August is SLB election time! Review the candidates in this issue of iSLB and be sure to vote in August!

# iSLB

Vol 2 2026

SOCIETY FOR LEUKOCYTE BIOLOGY

Image by Kate Pylaeva

## In this issue…..

# A Message from the President


SLB President Cindy Leifer

As we move through 2026, I want to begin by acknowledging what many of us are feeling: these are tough times for science. The challenges facing research, funding, and public trust are real. Yet, I am inspired by the scientific community's resilience, creativity, and commitment to doing excellent science. While research is always the priority, now, more than ever, we must engage in science policy, advocate for research funding, communicate broadly, and support one another.

SLB is hard at work advocating for you. We continue our partnership with FASEB as an affiliate member and recently joined Research!America to strengthen our collective voice. You are likely aware of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)'s proposal to revise the Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance and the potential impacts to how the federal government will fund scientific research. Like many of you, SLB Executive Committee members sat in on information sessions with FASEB, AAAS, and others, and submitted comments on the expected impacts to our society, journal, and us as researchers.

Despite these external challenges, and thanks to years of careful stewardship, SLB is on very strong financial footing. Our society will continue to be a stable and supportive resource for this community. We are prepared to help navigate whatever lies ahead.

The *Journal of Leukocyte Biology (JLB)* continues its partnership with Oxford University Press, and our Editor-in-Chief provides outstanding leadership. JLB's recently released two-year Impact Factor has increased to 3.4, and we are proud of this positive movement. It reflects the strength of the science and the rigor of our peer-review process. We thank all the editors and reviewers for their service to the journal.

SLB 2026 *"Leukocytes, it's all about location"* is just around the corner and I am excited for a fantastic meeting this September 14-17 at the Blackwell Conference Center on the Ohio State University campus. Abstract and award reviews are complete, and notification letters have been sent. I am looking forward to great science, seeing old friends, and making new ones. It is not too late to avoid FOMO and register for the meeting and submit a late breaking abstract through August 19th! The meeting will kick off with a welcome networking breakfast hosted by the Engagement and Enrichment Committee. Be sure to register for the Professional Development Workshop Dinner *"Navigating Career Transitions: From Someone Who's Been There!"*.

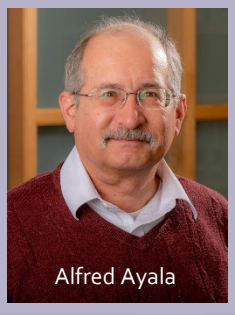
Mark your calendars! Plans are already well underway for SLB 2027 *"Leukocytes Without Borders: Integrating Systems, Scales, and Species."* The meeting will take place September 27–30, 2027, in Charlotte, North Carolina. Additional details will be coming later this summer but it is never too early to spread the word to your colleagues. Click here for confirmed topics and speakers!

Beyond the annual meeting, SLB has year-round programming to share science and connect our members. Click here to check out the calendar of speakers and topics in upcoming sessions for the *"Building Bridges in Leukocyte Biology"* webinar series and to access the library archive of prior sessions. The Professional Development Committee is also hard at work planning a new lab management webinar series, which will cover topics like lab finances, personnel, and collaborations. Keep an eye out for upcoming announcements of these events.

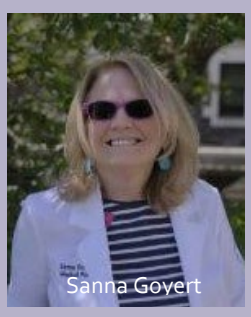
One of the things that makes me especially proud of being an SLB member is the society's commitment to supporting our trainees. In this issue, you'll find our very first undergraduate-authored article, *"Pipettes, Papers, and Persistence: The Ponderous Plodding Pathway to Undergraduate Research."* It's a wonderful reminder that undergraduates are our future scientists and a cornerstone of the SLB family. If you train or know undergraduates working in labs, let them know about the opportunities for them at SLB, which include writing for the newsletter, presenting at our annual meeting, and even developing some leadership skills by participating in our committees.

None of this progress happens without the generous time our members volunteer to SLB. The creativity of the events and activities that our committees plan and the energy they do it with inspires me. It is an honor to lead a society that values building community around great science.

## 2026 Honorary Life Members Inductees


Alfred Ayala

The SLB Awards and Honors Committee is pleased to announce the 2026 inductees for the society's Honorary Lifetime Awardee. Please join us in congratulating Alfred Ayala and Sanna Goyert for their accomplishments and contributions to the science and community. You can learn more about them and see all the awardee members over the years here.


Sanna Goyert

Spotlight on Undergraduate Authors

# Pipettes, Papers, and Persistence: The Ponderous Plodding Pathway to Undergraduate Research

*By Fahad Mian, Suvarshini Reddy, Elizabeth Sommer, Samuel Sonsalla - Samarasinghe Laboratory, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

From the click of the pipette tip being ejected, the cracking sound of a pasteur pipette thrown into the glass disposable box, to the beep of the centrifuge, research can be a very satisfying experience. However, what's not so satisfying, is finding research opportunities. Many students yearn for research experiences, but remain disheartened from the process and struggle to get involved. Research can be a very rewarding experience and allows for exploration of the various fields which interest undergraduates as well as potential career paths. Research allows students to experience the frontlines of scientific discoveries working with experts of their field to answer questions about what more we can learn. Research is very hands-on and can involve experiments, conducting surveys, or working with datasets. Many get the opportunity to do so, but the problem with those who don't, is knowing how to get in. As four undergraduate students in the Samarasinghe Group in the Division of Allergy, Pulmonary and Critical Care in the Department of Medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, each of whom followed a different path into research, we offer advice to undergraduate members of the Society of Leukocyte Biology on how to identify and enter research laboratories at their institutions.

When beginning the search for research, many undergrads are advised to contact labs of interest. With the vast array of departments and fields of research, finding a subsection that stands out can be overwhelming. The university websites dedicated to displaying the research occurring within various departments across campus are a great place to start. Laboratory details including the Principal Investigator (PI), lab members, ongoing research, and publications offer the chance to investigate each lab in further detail before reaching out. It is important to keep an open mind during the searching process as unfamiliar topics may spark curiosity. However, focusing on finding the "unicorn" laboratory can lead to additional challenges. If there are topics you are uncertain about while exploring, take the time to do additional searches beyond the scope of the website, as connections to known ideas may become apparent. After narrowing down labs of interest, read through each lab's publications, spanning the timeline of the lab, to understand crucial methodologies and lab projects. While reading through the literature it is worth taking note of key ideas, even if the topics are out of your grasp, and generating questions for the PI or members of the lab, to show interest in their topics.

