



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