

2026 Early-Career Hill Day Participants

Miranda Diaz-Infante, BS

PhD Candidate

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Amherst, Massachusetts



Miranda Diaz-Infante is a Southern California Latina with a strong passion for advocacy in equity and diversity. Causes close to her heart include increasing the proportion of underrepresented groups in the science/engineering sphere, as well as pre-secondary school exposure to hands-on STEM exploration. While at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) obtaining her BS in Bioengineering, she was involved in SHPE and SACNAS professional development and outreach initiatives. Currently, Miranda is a PhD candidate and NSF GRFP Fellow at the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a focus on developing a combination of immunotherapy for highly metastatic cancers.

Poria Dorali, PhD

Postdoctoral Scholar

MUSC Hollings Cancer Center
Charleston, SC



Poria Dorali, Ph.D. is a postdoctoral scholar at the MUSC Hollings Cancer Center. His research focuses on HPV-related cervical cancer epidemiology, microsimulation modeling for cancer screening and prevention, and the impact of persistent poverty on cancer outcomes across the United States. His work has been published in JAMA, JNCI Cancer Spectrum, and other peer-reviewed journals, and has received national media coverage. During his Ph.D., he developed mathematical models and conducted cost-effectiveness analysis for diabetic retinopathy screening in a large safety-net healthcare system. Dr. Dorali earned his Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Houston.

**Travis Fischer, BS**

Graduate Research Assistant
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

I come from a small town in New Hampshire and have a passion for science and discovery. I earned my B.S. in Biochemistry, Molecular and Cellular Biology from the University of New Hampshire, where I first developed a passion for cancer research. I am now a PhD candidate in the Cancer Biology program at the University of Iowa. My research focuses on using mouse models to study how tumor specific T cells respond over the course of immunotherapy, with the overall goal of advancing T cell-based treatments and outcomes for patients.

**Steven Forsythe, PhD**

Postdoctoral Scholar
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Birmingham, Alabama

Steven is a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Alabama at Birmingham under Dr. J Bart Rose. His current project is the development and testing of novel targeted therapeutics for multiple forms of pancreatic cancer. He has previously worked on projects involving biomaterial development, the body-on-a-chip program for toxicity testing, and precision medicine-based cancer therapies utilizing novel organoid culture. Steven received his doctorate in cancer biology from the Wake Forest School of Medicine and has research experiences at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, MD.



Phebe Havor, M Phil

PhD Candidate
Moffitt Cancer Center
Tampa, Florida

Phebe Havor is a fourth-year PhD candidate in Integrated Mathematical Oncology at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida. She works on developing personalized mathematical models of ctDNA dynamics to predict responses and adapt treatment in patients with HPV-associated cancers. Originally from Ghana, Phebe is committed to making precision medicine accessible globally, and actively mentors young girls in STEM programs. Passionate about science policy and advocacy, she believes good science should not just remain at the bench. She is eager to champion robust, sustained funding for the NIH and NCI—critical to advancing the fight against cancer for all Americans.



Courtney Hill, BS

Doctoral Candidate
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

Courtney is currently a doctoral candidate in Epidemiology at the University of Washington in Seattle. Before starting graduate school, Courtney attended college at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where she is from. Her research focuses on using robust epidemiologic methods to understand how the built environment, health behaviors, and molecular biology drive cancer disparities. She is also passionate about translating research findings into effective and actionable cancer prevention strategies.

**Emma Hymel, MPH**

Graduate Research Assistant & PhD Candidate
University of Nebraska Medical Center
Omaha, Nebraska

Emma Hymel is a PhD candidate in epidemiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Originally from Louisiana, she has a BS in biology from Centenary College of Louisiana and an MPH in epidemiology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Emma is a member of the Pediatric Cancer Epidemiology Research lab group led by Dr. Shinobu Watanabe-Galloway. Her dissertation research uses cancer registry to examine contextual factors associated with adverse outcomes in pediatric cancer, including neighborhood disadvantage, health insurance, and geographic access to healthcare.

**Barbara Karakyriakou, MS**

PhD Candidate
Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine
Hanover, New Hampshire

Barbara Karakyriakou is a PhD candidate in Cancer Biology at Dartmouth's Geisel School of Medicine, working in Dr. Brock Christensen's laboratory. She investigates cell-type-specific epigenetic alterations in the tumor microenvironment, with a focus on endothelial biology and tumor angiogenesis. Her research integrates cancer epigenetics, quantitative modeling, and computational analysis to uncover mechanisms that drive tumor progression. Barbara has presented her work at national conferences, including the American Association for Cancer Research, and received multiple awards for scientific excellence. She is committed to advancing cancer research, promoting data-driven policy, and supporting the next generation of scientists through mentorship and outreach.



Amy Kennedy, PhD
Postdoctoral Associate
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

My name is Amy Kennedy. I grew up in Oklahoma, and I live there with my son and husband. I earned my bachelor's degree from Bethany College, Ks. I then participated in the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience in Dr. Doris Benbrooks lab. This experience was where I learned about my love for cancer research. I received my Doctorate from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Campus in Dr. Doris Benbrook's lab. I am currently studying new therapies for HPV- related cancers in Dr. Mojgan Padash's lab.