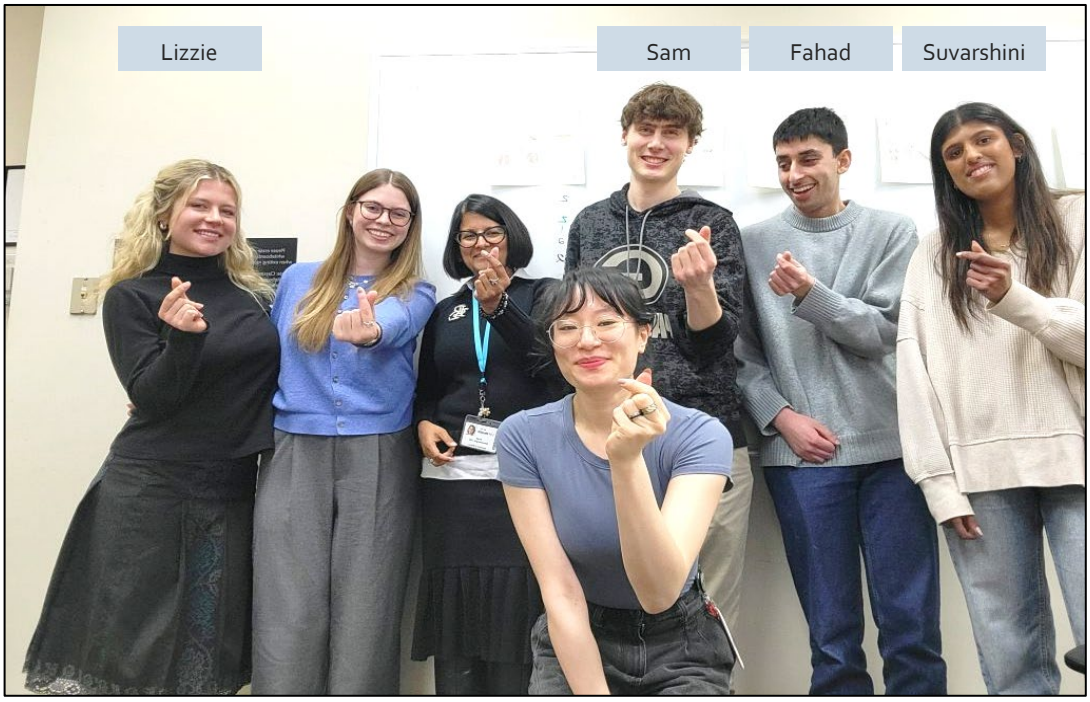
After compiling potential labs, the person to contact at each lab would be the PI who is responsible for directing and leading the lab. Draft an email and include the following: who you are, why you are interested in their lab specifically, and what you would bring to their lab. Many lab websites specify what to include in an interest letter, such as a resume or transcript. Be confident and try to make yourself stand out, as PIs receive a lot of these emails. After emailing, it is just a matter of waiting for responses. There will always be a handful that don't reply, or are full, or just not willing to take on another undergrad. Follow-up if necessary, to show continued interest.

Networking is also a great way to find a lab. Most college professors conduct research, and often briefly introduce it at the start or end of the semester. They may even advertise for students to join their lab. If the professor's research seems of interest to you, consider attending their office hours and introducing yourself. Ask about their research and display curiosity in getting involved. Professors often offer positions to more proactive students who are enrolled in their course and come to them in person.

Many universities know that finding labs can be challenging, so many offer programs through which students can be paired to a lab. In these programs students are often paired with a mentor, such as professors or PIs, as well as graduate students to facilitate research experiences and opportunities. For example, the University of Wisconsin Madison has the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program, and the University of Michigan has the Research Scholars Program where students can apply and get matched to a lab lining up with their interests. Alongside semester programs, many universities and organizations have Summer research programs which can be a great bridgeway to further opportunities. All together these sorts of programs can alleviate a lot of the stress involved with finding a research lab and reduce time fixated on finding a lab giving you more time to worry about your actual grades.

After hearing back from a lab, the next step would be to schedule an interview. Similar to a job interview, wear appropriate attire and arrive on time. It is important to read papers published by the lab, and the information on the lab website prior to the interview to show that you have put in adequate time in learning about the lab. Expect to meet with the PI, other lab members, and visit the lab space. During the lab interview, you may be asked what part of the lab has sparked your interest, what skills you can offer, and what you hope to achieve in your role in the lab. Each lab runs differently, so be upfront with your experiences and expectations.

The timeline of searching for, applying to and joining a research lab varies by person. On average, students should spend multiple hours reading lab websites and papers before narrowing down their top five to twenty-five labs. Drafting the email to send to the PIs should take time, as you want to write a personalized email for each lab to show interest. Expect to hear back from most PIs within a week before following up with an email of continued interest. Once a PI responds back to schedule an interview, the interview can take place anywhere from the same week to several weeks later. Be sure to send a thank-you email after the interview is over, it may take several weeks to hear back from the PI regarding whether they are willing to offer you a position. The general advice given to undergraduate students is to start reaching out to labs two to three months prior to your desired start date. Most students participate in a research lab for credit during the school semesters, which requires students to have committed to a lab by the start of the semester, to ensure credit eligibility.




*Elizabeth Sommer, Junior, Biology – Neuroimmune regulation in glutamate excitotoxicity;*
*Samuel Sonsalla, Senior, Biochemistry – Eosinophil metabolism in response to influenza virus;*
*Fahad Mian, Senior, Biology – IGF-1 inflammatory modification in response to influenza virus*
*Suvarshini Kadipi Reddy, Freshman, Biology – Learning the ropes*

Research can be a very rewarding experience, but it requires effort to get into a research lab. Cold emailing, networking, as well as schoolwide programs all provide an avenue to getting into research. Research provides the opportunities to open your mind and expose yourself to new ideas, learn how to work with your hands to generate data, and learn to analyze and communicate those data. Once you start working in your lab hearing the clicks of the pipette tips don't think that you have made it, rather think of it as a steppingstone for your journey and career. We wish you the best of luck with your search.

# Coming FREE FOR ALL Webinars

- THIS WEEK - Ronen Sumagin, *Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine* who will present, **"Neutrophil Plasticity in Gut Inflammation and Colorectal Cancer"**, July 22nd, 2026, 1pm eastern. This session will be presented LIVE ONLY.
- Chyna Lovell, *MASS General / Harvard* - August 26th, 2026, 1pm eastern
- Manjari Trivedi, *Harvard Medical School* - October 28th, 2026, 1pm eastern
- Amali Samarasinghe, *UW Madison* - November 18th, 2026, 1pm eastern

Also, look for a new 3-part webinar series organized by the Professional Development Committee on **Lab Management** starting in November 2026. Helpful information on lab finances, managing people, and managing collaborations will be presented by a seasoned panel of SLB members.

# Career Pathways Interview: Medical Science Liaison

*An interview with Osmaan Syed by Ramizah Mohd Sabri*

*Come meet Osmaan in person at SLB 2026 and see his poster* ***"Evaluating Levacetylleucine in Children and Adults with Ataxia-Telangiectasia"***

**Q:** What does your day-to-day look like?

**A:** One of the most exciting things about being a Medical Science Liaison (MSL) is that no one day looks the same as another. It is such a spontaneous role where one day you may be traveling to discuss new data with healthcare providers, the next few days you may be attending a conference, where then you might end your work week with administrative tasks recapping all the work you had done earlier in the week.

**Q:** What path brought you to this role?

**A:** I started to explore Medical Affairs through a medical information industry rotation I was completing while in pharmacy school. At the time, I was working as an intern at a big box pharmacy where I started to realize that I may not be the best fit for a role in a community or hospital pharmacy setting.

I took a lot of time to explore other careers that I could pursue with a PharmD degree, and as I learned more about pharmaceutical industry roles, I felt as though it would be the best fit for me.

**Q:** What's something about your work that people outside your sector tend to misunderstand?

**A:** The MSL role is a field facing role which means that often, you are meeting with various healthcare providers. This type of work can be mistaken for a sales role. Under strict compliance rules and regulations, MSLs work very collaboratively with their commercial colleagues, and it is important to know that one of the defining characteristics of the MSL role is that it is non-promotional.

The job is peer-to-peer scientific exchange that allows for credible, data-driven conversations with health care providers that include honestly discussing drug limitations and off-label questions.

**Q:** What skills from your training have been most useful, and what did you have to learn on the job?

**A:** Something that I have found to be the most useful from my training pertaining to the MSL role is to be able to quickly understand and disseminate complicated information. One of my many responsibilities as an MSL is to be able to understand complicated information and then present it in a concise way that is easy to understand.

