



UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

**Graduate Program in Life Sciences
&
Office of Postdoctoral Scholars
2025 Annual Awards Ceremony**

**Monday, October 27, 2025
3 p.m.
HSF II Auditorium**

**PhD Scholar Award
PhD Thesis Award
Elaine Miye Otani Memorial Award
MS Scholar Award
Alumnus Award
Teacher of the Year Award
Dr. Mark E. Shirliff PhD Student Mentor Award
Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Research Award
Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Mentorship Award
Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Service Award
Faculty Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentorship Award**

A special thank you to all of the faculty members, postdoctoral fellows, and Graduate Program in Life Sciences students who served on this year's Awards Selection Committee.

2025 GPILS/OPS Awards

Remarks by

Jessica A. Mong, PhD, *Assistant Dean for Graduate and Postdoctoral Scholars, University of Maryland School of Medicine*

Kenneth H. Wong, PhD, *Dean, University of Maryland School of Graduate Studies*

Mark A. Reynolds, DDS, PhD, *Dean, University of Maryland School of Dentistry*

PhD Scholar Award

Alexander J. Laurenson

Program in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology

Presented by Matthew B. Laurens, MD, MPH, Professor, Department of Pediatrics

This award recognizes a student who exhibits outstanding academic performance and great potential as a scientist early in their training period.

PhD Thesis Project Award

Povilas Kavaliauskas, MSc

Program in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology

Presented by Vincent Bruno, PhD, Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology

This award recognizes a student whose thesis work is highly significant within their field of study.

Elaine Miye Otani Memorial Award

Da’Kuawn Johnson

Program in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology

Presented by Nicholas H. Carbonetti, PhD, Department of Microbiology and Immunology

This award recognizes a student of outstanding character who demonstrates superior academic performance and exceptional potential to become a competitive and resourceful independent investigator.

2025 GPILS/OPS Awards

MS Scholar Award

Djeneba Sidibe

Program in Cellular and Molecular Biomedical Science

Presented by Maged M. Harraz, MB, BCh, MS, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry

This award recognizes a student in a master's program who has demonstrated an outstanding record of academic performance and shown great potential as a scientist.

Alumnus Award

Ya-Wen Chen, PhD

Program in Molecular Medicine

Presented by Min Yu, PhD, Department of Pharmacology and Physiology

This award recognizes the exceptional achievements of an alum of the Graduate Program in Life Sciences or a program that predated the creation of the Graduate Program in Life Sciences.

Teacher of the Year

William T. Jackson, PhD

Department of Microbiology and Immunology

Presented by Noah Pollack, student in the Program in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology

This award recognizes a Graduate Program in Life Sciences faculty member who is an outstanding and committed educator.

Dr. Mark E. Shirliff PhD Student Mentor Award

Timothy D. O'Connor, PhD

Department of Medicine

Presented by William T. Jackson, PhD, Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology

This award was created in honor of Mark E. Shirliff, PhD, former Professor in the School of Dentistry, Department of Microbial Pathogenesis, and School of Medicine, Department of Microbiology and Immunology. The award recognizes faculty members who have a record of supportive graduate student mentorship.

2025 GPILS/OPS Awards

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Research Award

Julie Rekant, DPT, PhD

Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science

Presented by Odessa R. Addison, DPT, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science

This award recognizes a postdoctoral fellow who has an outstanding record of research performance, professional development, and other accomplishments.

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Mentorship Award

Jimmy Olusakin, PhD

Department of Neurobiology

Presented by Mary Kay Lobo, PhD, Professor, Department of Neurobiology

This award recognizes a postdoctoral fellow who has an outstanding record of mentorship of graduate students or other research-related trainees.

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Service Award

Erik Nordquist, PhD

Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, School of Pharmacy

Presented by Alexander MacKerell, PhD, Grollman-Glick Professor of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

This award recognizes a postdoctoral fellow of outstanding character who shows evidence of a consistent record of service as well as a good working relationship with peers and faculty and has earned the respect of others.

Faculty Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentorship Award

Ivy E. Dick, PhD

Department of Pharmacology and Physiology

Presented by Audra Kramer, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, and Daiana C O. Vieira, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Physiology and Pharmacology

This award recognizes an outstanding faculty member who has a record of supportive mentorship of postdoctoral fellows in their lab.

Special Thanks to Our 2025 GPILS/OPS Awards Committee

Committee Co-chairs

Ruya Liu, BM, PhD, *Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine*

Melissa Kroeger, MA, *Program Specialist, Graduate Program in Life Sciences*

Committee Members

Lori Anderson, MA, MHS

Adam Clark, PhD

Jacqueline A. Clauss, MD, PhD

Paola Corti, PhD

Sara Crane, MA

Eliza Douglass

Katherine Dudek, DPT

Zahra Gohari, MS

Shuo Jim Huang, PhD, MPH

Erica Leyder, MS

Zongpan Li, PhD

Patricia Milletich, PhD

Satoru Otsuru, MD, PhD

Alan Rathbun, PhD, MPH

Alexandria A. Ratzki-Leewing, PhD, MSc

Julie Rekant, DPT, PhD

Saumen Sarkar, PhD

Gretchen Tucker, MA, PhD

Daiana Vieira, PhD

Kelly P. Westlake, PhD, MSc, PT

Alexander Wiltse