Subin Kim, BS
Graduate Student
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

Subin Kim is an MPH student in Health Management & Policy at the University of Kentucky and a cancer researcher at the Markey Cancer Center. She earned a B.S. in Neurobiology, Physiology, & Behavior from the University of California, Davis, where she previously researched neural mechanisms of disease and developed an interest in oncology. Her current focuses are in cancer therapy resistance and health disparities, with particular emphasis on DNA-PK inhibition to improve treatment response in pancreatic neuroendocrine tumors. She will begin medical school in 2026 and aims to integrate clinical care, biomedical research, and health policy to advance patient-centered care.



Elena Levi-D'Ancona, PhD
Science Policy Fellow
Friends of Cancer Research
Washington, DC

Elena Levi-D'Ancona earned her PhD in Immunology from the University of Michigan, where she studied diabetes by investigating mechanisms driving pancreatic beta cell dysfunction, with a focus on immune signaling pathways and mitochondrial function. She is currently a Science Policy Fellow at Friends of Cancer Research, supporting research and policy initiatives that advance cancer treatments. Her work includes translating complex research for non-scientific audiences, contributing to multi-stakeholder working groups, and supporting advisory advocacy efforts. Elena is deeply interested in science policy and communication and was selected as an ASPET Washington Fellow, where she gained hands-on federal advocacy experience and authored a policy brief.



Madeline Merrill, BS
Clinical Nurse Practitioner, APP Education Specialist for Clinical Trials,
Graduate Student
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
New York City, New York

Madeline Merrill, MSN, AGNP-BC, is an oncology nurse practitioner and senior advanced practice provider in Phase 1 & 2 Clinical Trials at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Her work centers on early-phase therapeutic research, clinical trial operations, and APP education. She publishes nationally and internationally, including contributing to the ONS Handbook for Clinical Trials. Madeline is pursuing her PhD at the City University of New York, focusing on expanding access to clinical trials, and collaborates on research exploring AI integration in clinical practice. Her current projects advance trial transparency, APP utilization, and innovative toxicity management.



Isis Narváez-Bandera, PhD
Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Moffitt Cancer Center
Tampa, Florida

Isis Narváez-Bandera, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Machine Learning at Moffitt Cancer Center. Her research focuses on developing and applying machine learning and statistical methods to analyze high-dimensional cancer genomics data, with a particular emphasis on transcriptomics, biomarker discovery, and immunotherapy response prediction. She works on uncertainty-aware and interpretable models, multi-omic integration, and reproducible computational pipelines aimed at improving the reliability of predictive models in oncology. Her work bridges data science and cancer biology to translate complex molecular data into clinically meaningful insights.



Isaac Plutzer, BA
Graduate Student
Washington University in St. Louis
St. Louis, Missouri

Isaac Plutzer is a PhD candidate in Computational and Systems Biology at Washington University in St. Louis, working in Ben Major's lab. Plutzer serves as a student advocate for Washington University in St. Louis and has experience engaging with lawmakers at the local, state and federal levels. His research focuses on mapping kinase signaling networks using mass spectrometry-based proteomics techniques. The goal of his research is to better understand cancer pathologies and identify kinases with therapeutic potential.

**Zoe Walts, BA**

Graduate Project Assistant
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin

Zoe Walts is a Ph.D. candidate in Epidemiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studying the molecular and social epidemiology of cancer. Zoe previously earned a B.A. in Neuroscience from Lake Forest College in Illinois. Zoe's research, supported by the National Institutes of Health, explores how biological and social traits interact to impact colorectal cancer outcomes, integrating molecular epidemiology, qualitative methods, and community engagement. Zoe has authored multiple peer-reviewed publications, presented nationally, and collaborated often with community partners to develop accessible public health tools. Zoe is committed to conducting rigorous, community-centered research to advance equitable, evidence-informed health policy.

**Jodie Wong, BS**

PhD Candidate
H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center
Tampa, Florida

Jodie Wong is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the Cancer Biology Program at the Moffitt Cancer Center and University of South Florida. She earned her bachelor's degree in Biology and master's degree in Biotechnology from Northeastern University. Her research focuses on identifying novel genetic and epigenetic biomarkers of prostate cancer to improve prognostic predictions and guide treatment response. Jodie also currently serves as President of the Cancer Biology Student Organization, which aims to support graduate students, foster scientific collaboration, and promote career development.

**Heather K. Beasley, PhD**

Postdoctoral Fellow

Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Nashville, Tennessee

Heather K. Beasley, PhD, is a cancer biologist and postdoctoral researcher at Vanderbilt University Medical Center whose work centers on clinical breast cancer research, with a focus on hereditary cancer risk and the integration of genomic data into translational studies. She serves as Chair of the AACR Associate Member Council and is actively involved in national efforts supporting early-career scientists through mentorship, advocacy, and professional development. Dr. Beasley is committed to advancing rigorous, patient-centered cancer research with meaningful clinical impact. She is honored to participate in American Association for Cancer Research Early Career Hill Day 2026 to advocate for sustained federal investment in biomedical research.

**Tejaswini Reddy, MD, PhD**

Resident Physician

Baylor College of Medicine

Houston, TX

Tejaswini Reddy, MD, PhD is an Internal Medicine resident at Baylor College of Medicine with a strong interest in cancer research and oncology. She completed her MD/PhD training with a focus on translational cancer research in breast oncology and investigational therapeutics aimed at improving patient outcomes. Dr. Reddy previously participated in the AACR Early-Career Hill Day in 2022, where she met with legislative aides and Members of Congress to advocate for sustained, robust federal funding for National Institute of Health-supported cancer research.