Since being an MSL, something that I have learned while on the job is that soft skills are very important. Sometimes, meetings may be cut short due to competing priorities, and in these instances, it's important to know how to best communicate and present data with providers who have busy schedules.

Additionally, I have also learned that it is very important to be flexible and adaptable in working in this role. You may experience travel delays, last-minute cancellations, or competing priorities that really require you to pivot on very short notice. I think that this type of flexibility while also being comfortable with uncertainties in your day-to-day is an important learning lesson as well.

**Q:** How do you stay current in the field outside of a traditional academic structure?

**A:** I try my best to keep up with trending topics and updates within the pharmaceutical industry. This could be anything from new clinical trials that are underway, company acquisitions, and new pipeline updates across various industry companies within the neurology space.

**Q:** What advice would you give to a trainee who's curious about your type of role?

**A:** I would tell anyone who is interested in pursuing the MSL role to really take the time to learn about what the role really entails. It is an amazing opportunity to connect and meet with various healthcare providers while presenting data and information to them that may help improve their treatment decision making.

I would also tell anyone who is wanting to pursue this type of career with a background that is similar to mine, to continue to network across the industry while asking questions and being curious. If you are a student, I would highly suggest seeking out industry related rotations, internships, and other opportunities to better understand what it would look like working in an industry setting.

**Q:** What's the most rewarding part of your work?

**A:** The most rewarding part of my job is building meaningful relationships with prescribers. I find it very rewarding when I can see my work begin to build credibility and trust with providers who begin to feel comfortable asking me questions about efficacy and safety data that may help them in their practice.

As an MSL, my goal is to help providers improve their treatment decision making through my work, and I find it very rewarding when providers tell me that our conversations are helping them improve a treatment plan for a patient they are managing.

# ADVOCACY CORNER

*NEWS AND RESOURCES FROM OUR SCIENCE ADVOCACY PARTNERS*

## FASEB

Updated State/District Funding Fact Sheets

FY 2027 FASEB Federal Funding Recommendations

New Factsheets Highlight Regional Impact of Biomedical Research Funding

Washington Update Newsletter

Advocacy Town Hall Meetings

FASEB Policy/Advocacy Statements

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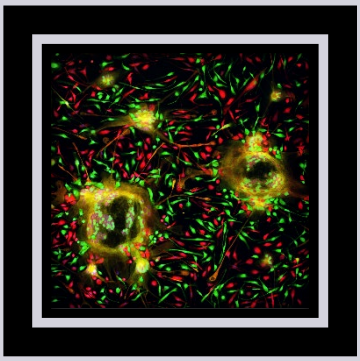
## Two New Programs Led by MTTC *By Lillian Levin*

The MTTC is launching two new programs designed to help trainees build meaningful connections and explore the full range of career possibilities: Mentoring Circles and BioCON.

**Mentoring Circles:** Building meaningful connections across career stages is at the heart of the Mentoring Circles initiative. **MTTC aims to create a welcoming space where graduate students and postdocs can come together, share experiences, and learn from one another in an open, supportive setting.** Each circle will bring together senior postdocs (3+ years), junior postdocs, and graduate students to encourage peer mentorship and candid conversation. Meeting once per quarter over the course of a year, the sessions are designed to be both consistent and manageable. Each gathering will feature a peer-only discussion followed by a guest faculty member who will join to offer perspective on a focused topic.

The goal of this program is to ensure that trainees feel heard, supported, and better equipped to navigate their careers. Conversations will explore practical, often unspoken challenges (how to give and receive feedback, what it really means to transition from mentee to mentor, and how to incorporate work-life balance). MTTC sent out a poll earlier this year seeking mentors and mentees interested in being part of this initiative, if you didn't sign up but are now interested, please reach out!

**BioCON:** BioCON brings professionals from industry and non-academic careers directly to trainees through a seminar series that offers trainees direct exposure to careers beyond academia. Through these seminars, students can hear firsthand about different professional trajectories, gain insight into day-to-day roles outside the academic setting, and begin to envision a broader range of possibilities for their own futures. More information about upcoming speakers and the schedule will be out soon, in the meantime, if you know anyone who you think would be a good speaker for BioCON please reach out!



## SLB's Annual Image Contest

Thank you to our members who participated in the annual Image Contest in celebration of the International Day of Immunology. Congratulations to our first-place winner, Yasmine Higgins and her image titled "Macrophage Nebulas". See all the winners and look for another opportunity to participate in April 2027.

# Building the Skills That Support Your Science


*By Jared Taylor, SLB Professional Development Committee Chair*

Ever wonder what the Professional Development Committee (PDC) does? The short answer is that the PDC focuses on the professional skills that help SLB members lead effectively, work collaboratively, and turn strong science into successful careers. Science is what brings us together as a society, and it will always be at the center of our annual meeting. But building a successful scientific career requires more than generating strong data, and that is where professional development plays an important role.

The skills supported by professional development may sit adjacent to the science, but they are not separate from it. They are key to building productive, meaningful, and sustainable scientific careers. Our professional development programming is designed to be useful across all career stages but is especially focused on supporting trainees and early-career investigators as they build the foundation for what comes next.

As you think about what you would like to see from the PDC, we encourage you to consider the professional skills you wish someone had taught you earlier. Please watch for our annual survey and share the topics, questions, and challenges you would like us to address. Your feedback helps us build programming that is practical, relevant, and useful to the SLB community. With that in mind, we are excited to highlight several upcoming programs designed to help SLB members build these skills.

**Mentoring Dinner Workshop at SLB 2026**

At the 2026 annual meeting, the PDC will partner with the Members in Training and Transition Committee (MTTC) to host a mentoring dinner workshop built around the new Mentoring Circles initiative. This event is designed to bring trainees together over dinner to build connections, share experiences, and discuss the practical career questions that are often difficult to raise in more formal settings.

The workshop will emphasize peer mentorship and candid conversation among graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and research associates, followed by remarks from a guest faculty member on a focused mentoring topic. Whether you are looking for mentorship, exploring career options, or hoping to expand your professional network, this event is intended to help trainees feel more connected, supported, and prepared for what comes next.

**Three-Part Lab Management Webinar Series**

After the 2026 annual meeting, the PDC will host a three-part webinar series focused on the practical work of running a lab. The series is designed especially for new investigators and postdocs preparing for independent research careers.

- **Lab Finances**: The first webinar, in November, will focus on lab finances, including how to approach grant budgets, manage startup funds, and make strategic decisions about available resources.
- **Managing People**: The second webinar, in December, will focus on managing people, including setting expectations, providing feedback, addressing conflict, and supporting the day-to-day work of a lab team.
- **Managing Collaborations**: The third webinar, in January, will focus on managing collaborations, including how to establish expectations, divide responsibilities, protect your own interests and future plans, and recognize when to say no or step away.

Learn more and register

## The SLB Engagement and Enrichment Committee Want YOU!

The SLB Engagement and Enrichment Committee (EEC) is seeking an SLB trainee member to join our group. EEC plans activities and proposes programs that aid the membership with a special focus on providing a welcoming and inclusive environment.

Want to join and support our mission? Please contact: jholland@leukocytebiology.org or Santiago.Partida-Sanchez@NationwideChildrens.org

# Recognizing Emerging Talent at the 3rd iiSIAR Forum in Vilnius


Véronique Witko-Sarsat (Institut Cochin, Paris, France), serving as a **Society for Leukocyte Biology (SLB) Ambassador**, had the pleasure, together with Marco Cassatella (University of Verona, Italy) and Liwu Li (Virginia Tech University, VA), to present ten SLB Trainee Awards during the 3rd iiSIAR Forum held in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The SLB Trainee Award program is an important initiative aimed at fostering the next generation of scientists. Through this program, SLB Ambassadors identify outstanding trainees and provide them with a complimentary one-year membership to the Society. This initiative encourages early-career researchers to engage with the SLB community, participate in scientific exchanges, and contribute to future meetings and activities, including upcoming SLB annual conferences.

