



IMSD Newsletter

Dear IMSD students, alums and friends,

Happy Summer to all! The IMSD office received so many exciting student updates this past month that we wanted to share some of this good news with all of you. Please read on to learn about graduations, fellowships, outreach, and mentoring activities that IMSD students have been involved in this year.

The UChicago IMSD staff

IMSD Graduations and Accolades

Several IMSD students have graduated with their PhDs this year! Since Fall 2021, the following students have defended their dissertations and graduated:

Elisa Pabon, PhD in Neurobiology (de Wit lab), Fall 2021

Mathew Perez-Neut, PhD in Cancer Biology (Zhao lab), Fall 2021

Cody Hernandez, PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology (Staley lab), Winter 2022

Erick Bayala, PhD in Integrative Biology (Kronforst lab), Spring 2022

Selina Baeza-Loya, PhD in Neurobiology (Eatock lab), Summer 2022

Nadya Ali, PhD in Evolutionary Biology (Santymire lab), Summer 2022

We are very proud of all of our graduates! We will miss them but are certain that their hard work both in and out of the lab, on and off campus, through mentoring activities, outreach, volunteering and advocacy will have a lasting impact at UChicago. While we won't attempt to list all of the successes and activities of these amazing students, below is a brief summary of just some of the achievements of the IMSD graduates while at University of Chicago.

Dr. Elisa Pabon spent the past several months after her graduation finishing her research projects in the de Wit lab and publishing multiple journal articles based on her dissertation work. While in graduate school Elisa mentored several new IMSD and PREP Scholars and served as the TA for the Graduate Summer Research Program for incoming IMSD students. Elisa was awarded an NIH F31 Fellowship as a graduate student here and will be moving to California to start her postdoc position at UCLA later this summer.

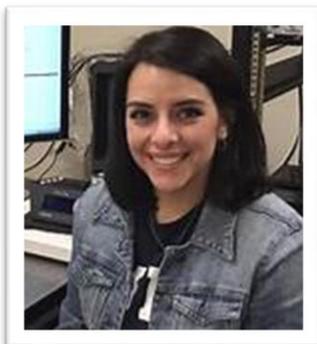


Dr. Mathew Perez-Neut was awarded an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship to support his research in the lab during graduate school, and was recognized for his significant achievements in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion at UChicago in receiving the [UChicagoGRAD Diversity Advisory Board \(DAB\) 2021 Diversity Award](#). Mat, along with Cody Hernandez and other students, was instrumental in conceiving of the idea (and name!) for [GRIT](#) – the Graduate Recruitment and Initiative Team, and in getting it started both on campus here and at other universities. Both Mat and Cody were also involved in planning and implementing the 2019 Midwest Regional IMSD/PREP Symposium along with a team of other PREP and IMSD students. Please see the DAB link above to read more about Mat's inspiring DEI efforts while at UChicago. Mat now works as a Scientist at Evozyne.



Dr. Cody Hernandez was awarded an HHMI Gilliam Fellowship that supported his dissertation research in graduate school. Cody was also involved in initiating and implementing many important DEI programs while in graduate school including GRIT, and was recognized as one of the four inaugural recipients of BSD Diversity Committee (BDC) [Trainee Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Awards](#) in 2021. Through the HHMI Gilliam Fellows group, Cody co-founded the national Transforming Academic Ecosystems (TAE) Consortium that promotes positive change and mental well-being for graduate students. Cody is now working as a Scientist at Evozyne.

Dr. Erick Bayala has been an active member of GRIT which included traveling as a recruiter for the BSD graduate programs. Erick has also served as a mentor on campus to many new PREP and IMSD students, and has always provided a friendly welcome, especially to any new students coming from his home island of Puerto Rico. Erick received an Honorable Mention for an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship application and was recently awarded a competitive NSF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Biology for his postdoc fellow position that will start this summer at the University of Michigan.



