

2026 GPILS/OPS Award Descriptions

Please do not provide materials that are not requested in the award description.

Nomination letters should not exceed two pages in length.

Nominations Submitted by Program Directors

Each Program Director should contact their faculty, ask for potential nominees, and work with their governing committee to select an appropriate student to nominate for each award. Each program may only nominate one student per category.

MS Scholar Award

This award is intended to recognize a student who has demonstrated an outstanding record of academic performance and shown great potential as a scientist.

Nominees for this award may not have previously earned a higher degree (e.g., PhD, MD, etc.).

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from the MS Program Director (If a program's Program Director has recently changed, a previous Program Director may provide the letter.)
- One letter of support from a faculty member (a letter from an individual who has served as a mentor, course director, or member of the student's thesis committee is strongly recommended).
- A curriculum vitae including the student's GPA

PhD Scholar Award

This award is intended to recognize a student who exhibits outstanding academic performance and great potential as a scientist early in their training period as a GPILS student.

Nominees for this award must have enrolled in a GPILS PhD program no earlier than the Summer 2023 semester.

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from the student's Program Director or Track Leader (If a program's Program Director or Track Leader has recently changed, a previous Program Director or Track Leader may provide the letter.)
- A nomination letter from the student's current mentor
- One letter of support from another faculty member (a letter from a course director or member of the student's thesis committee is strongly recommended).
- A curriculum vitae including the student's GPA

PhD Thesis Project Award

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

The letters of recommendation should describe the work's significance in the specific field of study.

Nominees for this award are limited to students who have successfully defended their thesis between May 2025 and August 2026 or who will defend before the end of the Fall 2026 semester.

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from the student's mentor
- A letter of support from a faculty member
- A curriculum vitae
- An abstract of no more than 500 words summarizing the overall dissertation project and its significance to the field of study

The Otani Award

The Otani Award commemorates Elaine Miye Otani. Ms. Otani was a student who stood for hard work and perseverance with a particular interest in the mechanisms of cellular differentiation and carcinogenesis. Despite her intense focus on research, she still found time to spread her friendship and goodwill among those around her, trying at the same time to inspire them in their studies. Her family established this award as a living memorial and tribute to her and her aspirations.

This award is given annually to a graduate student of outstanding character who demonstrates superior academic performance and shows exceptional potential to become a competitive and resourceful independent investigator.

The student must have a consistent record of service and support to the overall goals of GPILS by stimulating interest and enthusiasm, as well as attempting to improve the quality of academic studies among fellow students in GPILS. The recipient of this award must show evidence of a good working relationship with peers and GPILS faculty and have earned the esteem of others.

Nominees for this award must have successfully passed their Program's Qualifying Examination.

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from the Program Director or Track Leader (If a program's Program Director or Track Leader has recently changed, a previous Program Director or Track Leader may provide the letter.)
- A letter from the nominee's faculty mentor or another appropriate faculty member
- A curriculum vitae including the student's GPA

Nominations Submitted by Mentors of Postdoctoral Fellows

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Research Award

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

The supporting letters should address the significance of the nominee's work in the context of the specific discipline and science in general.

The postdoctoral fellow must have been employed as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland, Baltimore at any point between Fall 2025 and Fall 2026.

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from the mentor
- A letter of support from a faculty member
- A curriculum vitae
- An abstract of no more than 500 words summarizing the overall dissertation project and its significance to the field of study

Nominations Submitted by Faculty Members, Postdoctoral Fellows, Graduate Students, or Staff Members

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Service Award

In recognition of the University's commitment to our core values and community engagement, this award is intended to honor a postdoctoral fellow of outstanding character who shows evidence of a consistent record of service and support to the School of Medicine, School of Dentistry, or the community, as well as a good working relationship with peers and faculty, and having earned the respect of others.

If the postdoctoral fellow's primary service is mentorship-related to graduate students or other research-related trainees in a laboratory during their time at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, please see the description of the Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Mentorship Award.

The postdoctoral fellow must have been employed as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland, Baltimore at any point between Fall 2025 and Fall 2026.

The following items are required by the committee:

- Two letters from faculty members, postdoctoral fellows, staff members, graduate students, or representatives of a service organization. The letters should specifically highlight the postdoctoral fellow's service record.
- A curriculum vitae highlighting the candidate's service record

Postdoctoral Fellow Excellence in Mentorship Award

This award is intended to honor a postdoctoral fellow who shows an outstanding record of supportive mentorship of graduate students or other research-related trainees in a laboratory during their time at the School of Medicine or the School of Dentistry.

Nomination and support letters should describe the postdoctoral fellow's character, their investment and commitment to training the next generation of researchers, the frequency of the interactions and length of relationships with mentees, and the importance of their impact on the mentee's professional or educational success.

The postdoctoral fellow must have been employed as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland, Baltimore at any point between Fall 2025 and Fall 2026.

The following items are required by the committee:

- A nomination letter from a mentee of the candidate
- An additional letter of support from a faculty member, postdoctoral fellow, graduate student, staff member, or additional mentee
- A curriculum vitae highlighting the candidate's mentorship activity

Nominations Submitted by Postdoctoral Fellows

Faculty Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentorship Award

This award is intended to honor a faculty member with a record of supportive mentorship of postdoctoral fellows.

Nominees must have their primary faculty appointment at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

The following items are required by the committee:

- Nomination letters from two postdoctoral fellows mentored by the candidate
- The candidate's curriculum vitae including a list of current and past postdoctoral fellows and, if known, the current position of past postdoctoral fellows

Nominations Submitted by Graduate Students

Teacher of the Year Award

This award is intended to honor a Graduate Program in Life Sciences faculty member with an outstanding record of teaching graduate students.

Nominees must have their primary faculty appointment at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. Previous winners of this award may not be nominated.

The following items are required by the committee:

- Two separate letters from individual graduate students
- The candidate's curriculum vitae with detailed information on previous and current teaching activities

The Dr. Mark E. Shirtliff PhD Student Mentor Award

This award honors Mark E. Shirtliff, PhD, former Professor in the Department of Microbial Pathogenesis in the School of Dentistry, and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in the School of Medicine. The nominee must have a record of supportive graduate student mentorship. For the purposes of this award, graduate student mentorship means that the faculty member has acted as the dissertation committee chair or co-chair for at least one of the students who provide a nomination letter.

Nominees must have their primary faculty appointment at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. Previous winners of this award may not be nominated.

The following items are required by the committee:

- Two separate nomination letters from individual students who have been mentored by the candidate. These may be current or past students.
- The candidate's curriculum vitae including a list of current and past students and if known, the current positions of past students