The 3rd iiSIAR Forum, chaired by Amiram Ariel (President of The Federation of Israeli Societies for Experimental Biology), provided an excellent platform for young investigators to present their research and interact with leaders in the field. The meeting highlighted the diversity, innovation, and high quality of emerging research in inflammation and immunology.


*Amiram Ariel, Veronique Witko-Sarsat, Liwu Li, Marco Cassatella, Emil Becka, Rodney Macedo Gonzales, Janine Lueckgen , Razvan Macarie, Esther Silberberg, Margarita Žvirblė, Danas Ivanauskas, Kristina Mašalaitė, Simona Malmigė, Emilija Paberalė*

All awardees are warmly congratulated for the quality and originality of their work. Their contributions reflect the vitality of the field and emphasize the importance of continued support for early-career scientists.

Encouraging young investigators and fostering scientific exchange remain central to the Society for Leukocyte Biology and inflammation research.

# Navigating Career Transitions: From Someone Who's Been There!

**Join us for an exciting evening where MTTC and the Professional Development Committee are planning a dinner workshop at SLB 2026 designed to help trainees build meaningful connections and explore the full range of career possibilities.**

Building meaningful connections across career stages is at the heart of the Mentoring Circles initiative. **The MTTC and Professional Development committee aims to create a welcoming space where graduate students and postdocs can come together, share experiences, and learn from one another.** This workshop will bring together research associates, junior postdocs, and graduate students to encourage peer mentorship and candid conversation. This will be followed by a talk from a guest faculty member to offer perspective on a focused topic.

The goal of this workshop is to ensure that trainees feel heard, supported, and better equipped to navigate their careers. Conversations will explore practical, often unspoken challenges. Over dinner, learn more about how these programs can support your professional development, meet fellow trainees, and discover how to get involved. Whether you're seeking mentorship, exploring career options, or simply looking to expand your network, this is your opportunity to be part of exciting new initiatives!

**Pre-registration required.** This event is free to join for registered SLB 2026 conference attendees, but you must pre-register using the invitation that will be sent to *registered attendees* in August. **Limited availability and onsite space are not guaranteed so be sure to reply when invited in August!**

## Neurodivergence in Science: Moving from Awareness to Understanding By Dr. Sofia de Oliveira

**I have been writing this piece in my head for a few years. Every time I tried to put it on paper, it came out too sloppy, too careful, or simply too far from what this actually feels like. That is part of the story.**

I learned I was neurodivergent 3 years ago. The turning point was not my own evaluation; it was my son's twice-exceptional diagnosis. When he underwent a neuropsychological assessment, I started reading the reports, listening to descriptions of his ADHD and intellectual giftedness, and something shifted. I recognized the patterns. Not abstractly, but personally. His struggles were mine, at every level. For a long time, I had explained that not through science, but through habit, family narratives, and sociocultural bias: he is like me, with the same traits; this is simply how we are. After all, I had spent years being told I was exactly like my mother, often not as a compliment, but almost as a curse. It became clear that what I was seeing was more than coincidence. It was something shared, something carried across generations without being named. ADHD had been present in our lives long before any of us had language for it. I was reborn at 40, and with that, my world - our world - changed forever. The way I understood science and academia also changed. That diagnosis made visible something I had felt for years but had never fully named: neurodivergent scientists are present at every stage of science, yet many academic environments are still learning how to recognize, understand, and support them.

**"Aren't we all a bit like that?"** One of the most common responses neurodivergent scientists hear when they describe their struggles with peers is some version of, "Aren't we all a bit like that?" The intention is often to normalize and connect, but it can unintentionally minimize the distinction between ordinary human experiences, such as stress or occasional disorganization, and the persistent cognitive differences that characterize neurodivergence. Everyone becomes distracted, forgets something, procrastinates, or feels overwhelmed. Neurodivergence is not defined by the presence of one of these experiences, but by their pattern, frequency, intensity, and impact across many areas of life. It is not a personality quirk or an excuse for underperformance. It reflects real differences in how the brain processes information, regulates attention, prioritizes tasks, manages emotion, and responds to the environment. When these differences are flattened into something universal, people can feel unseen, and the shame many have already carried for years can deepen. In science and academia, this misunderstanding can be particularly complicated because many neurodivergent traits are initially rewarded. As students and trainees, neurodivergent individuals are often highly curious, energetic, creative, and willing to question assumptions. They may connect ideas quickly, see patterns others have not yet noticed, and contribute in ways that make them highly visible in intellectual settings. In seminars, journal clubs, and research discussions, these qualities can look like confidence, originality, and promise. In some cases, they do provide an advantage. The difficulty is that, over time, the academic system places increasing value not only on ideas, but also on a relatively narrow model of execution. Success becomes tied to consistent self-management, administrative precision, emotional restraint, polished communication, and sustained control over time, workflow, and output. This is often where neurodivergent scientists begin to struggle more visibly, not because they lack intelligence, commitment, or creativity, but because executive function becomes central to nearly every measure of success.

**Struggles and challenges** Among the least understood dimensions of neurodivergence in academic life is executive-function deficit and disorder. These difficulties are not simply about "being bad at organizing." They can affect decision-making, task initiation, prioritization, time management, working memory, and the ability to move efficiently between responsibilities. A neurodivergent scientist may be able to hyperfocus for hours on a complex research problem while being unable to start a smaller but equally important task. They may generate multiple pathways and possibilities at once, making even ordinary decisions exhausting. They may have a clear vision of what needs to be done, but struggle to break that work into actionable steps. In environments that reward visible consistency, these difficulties may be interpreted as lack of discipline or commitment rather than as differences in cognitive processing. Writing is one area where these challenges often become especially apparent. Grant writing, manuscript revision, and responding to trainees' work are central academic responsibilities, but they can also become sites of paralysis. From the outside, this may look like procrastination. From the inside, it can feel like being immobilized by the full weight of the task - the scope, the stakes, the consequences, the complexity, and the fear of failure - all arriving at once. The ideas may be present, sometimes too many ideas are present, but finding the point of entry can be extraordinarily difficult. This is not a marginal issue. In academia, where so much advancement depends on writing, the inability to engage consistently in these tasks can have profound consequences for career progression and self-worth. Emotional regulation is another area that remains difficult to discuss openly and is often misunderstood. Neurodivergence is not only about attention or productivity; it can also involve heightened sensitivity to stimuli, stronger emotional responses, and greater difficulty regulating overwhelm under pressure. In academic environments, where composure is often treated as competence, this can be challenging. When overwhelm becomes visible - through tears, reactivity, silence, or emotional intensity in high-stakes settings such as meetings, interviews, mentoring relationships, or evaluations - it may be remembered not as a sign of strain, but as evidence of instability or lack of professionalism. For many neurodivergent scientists, and especially for women, emotional dysregulation may become another lens through which competence is judged and another source of shame. These experiences can produce significant isolation. Neurodivergent scientists frequently compare themselves with peers who appear to move through academic life with greater ease: answering emails, maintaining structure, returning edits, making decisions, and keeping pace with institutional expectations. That comparison can become corrosive, feeding anxiety, shame, and impostor syndrome. Over time, many begin to internalize labels that do not reflect reality - lazy, unreliable, disorganized, too emotional, difficult - because they have so few alternative explanations for what they are experiencing. For many scientists, recognition of neurodivergence comes late. Some are diagnosed only in adulthood, after years of interpreting their struggles as personal shortcomings rather than neurocognitive differences. By then, they may already have developed elaborate systems of adaptation: masking, compensating, overworking, using anxiety to create urgency, and finding ways to succeed within structures that may not fit how they work best. Therapy, medication, coaching, assistive technologies, and self-awareness can all help, often meaningfully, but none of these eliminate the underlying challenge. They can make life more manageable and help people develop better strategies, but they do not remove the value of understanding and appropriate support within our workplaces.