Dr. Selina Baeza-Loya also took on an important early leadership role in GRIT, overseeing the organization along with others, as GRIT expanded to multiple branches and graduate divisions after its initial creation as a BSD recruitment group. She also served on the [UChicagoGRAD Diversity Advisory Board](#) (DAB) and the NESSTP steering committee. For her scientific work, Selina was awarded both a Ford Fellowship and an HHMI Gilliam Fellowship to support her dissertation research. Selina is currently continuing her academic research training as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Washington.

Dr. Nadya Ali received multiple fellowships to support her dissertation research while at UChicago, including the Henry Hinds Fund, a Pritzker Lab Grant through the Field Museum, a SAFE Grant from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and a Smithsonian Fellowship. Nadya has just started her post-PhD position as a Data Scientist at the Philo tech company based in California. She would be happy to share her insights on landing an industry job with any students who are in the market!



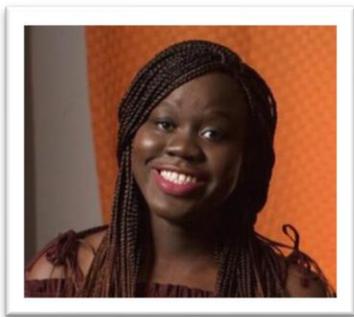
IMSD alum **Dr. Daniel Ruiz** (PhD 2019) was recently awarded an NIH F32 Postdoctoral Fellowship for the research he is doing at Emory University. Congratulations Daniel!

Previous IMSD graduates are listed on our website: <https://imsd.uchicago.edu/alumni/>. To date 11 IMSD students have completed their PhDs and 3 students have graduated with MS degrees. Please reach out with any updates!



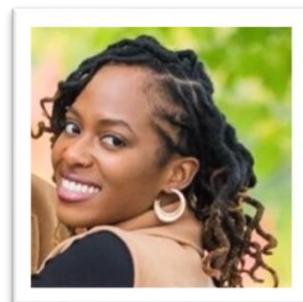
IMSD Summer Final Defense Dates

Several additional IMSD students are in their final stages of preparation for their defense presentations scheduled for this summer. Good luck and best wishes to all!



Elaine Kouame (Jabri lab) just defended her dissertation on July 18, 2022 for her PhD in Immunology. In addition to being an active member of GRIT, Elaine has advocated for fair faculty hiring practices at UChicago and co-founded the national Black in Immuno organization (read more about her work with this group in this [recent article](#)). Elaine also published two articles in the Journal of Immunology about Black in Immuno week, found [here](#). Elaine was also recognized as one of the four inaugural recipients of BSD Diversity Committee (BDC) [Trainee Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Awards](#) in 2021. After finishing her dissertation work, Elaine plans to continue her career in academic research as a postdoc fellow.

Evelyn Campbell (Nagler lab) is set to present her final dissertation defense on July 22, 2022 for her PhD in Microbiology. Evelyn has been active in multiple mentorship initiatives, such as serving as a STEM Educator for Target HOPE for local high school students and as a volunteer poster judge and mentor with the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP) Symposium. At UChicago, Evelyn has served as the Board Chair of the UCGrad [Diversity Advisory Board](#) where she has assisted in developing programs and resources related to diversity in graduate education in order to support graduate students and postdocs from racial/ethnic and other historically underrepresented groups in higher education.



Roy Morgan (Kee lab) plans to defend his dissertation research this August, 2022 to complete his PhD in Genetics, Genomics and Systems Biology. Roy is also passionate about teaching, outreach and mentorship. While at UChicago, Roy, along with other students and postdocs, developed an outreach program called Computational STEM Lab (CSL), designed to teach introductory coding skills to high-school students along with introducing them to research and graduate school. Roy volunteered as a tutor with Tutoring Chicago for several years where he also held a position on the Tutoring Advisory Board (TAB).

