time in organizations like AWIS is a great way to build your network and get referrals from those you have built relationships with, she suggested. Also, make sure to let those within your network know what your interests are so that they can be on the lookout for opportunities that they can send your way. She also stressed highlighting skills you learned during your Ph.D. that transition well into an industry setting. Examples Dr. Zavala gave were skills developed in self-management, creative problem-solving, and resourcefulness. She emphasized how important it is to acknowledge areas where you may be lacking and to take the time to build your skill set. She stated that gaining more experience takes a lot of pressure off job searches. Because of her decision to follow a consulting career path, Dr. Zavala joined a micro-MBA program at UCSD to familiarize herself with the business side of her chosen career. She admitted to feeling self-doubt during this journey. This is something she overcame and advised others to do the same.

In her position as COO, Dr. Zavala wears many hats. Day-to-day, she acts as a thought partner to help with problem-solving, interfaces with and aids in managing various teams (HR, Legal, etc.), and spends most of the time on Zoom meetings. She spotlighted the MedTech Innovator program for early- to mid-stage biotech companies. This program provides market opportunities by showcasing their companies, setting up ways to meet with investors, and pairing them with a mentor from one of MedTech's corporate partners.

Dr. Zavala's advice was great and applied to all those who were thinking about making a transition into industry. She was open to sharing her contact information and willing to discuss more about transitioning from academia to industry with anyone interested.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kathrynzavala/>

Email: [kathryn.zavala@gmail.com](mailto:kathryn.zavala@gmail.com)

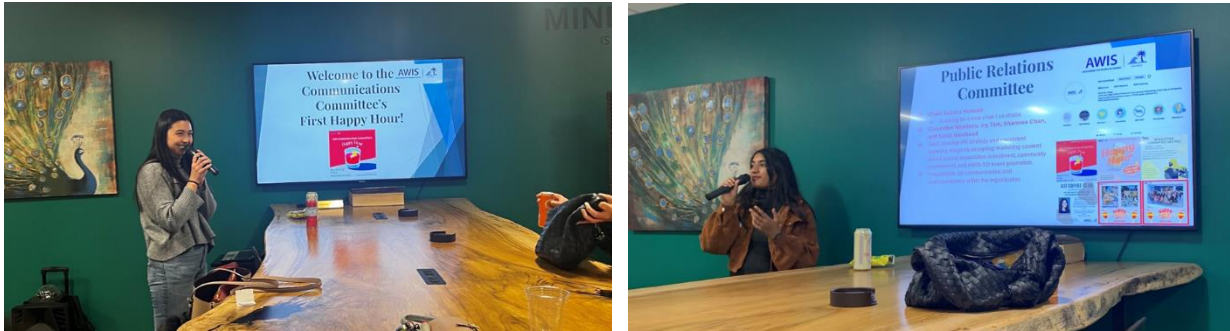


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## AWIS-SD Communications Happy Hour

By Ivy Tam

On May 30, AWIS-SD Communications Committee hosted its first happy hour event to welcome new and prospective members to learn about the Communications Committee and enjoy an evening with AWIS-SD. There were 11 people who attended the event, and each with diverse backgrounds—from students to CEOs of biotech companies. Attendees enjoyed complimentary food and drinks provided by committee members. Most important of all, they chatted with other members about career development and personal growth opportunities within the organization.



There were also presentations from Website (Jennifer Swindlehurst), Newsletter (Corine Lau), and PR committee members (Suzana Hossain) to tell new and prospective members how to get involved in different communication subcommittees. The committee also had a chance to say farewell to the Chair of PR, Suzana Hossain, as she embarked on her Ph.D. journey on the East Coast. Last but not least, thank you, Hera Hub, for offering such a beautiful and comfortable space for this event!





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### Member News

Rose Presby, AWIS-SD president, received a two-year grant from the Brain and Behavior Research Foundation (BBRF) Young Investigator program. Her project aims to discover the mechanisms behind the induction and maintenance of disordered eating, with the goal of leading to more targeted therapeutic options.