**When neurodivergence meets gender** Academia has also historically been more tolerant of some forms of unconventionality in men than in women. Traits such as eccentricity, social awkwardness, or single-mindedness are often absorbed into narratives of brilliance when displayed by male scientists. Women, by contrast, are still expected to be highly competent while also organized, composed, collaborative, emotionally calibrated, available, and professionally polished. The range of behavior interpreted positively can therefore be narrower. Behaviors

that may be overlooked or even valued in men can be interpreted differently in women, affecting how they are evaluated as colleagues, mentors, and leaders. I know this not only from literature, but from my own experience. Small comments about tone, emotional expression, organization, intensity, or professional style may appear insignificant when considered one at a time, but over many years they accumulate. They can make a person question whether she is being judged for the quality of her work or for not presenting competence in the expected way. They can also leave neurodivergent women feeling that they must constantly monitor themselves, explain themselves, or become smaller and quieter to be accepted. This becomes especially visible at the level of leadership. Women are well represented in training programs and increasingly present among faculty, yet leadership structures remain uneven. When neurodivergence is added to that landscape, the challenges can become even more apparent. The issue is rarely one of capability. Rather, leadership in academia is still often evaluated against a familiar model of how authority, composure, productivity, communication, and professional fit are expected to look. Neurodivergent scientists, particularly women, may be disadvantaged not because they cannot lead, but because their leadership style does not match that inherited template. Energy may be interpreted as lack of restraint, passion as excessive emotion, directness as difficulty, and nonlinear thinking as disorganization, even when the person is building programs, mentoring people, generating ideas, and moving science forward. Over time, this constant pressure to translate ourselves into a more acceptable form can be exhausting. It can push women to mask more deeply, second-guess their instincts, and spend an enormous amount of energy managing how they are perceived rather than simply doing their work. For some, recognition of neurodivergence brings relief because it finally provides language for experiences that had long been interpreted as personal failure. But recognition alone is not enough. What also matters is whether our scientific environments are willing to become more informed, more flexible, and less dependent on one narrow image of what competence and leadership should look like.

**Making science work for different minds** Awareness should lead to education, understanding, and practical change. Institutions can acknowledge neurodivergence as an important dimension of the scientific workforce without reducing people to diagnoses or assuming that every neurodivergent person has the same needs. Support can begin with simple practices: clearer expectations, written priorities, realistic deadlines, meeting agendas, explicit next steps, mentorship that recognizes differences in executive function and communication, and leadership that pauses before interpreting a difference in working style as a character flaw. New tools can also help. For some neurodivergent scientists, AI-based tools may support organization, communication, task initiation, or the translation of fast, nonlinear thinking into a clearer sequence. They are not substitutes for scientific judgment or institutional support, but they can function as one form of practical assistance. Across the scientific community, the goal is not to lower standards, excuse harmful behavior, or remove accountability. It is to make expectations clearer, interpretation more accurate, and support easier to access so that different minds have a fair opportunity to contribute fully. Science should remain rigorous, responsible, ethical, and collaborative. But high expectations do not require narrow expectations. There is more than one way to organize work, communicate an idea, mentor a student, solve a problem, or lead successfully in science.

Neurodivergent scientists are already present across the scientific enterprise. They are contributing, mentoring, discovering, organizing, building communities, managing laboratories, directing facilities, and leading scientific programs. The question is not whether they belong in science. It is how we can become more informed, thoughtful, and prepared to recognize both the challenges they may face and the perspectives they bring. So, the real question is: ***What can we do?***

**Author's suggestion:** "Being neurodivergent in academia" Collection from Elife. References for this article can be found here.

# 2026 SLB Elections

***Your vote counts!***

SLB is **your** society. This year, the membership will elect 2 Councilors and 1 Associate Councilor. Review the candidates and learn why they want to serve. Look for your invitation to vote in August!

## For the Office of Councilor (2 positions available)

Candidates Peter Keyel, Tammy Kielian, Rob Maile, and Ronen Sumagin

## Peter Keyel Full Bio

Peter joined SLB in 2010, and is active in the Society. He co-organized the Program for the 2023 Annual Meeting, and serves on the Publication committee, most recently as the current chair. On the Publications Committee, he led the creation of the Reviewer Training program to engage trainees in the *JLB* review process. Under his leadership, the Publications committee is developing an Ambassador Kit, and members set up an undergraduate corner in iSLB. Ambassador kits will better equip SLB members to speak to the benefits and prestige of publishing in *JLB*. The undergraduate corner for iSLB provides a space to talk about engaging undergraduates in immunology research and for undergraduates to share their findings and experiences.

As Councilor for SLB, he would like to help SLB build on its prior successes and continue to innovate to help SLB position itself as the model other scientific societies can follow in the 21st century. He would like to help find new ways to bring value to members, especially early career members and trainees, and increase public outreach. Three such opportunities include providing lay membership options to empower and engage the public, increasing professional development modules, and adopting cutting-edge technologies to connect members and accelerate science.

# Tammy Kielian

Full Bio

I have been a long-standing member of SLB. I joined the Society during my MS training in 1994 and published my first peer-reviewed publication in the *Journal of Leukocyte Biology* in 1995 with several subsequent papers in the Journal. I have attended several SLB Annual Meetings and love the comradery and welcoming atmosphere, which has made SLB one of my favorite meetings to send my pre- and post-doctoral trainees.

As a first-generation college graduate, I am passionate about graduate education and supporting trainee development. As an SLB Councilor I would play an active role in trainee opportunities offered by the Society, including serving as a liaison for trainees at annual meetings to make them feel welcome. I would play an active role in promoting the benefits of SLB membership and associated award opportunities and help in recruiting new members to the Society, in particular trainees.

I also have experience with conference organization, having served as a past co-chair of a Gordon Research Conference in addition to organizing several symposia at national and international meetings. I have participated in forums on career development and conversations about the barriers to inclusivity in the sciences, which is another area that is important to me.

I would be honored to contribute to the vibrant SLB community and support the Society as a Councilor.

# Ronen Sumagin

Full Bio

Dr. Sumagin has been an active and engaged member of the SLB, with sustained contributions spanning service, publishing and community building. He currently serves on the SLB Publications Committee, where he is engaged in developing strategies to increase both the quality and quantity of manuscript submissions to the society's flagship journal *Journal of Leukocyte Biology*, enhance the journal's impact and improve its visibility to the broader immunology community. In addition to his service role, Dr. Sumagin contributes to JLB, as an Editorial Board member and frequent reviewer. His scientific work is highly recognized within the field, including authorship of one of the most highly cited papers in the journal (over 1000 citations), reflecting both the impact and visibility of his research within the leukocyte biology community. Through these roles, he has actively supported the promotion, quality and scientific influence of the journal.

As a candidate for Councilor, Dr. Sumagin aims to build on this foundation by advancing several key priorities: (i) further expanding SLB membership through targeted outreach and increased engagement of trainees and international investigators; (ii) enhancing the visibility and impact of SLB and its journal through strategic promotion and integration with emerging areas of immunology; (iii) strengthening career development and mentorship initiatives; and (iv) contributing to the organization of high-impact scientific meetings. His combined experience in leadership, publishing and community engagement positions him to effectively support SLB's continued growth and mission.