IMSD Student Activities

Thank you to all our current students who provided recent updates on your activities this year. There is too much to list here, but many students attended and presented at conferences, volunteered at outreach events, recruited for the graduate school, and received nominations for individual fellowships or training grant appointments, among other accomplishments. Congratulations and great work everyone!



Welcome to our new IMSD Students and UChicago PREP Scholars!

The newest cohorts of UChicago IMSD students and PREP Scholars just started this month. Please join us in welcoming them! If you are interested in serving as a peer mentor to one of our new PREP or IMSD students, we are still in need of a couple volunteers this year.

The **2022-23 PREP Scholars** are shown here and include: Nadjet Cornejal (developmental biology), Viridiana Leon (biochemistry), Imani

Gordon (genetics and pathology), Isabelle Young (neurobiology and psychology), Jermaine Austin (cancer bio and cell bio), Omar Fernandez (cell and molecular biology), Zachary Briscoe (biophysics) and Julian Bonilla Diaz (virology and infectious diseases).



Incoming graduate students in the 2022 BSD Summer Research Program



We are also happy to welcome new IMSD graduate students Karen Velez (CMB), Lizette Zavala (BMB), Nicole Arellano (Cancer Bio), Nina Amarandos (Immunology) and Brandon Grandison (E&E) who are participating in the graduate summer research program and have just started summer lab rotations. Also participating in the summer program are Gianna Davis (Neurobio) and Luciano Simonetta (DRSB) who received fellowships from Dr. Schwartz's NESSTP grant for this summer, along with Selena Martinez (Evolutionary Bio), Stephanie Hartel (CMB) and Koray Kasan (Integrative Bio). Luciano just completed his PREP year here, along with Deborah Rodriguez (Cancer Bio), who will also be matriculating to UChicago in the Fall. Congratulations to all on your fellowships and acceptances to UChicago!

The IMSD would also like to thank Victor Mendoza for serving at the TA for the 2022 Graduate Summer Research Program and Jorge Alvarado for serving as the TA for the [NESSTP Undergraduate Summer Research Program](#) for students interested in Neuroscience. Ashleigh Polo and Hagerah Malik are also serving as peer mentors for the NESSTP program. For any students whose research is related to Neuroscience, please be sure to check out the [funding opportunities available through NESSTP](#).

IMSD Student Awards

The university has not yet announced a second round of DEI awards for 2022, so we would like to do a throwback to 2021 for anyone who might have missed this! Congratulations again to the four inaugural recipients of BSD Diversity Committee (BDC) [Trainee Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Awards](#): IMSD students Cody Hernandez (PhD 2022) and Elaine Kouame, as well as UChicago PREP alums Christine Roman (PhD 2021) and Juan Apiz-Saab, whose award was from the University of Chicago Comprehensive Cancer Center. As mentioned above as well, Mathew Perez-Neut (PhD 2021) received the [UChicagoGRAD Diversity Advisory Board \(DAB\) 2021 Diversity Award](#). We look forward to the next round of awards!

IMSD Evaluation Project

Our long-term IMSD Evaluation project is on-going at this time. Thank you to all who participated in the beta testing last year and the online surveys that were developed in collaboration with NORC. These skill-based assessment forms are designed to track students' progress through graduate school and cover 8 categories of skills that have been shown to be essential for doctoral student development: Knowledge of Research Specialization, Critical Thinking, Experimental, Computational, Communication, Management, Leadership and Resiliency Skills. Both student and mentor versions have been developed for evaluation in both directions. You can expect to receive a survey as you move through your early, middle and late stages of graduate school. Your responses are much appreciated and will be used to inform and improve the training for future graduate students at UChicago.

We'd love to hear from you! If you have any recent awards or career news to share, or have an idea for an article for a future IMSD newsletter, please e-mail us at irisner1@peds.bsd.uchicago.edu.

Visit the University of Chicago IMSD website: <https://imsd.uchicago.edu/>