For more information on the BBRF Young Investigator program, visit their website at <https://www.bbrfoundation.org/>

## Upcoming Events

### AWIS-SD Board and Committee Co-chairs Picnic

The AWIS-SD Board and Committee Co-chairs are hosting a picnic for all members who are interested in serving on the Board or becoming a Committee Co-Chair. It is a great opportunity for stepping into leadership positions. This event will replace our regular Board/CC Zoom meeting for the month.

When: Saturday, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 12-2 PM

Where: Kate Sessions Park, 5115 Soledad Rd, San Diego, CA 92109

What to bring: chairs/blankets for sitting

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## Authors



**Rose Presby** is the current President of AWIS-SD. She is a recent transplant to sunny San Diego from the snowy Northeast. She received her undergraduate degree in Biology with a minor in Psychology from the University of Maine. She went on to work for a few years as an animal-care technician and as a lab technician at the Jackson Laboratory. In the Fall of 2016, she started her graduate school career in the lab of Dr. John Salamone at the University of Connecticut where she received both her Master's and PhD, studying the motivational aspects and pharmacological manipulation of a rodent model of binge like eating. She, her husband and their two cats Salem (guess what color he is...) and George, moved to San Diego in August for her postdoc position at the Scintillon Institute in the lab of Dr. Albert Chen studying neural circuits of food intake. She has been a member of the Outreach, Corporate Sponsorship and A2I committees, and as one of the new Co-chairs of the Scholarship committee. She is an avid seamstress, hiker and chocolate lover. Feel free to reach her at [rpresby@scintillon.org](mailto:rpresby@scintillon.org) or on her LinkedIn profile <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rose-presby-07021088/>.



**Shanna Lavalle** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Salk Institute where she is using genetic and genomic approaches to identify functional risk variants in autoimmune disorders and cancers. During her PhD studies, she also completed the Rady's School of Management MicroMBA program to enhance her knowledge of business strategy and management. Shanna has since applied these concepts to her leadership roles within the Endocrine Society and the Association for Women in Science (AWIS). She is a former Chair of the Endocrine Society's Summer Research Fellowship program, and a former Co-Chair of the AWIS-SD Academia to Industry Committee. In addition, Shanna has served on the AWIS National Strategic Planning Task Force, and is currently a board member of the AWIS-SD Chapter. Through her commitment to these organizations, she has made a meaningful impact on the professional lives of others and continues to drive growth and development within these organizations to better serve their members.



**Ivy Tam** is an international MS student at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) who moved to the US from Hong Kong. She also received her undergraduate degree from UCSD after transferring from University of Washington, Seattle. As a graduate research student at the Thackray Lab, she is studying the relationship between steroids and the gut microbiome. She joined AWIS-SD in 2022 and began her role as a Public Relations Committee member. In her free time, Ivy enjoys cooking, hiking, and traveling.

## Contribute to the Newsletter

If you are an AWIS-SD member, we encourage you to contribute to the newsletter. Please send articles, photographs, and member news as Word attachments to [newsletter@awissd.org](mailto:newsletter@awissd.org). News articles should not exceed 250 words, event summaries should not exceed 500 words, and feature articles (special-interest stories and profiles) should not exceed 1000 words. The submission deadline for the next issue is Nov 15, 2023.

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## AWIS San Diego Communications Committee - Newsletter

Chair: Corine Lau

Members: Pat Rarus, Juliati Rahajeng, Chandani Sen, Jean Spence

[Newsletter@awissd.org](mailto:Newsletter@awissd.org)

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## AWIS San Diego Sponsors

AWIS-SD thanks our corporate sponsors for their generous support. Donations from corporate sponsors help us fund scholarship awards, monthly events, career development workshops, community outreach efforts, the newsletter and the website.

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## AWIS-SD Board Members

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