# Rob Maile

Full Bio

I am honored to be considered for the position of Councilor for the Society for Leukocyte Biology. SLB has long been an important intellectual home for investigators committed to understanding leukocyte biology in both fundamental and translational contexts, and I would welcome the opportunity to help advance the Society's mission. My career has centered on understanding how leukocytes respond to tissue injury, infection, and inflammatory stress in diverse diseases leading to critical illness. Throughout this work, I have valued communities like SLB that bring together investigators across disciplines, model systems, and career stages to exchange ideas and build collaborations.

My own participation in SLB, including service on the Professional Development Committee, has reinforced for me how important the Society is in fostering scientific rigor, career development, and a sense of professional community. As Councilor, I would work to support three priorities. First, I would like to strengthen opportunities for trainee and early-career member engagement, especially through mentorship, professional development programming, and clearer pathways into Society service. Mentorship has been a central part of my academic career, and I believe SLB can continue to distinguish itself as a society that actively invests in the next generation of leukocyte biologists. Second, I would like to help broaden the Society's reach by promoting connections across basic, translational, and clinical immunology. Leukocyte biology increasingly sits at the center of major problems in human health, including inflammation, infection, tissue repair, and immune-mediated disease and common-mechanisms are often understudied. SLB is uniquely positioned to highlight that breadth and to create productive interactions among scientists working in diverse but related areas. Third, I would like to contribute to the continued visibility and vitality of the Society by helping support strong annual programming, sustained member engagement, and thoughtful communication of the value of leukocyte biology to the broader scientific and biomedical communities. This is an especially important time to advocate for rigorous science, collaborative discovery, and the training environment needed for future advances.

## For the Office of Associate Councilor (1 position available)

Candidates Rosemary Bayless and Stephania Libreros

# Rosemary Bayless

## Full Bio

As a veterinary clinician-scientist and self-professed "Neutrophil Nerd" who is enthusiastic about supporting trainees and early-career researchers, I would be honored to serve the SLB community as Associate Councilor. My involvement in SLB started in '21, when I was a PhD student discovering their passion for basic science and translational leukocyte research. My previous training (veterinary school, internship, residency), research experience (master's degree), and conferences/abstract presentations (veterinary medicine) had reflected my initial clinical career focus. SLB resources, webinars, and online community enhanced my professional development during the pandemic, especially in support of my shift to a research-based career path. The '21 Virtual Meeting was one of my first non-veterinary conferences and opportunities to present a basic/translational research abstract. Two years later, the '23 Meeting was my first scientific meeting as tenure-track faculty, and I was thrilled to share findings from several projects via two presentations. My early career research trajectory was highlighted in the iSLB Volume 3 '25 Member Interview section. I value the Journal of Leukocyte Biology as a source of high-quality scientific literature and enjoy serving as a reviewer. I am excited to chair a Special Interest Group (Naturally Occurring Veterinary Diseases as Models for Human Diseases) at the '26 Meeting.

As SLB Associate Councilor, I would enjoy giving back to the society that has shaped my progression from trainee to junior faculty. In addition to representing the overall SLB community, I envision two major themes for my contributions to the Council:

1. **Supporting & expanding SLB resources and programming for trainees and early career researchers**. As Council Liaison for the MTTC, I would advocate for professional development and networking events. I would seek feedback from graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and junior faculty regarding desired topics (e.g., deciding next career steps, building and managing a lab team, diversifying research funding), skills (e.g., efficiently navigating scientific literature, preparing for interview seminars/chalk talks, grant-writing) and formatting (e.g., online, in-person; structured presentations, informal discussions).
2. **Promoting SLB to researchers from complimentary fields**. I am active in other leukocyte communities (e.g., attendees of the Phagocytes Gordon Research Conference/Seminar and the Neutrophil International Symposium) as well as groups of veterinary clinician-scientists, physician-scientists, and biomedical engineers who study leukocyte-mediated diseases. I consider SLB's friendly and collaborative culture, particularly the welcoming environment at meetings, to be a major strength of our Society. I am committed to fostering this collegial and inclusive atmosphere as we welcome new members and diversify our community's collective expertise.

# Stephania Libreros

## Full Bio

I delivered my first scientific presentation at an SLB meeting as an undergraduate, and I remember walking into that meeting without a sense of belonging. But the Society welcomed me with open arms and from that moment on, SLB has been my scientific home, the community that gave me my first mentors, my first platforms, and the connections that turned a curious undergraduate into a faculty member. I cannot imagine my career without this Society, and that is precisely why I want to serve it.

I have had the opportunity to serve SLB in several roles. I served as the first Junior Editor of iSLB from 2014 to 2018, because trainees deserved a deliberate voice inside our newsletter. I co-founded the Members in Transition and Training Committee (MTTC) and chaired it for six years, from 2014 to 2020, so that no trainee would navigate the long, uncertain stretch between the bench and independence alone. Through MTTC, we established the SLB Poster Flash Talks, a platform built to put trainee science on stage, which has since become a pillar of our annual meeting. I have also co-chaired the SLB Satellite Symposium on Resolution of Inflammation.

Chairing MTTC gave me a working view of how SLB Council operates. I sat in conversations and contributed to decisions that directly shaped trainee programming, and I saw firsthand how deeply the Council and the Society invested in training the next generation of leukocyte biologists. I know what this seat can do for trainees, and I am ready to do the work.

If elected, I will deliver three concrete commitments alongside MTTC. **First**, close the postdoc-to-PI gap with structured peer-mentoring cohorts, K-to-R chalk talks, and mock study sections, so trainees enter independence prepared, not alone. **Second**, continue building the non-academic career pipeline through standing programming with industry, biotech, and government scientists, so the full breadth of leukocyte biology careers is visible and our members in those sectors stay engaged with SLB. **Third**, keep our community international and inclusive by expanding hybrid programming, growing trainee travel awards for under-resourced institutions and countries, and advocating for international members facing visa and mobility barriers. I will also commit to the part of this role that is most important: listening. Quarterly listening sessions with MTTC, regular check-ins with trainee committee leads, and a clear feedback channel into Council, so trainee experience continuously shapes what SLB becomes.

This Society has been shaped by many people who cared, and I have been honored to be among them. I would be privileged to serve as Associate Councilor and to be a voice on Council for every undergraduate, graduate student, and postdoc who joins SLB hoping to find their place, the way I once did.

## Behind the Science: Interview with JLB Author Marc Pouliot

by Ramizah Mohd Sabri

# Neutrophil FcγRI expression as a determinant of oxidative responses in human blood

Read in JLB!

(from right to left) Marc Pouliot, Cynthia Laflamme, Sandrine Huot, Paul R. Fortin

**Q:** For readers who haven't seen the paper yet, how would you summarize your key findings in plain language?

**A:** We uncovered a new level of regulation in the generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) by neutrophils, through the rapid up-regulation of FcγRI from intracellular compartments. FcγRI, the only high-affinity receptor for IgGs in humans, is constitutively expressed on monocytes but is barely present on resting neutrophils. Interaction with immune complexes rapidly increases its expression, particularly in neutrophils. Its increased expression contributes to enhanced ROS production.

**Q:** What initially sparked the idea for this study?

**A:** This project stemmed from more general measurements of surface markers on neutrophils from patients with lupus or exposed to immune complexes.

**Q:** Was there a moment during the project when the data surprised you?

**A:** Yes! We were expecting other Fc receptors to increase in response to immune complexes. Another surprise was that the correlation between neutrophil FcγRI and ROS production was significant in both healthy and lupus conditions. We expected differences between these groups, so seeing this consistent relationship across contexts was very satisfying and opened up new questions to explore.

**Q:** What methods or approaches were especially important in allowing you to answer this question?

**A:** We relied a lot on flow cytometry, which is powerful, but also can be tricky and requires proper controls. We had to go through a lot of calibration before we could make sense of the data. It is easy to overlook crucial details.

**Q:** What was the biggest challenge you faced during this study, and how did you overcome it?

**A:** The biggest challenge was to find what it means in a bigger picture. Fortunately, the strongest lead came from observations made in whole blood, as opposed to isolated cells. We found that, in neutrophils, the spontaneous production of ROS -in the absence of external stimuli- correlated specifically with FcγRI expression. This suggests a possible functional link between FcγRI, immune complexes in circulation, and the regulation of their clearance by neutrophils.

**Q:** What do you enjoy most about doing research?

**A:** Collective thinking at the edge of knowledge is one of the most exciting parts of research.

**Q:** How do you approach creativity or problem-solving when you hit a scientific roadblock?

**A:** Most often by taking some distance from the said roadblock. Changing the perspective is helpful.

**Q:** What part of working in science brings you the most satisfaction?

**A:** We find it very satisfying to see a piece of the puzzle become clearer through the process of experimenting, refining ideas, and overcoming challenges. Those moments when things start to make sense are incredibly rewarding.

**Q:** Looking ahead, what excites you most about where the field is heading in the next few years?

**A:** In a field of autoimmune diseases like lupus, no doubt that immunotherapy is the next breakthrough, appearing as a game changer for a condition that currently has no known cure. The challenge is to make that technology available to a larger proportion of patients. We also see great potential in a more collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to research. As we move toward more personalized and innovative therapies, bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise—from patients, clinicians, and scientists to voices beyond traditional scientific fields—can help us ask new questions, think differently, and develop solutions that truly make a difference.

**Q:** What advice would you give to those that are at the beginning of their scientific journey?

**A:** Resilience. It will not be easy, but it will be fulfilling, eventually. Perseverance requires accepting that things do not have to be perfect to move forward. The idea that "better done than perfect" can help overcome the paralysis of perfectionism and leave room for creativity, discovery, and growth.

## Behind the Science: Interview with JLB Author Anna Nicolela

by Ramizah Mohd Sabri

Read in JLB!

# Adenosine drives suppression of CD16low NK cell responses against HGSC via NKG2A:hLA-E interactions

**Q:** For readers who haven't seen the paper yet, how would you summarize your key findings in plain language?

**A:** In this work, we demonstrate that adenosine, which accumulates in tumour microenvironments, is associated with suppression of immune function driven by natural killer (NK) cells. Interestingly, we also find an association between adenosine exposure and expression of HLA-E, which acts as an inhibitory ligand through the inhibitory receptor, NKG2A. There are two different isoforms of NKG2A, and for people with the higher affinity "V5" allele, this inhibition is more profound. Of course, more work is necessary to understand this pathway, but it might expose a reason and target for NK cell inhibition in the solid tumour microenvironment.

**Q:** What initially sparked the idea for this study?

**A:** In the Boudreau lab, we are developing NK cells as immunotherapy for ovarian cancer and other solid tumours. It was already known that adenosine is associated with poorer immunity and outcomes for patients with ovarian cancer, but we wanted to understand what the impact was on NK cells, and whether there is a putative mechanistic link, and possibly a target, that we could use to strengthen the NK cell response in an ovarian tumour. Since blocking antibodies against NKG2A already exist and are being tested in clinical trials, it might be possible to leverage them to enhance NK cell activity in ovarian tumours.

**Q:** Was there a moment during the project when the data surprised you?

**A:** This work initially started off as two projects and, as with all good science projects, there were a few surprises along the way! First, we were surprised to learn that although adenosine suppressed NK cell function against ovarian cancer cell lines, it was not an impact of the adenosine directly on the NK cells. Instead, it seems, NK cells' reactivity is diminished by something that happens when the tumour cells are first exposed to adenosine. We were concurrently studying HLA-E:NKG2A polymorphisms and how they impact inhibition, so we were excited when we found that adenosine could induce upregulation on of HLA-E on the tumour cells! From there, we surmised that one of the inhibitory mechanisms brought about by adenosine exposure was enhancement of the inhibition that occurs via NKG2A:HLA-E engagement.

**Q:** What methods or approaches were especially important in allowing you to answer this question?

**A:** Flow cytometry is central in this work. For NK cells, function varies within and between the repertoires of individuals, as a product both of epistatic genetic interactions and variegated co-expression of different receptors. Thus, even within a single donor, appraising the function of NK cells is difficult: we needed to use high parameter flow cytometry so that we could understand the features of the NK cells that were responding to our tumour cells with and without adenosine treatment! With this technology, we could concurrently understand what receptors might be available and then move forward with studying their function.

**Q:** What was the biggest challenge you faced during this study, and how did you overcome it?

**A:** For a while, we expected that adenosine would act directly on NK cells to inhibit them. We also eventually learned that the tumour cells needed time to respond to the adenosine treatment – and upregulate HLA-E – to mediate their suppressive effects. This highlights a key element of tumours in that they can adapt to changes around them, and that, when designing new therapies, it will be important to consider all the manifestations that the disease may have.

**Q:** What do you enjoy most about doing research?

**A:** We enjoy the thrill of chasing down a problem! With systematic questions (and good controls) the science will lead you to an answer. It's fun to go from an observation via mechanistic studies to a consequence that is explained biologically.

**Q:** How do you approach creativity or problem-solving when you hit a scientific roadblock?

**A:** We think the key is in the planning phases! Of course, hypotheses might not be supported by specific experiments sometimes, but an experiment that has been planned with the right control groups should nevertheless be interpretable. It becomes possible to design follow up experiments when results aren't what you expect. We will often include additional test groups in our experiments, informed by the literature or curiosities – these can give us an early signal where the next

interesting finding might be. If you keep up with the literature and have good conversations at conferences and poster presentations, it becomes easy to think about alternative explanations, and do these types of "flyer" experiments while still moving your primary project forward.

**Q:** What part of working in science brings you the most satisfaction?

**A:** Seeing fundamental research start to inform treatment is really exciting! In the lab, we're bringing new approaches to precision medicine forward, including engineering and selecting features of NK cells that will make them fit-for-purpose as cellular therapy. Through mechanistic studies, we can identify and understand the key features of NK cells that enable them to execute their functions!

**Q:** Looking ahead, what excites you most about where the field is heading in the next few years?

**A:** Next steps will be interrogating how these observations can be leveraged to better understand tumour biology and implement NKG2A as a target in precision medicine. So far, blocking NKG2A with antibodies hasn't been effective on its own in therapeutic applications. Combination therapies including anti-NKG2A are now being tested. Our work adds a new facet to this – for example, arming NK cells to be resistant to NKG2A-mediated inhibition, or blocking it, might be most or only effective in people carrying the V5 variant of NKG2A.

**Q:** What advice would you give to those that are at the beginning of their scientific journey?

**A:** Science won't always be easy, and if your hypotheses are always right, you're probably not asking hard enough questions! Use the literature to design smart hypotheses, design lots of controls, and interpret your data as soon as possible so that you can keep moving forward! Finally, planning your experiments well in advance gives you an opportunity to seek help with unfamiliar techniques and ensure the greatest success!

# REVIEWER APPRECIATION PROGRAM

SLB and JLB recognize none of these quality articles in JLB could happen without our dedicated reviewers. Whether a long-time reviewer and member of our community or a newer addition to the review team coming through the Society's Reviewer Training Program, SLB and JLB are now making moves to properly recognize these dedicated individuals and the role they play in the publication process.

In this issue of iSLB, we are recognizing the top 25 reviewers for the first half of 2026. In the future, we will be recognizing these efforts or a regular annual basis. Recognition includes measures such as certificates and complimentary membership in the society. If you are not already a Reviewer with JLB, consider signing up today by contacting mailto:jlbstaff@leukocytebiology.org!

## Top 25 JLB Reviewers:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Kazuhiro Nagai* | *Andri Leo Lemarquis* | *Lisa Spencer* | *Amy Klion* | *Arup Banerjee* |
| *Filiz Korkmaz* | *Eric Alves* | *Mats Johansson* | *Alberto Mantovani* | *Andrew Teo* |
| *Jacob Jackson* | *Kamila Guimarães-Pinto* | *Shigeharu Ueki* | *Alexander Pedroza-Gonzalez* | *Benjamin Gern* |
| *Tian Xu* | *Irving Allen* | *Xin Chen* | *Ana Maria Faria* | *Mark Cronan* |
| *Yibo Chen* | *Juhi Bagaitkar* | *Xinxin Luo* | *André Amorim da Costa* | *Daniela Moreno Vicencio* |

## SLB Member Appointed Executive Vice Chancellor for Medical Affairs and Dean of WashU Medicine

Congratulations to long time SLB member Bruce Levy for his recent appointment in this prestigious role. Learn more and join us in celebrating Bruce's well-deserved recognition and accomplishments.

# Behind the Science: Interview with JLB Authors Lisa Spencer & Natalie Falta

by Ramizah Mohd Sabri

Read in JLB!

## Gut-derived, inflammatory ILC2s disseminate type 2 immunity to remote lung in food allergen-challenged mice


Lisa Spencer

**Q:** For readers who haven't seen the paper yet, how would you summarize your key findings in plain language?

**A:** Our study examined how allergic immune responses initiated in the small intestine can disseminate to the lungs following intestinal food allergen exposure. We found that in allergen sensitized mice, intragastric challenge with allergen elicits duodenum localized tuft cell expansion, IL-25 production, and expansion of a subset of IL-25-responsive type 2 innate lymphoid cells (inflammatory ILC2s, or "i"ILC2s). These gut-derived iILC2s migrate through the mesenteric lymph nodes and ultimately to the lungs. Once in the lungs, iILC2s alter the cytokine environment by promoting early IL-13 production and are required for rapid induction of Muc5ac. Eosinophils increase in remote lung 24 hours after iILC2s; however, surprisingly, iILC2s were not necessary for subsequent eosinophil recruitment. This is the first report of gut-derived migratory iILC2s in a food allergy model and identifies the duodenum as a regional hub for food allergen-driven expansion of lung-migratory iILC2s that disseminate type 2 immunity from the GI tract to the respiratory system.

**Q:** What initially sparked the idea for this study?

**A:** The idea for this study originated from previous work in our laboratory examining the immunobiology of mucosal tissue eosinophils and the allergic march, the clinical progression of allergic disease from one tissue site to another. In those earlier studies, we observed that allergen challenge to the skin, gut, or lung increased eosinophil populations locally, and also in remote (allergen non-exposed) gut and lung. For example, oral allergen challenge not only elicited local intestinal eosinophils, but also increased eosinophils in allergen-naïve lungs. This study was initiated to determine how allergic immune signals are transmitted along the gut-lung axis to regulate eosinophil recruitment. In our first sets of experiments we evaluated transcriptional changes in the lung after intragastric allergen challenge and observed increased expression of markers associated with iILC2s. Since ILC2s are known to promote eosinophil recruitment, we hypothesized that iILC2s could be the cellular link between intestinal allergen exposure and eosinophil recruitment into remote lung. Ironically, although this study demonstrates duodenal iILC2s rapidly disseminate type 2 immunity along the gut-lung axis, we surprisingly found subsequent eosinophil infiltration into remote lung to be independent of iILC2s.


Natalie Falta

**Q:** Was there a moment during the project when the data surprised you?

**A:** We initially hypothesized that gut-derived iILC2s were responsible for recruiting eosinophils to the lungs after intestinal allergen exposure, based on evidence that lung-resident ILC2s promote eosinophilic inflammation during airway allergy. Instead, when we pharmacologically blocked iILC2 migration, eosinophils still accumulated in the lungs. This changed the direction of the paper.

**Q:** What methods or approaches were especially important in allowing you to answer this question?

**A:** A mouse food allergy model was essential for this project, along with an IL-25 stimulation model that allowed us to streamline experiments. Flow cytometry, gene expression analysis, and histology allowed us to track these cells and determine how they influenced immune responses in the lungs.

**Q:** What was the biggest challenge you faced during this study, and how did you overcome it?

**A:** NAF: Understanding what the iILC2s were actually doing once they reached the lungs if not recruiting eosinophils. On a personal level, I completed most of the experimental work during undergraduate summer and winter breaks, so maintaining continuity between semesters required careful planning.

**A:** LAS: I agree with Natalie on both counts. Scientifically, a direct link between ILC2s and eosinophils is so well established in allergic models that it took several complementary experimental approaches and multiple trials to truly convince ourselves that the two cells can operate independently in this system. On the personal side, Natalie earned herself a leadership role on this project while still an undergraduate student. As a mentor and a PI, it became challenging at times to make decisions that balanced prioritizing her growth and training trajectory with the laboratory's need for timely productivity. We overcame this challenge by being intentional about transparent and regular communication that also included all members of the laboratory, who offered tremendous intellectual and experimental support to keep the project moving.

**Q:** What do you enjoy most about doing research?

**A:** NAF: I love trying to become an expert on the topic I'm pursuing. I enjoy tracking down papers that refine my thinking and help me develop new hypotheses. Research pushes me to think creatively, especially when the data don't match my original hypothesis. I enjoy piecing together a new explanation from the evidence I have, almost like solving a puzzle. What excites me most is how each new explanation opens up questions I hadn't thought to ask before.

**A:** LAS: Well said!

**Q:** How do you approach creativity or problem-solving when you hit a scientific roadblock?

**A:** I often take a step back—sometimes literally, through a run or a hike, and sometimes figuratively, by stepping back to look at the bigger picture—to cultivate perspective. Often, if I set the project aside for a time, new inspiration will come unexpectedly while reading a paper, listening to a talk, or interacting with colleagues.

**Q:** What part of working in science brings you the most satisfaction?

**A:** NAF: What brings me the most satisfaction is finally figuring out why data that didn't make sense actually does. Those moments often change the direction of a project and lead to the most interesting discoveries.

**A:** LAS: I agree with Natalie. We follow the data, and that can lead to some murky waters. They may be few and far between, but those "eureka" moments when a key experiment finally unlocks the missing piece of a puzzle are amazing!

**Q:** Looking ahead, what excites you most about where the field is heading in the next few years?

**A:** Our evolving appreciation of eosinophils as tissue-resident managers of homeostasis, and their apparent dynamic plasticity in response to microenvironmental cues. This, layered with technological advances that are allowing us to begin to interrogate spatial cellular neighborhoods and predict intercellular signaling circuits, are likely to reveal important new context-dependent roles for these cells in health and disease. I'm excited about the prospect of leveraging these new insights to develop more nuanced therapeutic approaches for the treatment of eosinophil-associated diseases.

**Q:** What advice would you give to those that are at the beginning of their scientific journey?

**A:** Be intentional about setting aside time to read, think deeply, and engage with others. Expose yourself to different fields and ideas. Hold hypotheses lightly and follow the data.


Now accepting late breaking abstracts through August 19th. See the full list of SIGs, details on the dinner workshop and more program details.

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