

Newsletter

Volume 63, Number 2



Message from Brenda Winkel, PSNA President

**Dear Members of the Phytochemical
Society of North America,**

Greetings from Blacksburg, Virginia,
USA!

It was a great pleasure to see so many of you on the York University campus in Toronto in June, where we held our 64th annual meeting. What a wonderful conference it was, with researchers from across North America and overseas presenting on topics ranging from functional genomics and synthetic biology to chemical ecology and microbiome interactions. Pioneer awardee, Vince De Luca (Brock Univ.), gave both the opening plenary and a career retrospective at the banquet, replete with wonderful photographs of his research team over the years, many key players in the PSNA now themselves. Additional special events included a presentation by indigenous scientist, Jonathan Ferrier,



of Dalhousie, on Mississauga phytochemistry and a unique panel discussion from industry/clinical/academic perspectives on the use of phytochemicals for treating chronic pain. Throughout the conference, the camaraderie and solidarity that has characterized our society across its history was particularly in evidence this year, with the empathy of neighbors, north and south, for the plight of science and scientists in the U.S. on full display.

Phytochemical Society of North America

The Phytochemical Society of North America (PSNA) is a nonprofit scientific organization whose membership is open to anyone with an interest in phytochemistry and the role of plant substances in related fields. Annual membership dues are U.S. \$100 for regular members and \$30 for student members. Annual meetings featuring symposium topics of current interest and contributed papers by conference participants are held throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. PSNA

President's message continued...

This seems like a particularly relevant time to reflect a bit on our society's history. What many of you may not know is that the roots of our society can be traced back to 1961 and the founding of what was then the Plant Phenolics Group of North America (the PPGNA). Thanks to Stewart Brown of Trent University (Ontario, CA), we have a detailed accounting of the first thirty years of the society, published in 1992¹, followed by an update assembled on the occasion of the society's 50th anniversary in collaboration with Constance Nozzolillo (Univ. Ottawa) and Tom Mabry (Univ. Texas) that appeared in 2015². These accounts detail the establishment of the annual conferences, starting in 1961, followed soon thereafter with expansion of the focus from phenolics to phytochemicals and the conversion of the PPGNA to the PSNA officially in 1967. The PSNA Newsletter had its inception around 1970, with Helen Stafford at the helm, and the first public website was launched in 2000, created by David Bird (a student of Peter Facchini's on whose examining committee I served). From these accounts it is also clear that, besides playing role in greatly enhancing awareness of the importance of research on plant specialized metabolism, from early on the society placed a premium on supporting early-career scientists. The first support for student travel came in 1981, followed by monetary awards for the best oral and poster presentations by young investigators starting in 1986, all becoming permanent features of the annual meetings. The society launched the prestigious Arthur C. Neish Young Investigator's Awards in 1995; the Elsevier Phytochemistry Young Investigator Awards were introduced in 2012, supplanted by the

Plant Journal Early Career Awards in 2020. Our Young Members Committee (YMC), established in 2007, is another unique dimension of the PSNA. It held its first event in 2008, an "Ask the Editor" panel focused on advice on publishing journal articles. Eighteen years later this committee continues to grow in importance and influence, bringing creative new dimensions to the annual meetings. This year the YMC has several new initiatives on the front burner under the leadership of Gabby Wyatt (UC Davis), while the past YMC chair, Praveen Khatri (University of Toronto-Mississauga) leads a critical transition of the [PSNA website](#) to a new hosting platform and website builder (stay tuned!).

As we look to next summer's conference in Madison, Wisconsin (June 15-19, 2026), I hope that many of you are planning ahead to participate at this critical time in our society's history. Now more than ever we all stand to benefit from pulling together, not only to celebrate our collective achievements, but to ensure the future of the phytochemistry field by supporting and promoting our early-career members.

In the meantime, these pages are filled with much good news and many helpful resources as we continue to celebrate the vital community that is the PSNA in its 65th year! Please do continue to send your own announcements of special achievements and opportunities to Chair of the Publications Committee and PSNA Secretary Nik Kovinich at kovinich@yorku.ca for inclusion in the spring edition.

**With all the best,
Brenda Winkel**

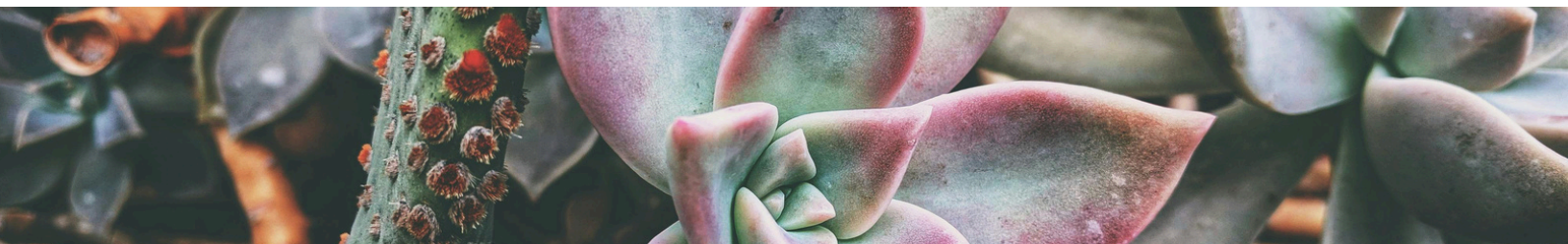
PSNA President (2025-2026)

meetings provide participants with exposure to the cutting-edge research of prominent international scientists, but are still small enough to offer informality and intimacy that are conducive to the exchange of ideas. This newsletter is circulated to members to keep them informed of upcoming meetings and developments within the society, and to provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas. If you would like additional information about the PSNA, or if you have material that you would like included in the newsletter, please contact the PSNA Secretary or visit our website at www.pсна-online.org. Also check the PSNA website for regular updates.

The PSNA is an all-volunteer organization which depends on its membership to run the organization. We appreciate the time and effort these volunteers are putting in to keep the organization up and running. As a member, please consider volunteering to serve on one of these committees. The PSNA can always use more help!

1.1 S.A. Brown, 1992, Recent Advances in Phytochemistry, Vol. 26 pp. 377-393, 10.1007/978-1-4615-3430-3_12

2.2 S.A. Brown, C. Nozzolillo, T.J. Mabry, 2015, Recent Advances in Phytochemistry, Vol. 45, pp. 1-29, 10.1007/978-3-319-20397-3_1





President: Dr. Brenda Winkel

Research Interests: Characterization of the architecture and localization of the Arabidopsis flavonoid enzyme complex using a variety of molecular, biochemical, and cell biological techniques; analysis of the effects of phytohormones on the plant root proteome and metabolome using mass spectrometry-based methods, in collaboration with the Helm Laboratory in the Department of Biochemistry and colleagues at Wake Forest University; development of novel multimetallic complexes for use as anticancer agents, in collaboration with the Brewer Laboratory in the Department of Chemistry.



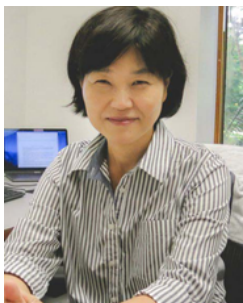
President Elect: Dr. Sohiel Mahmoud

Research Interests: Molecular, cellular, biochemical and environmental factors that regulate the quality and quantity of aromas and essential oils produced by herbal and medicinal plants; identification, cloning and characterization of structural and regulatory genes that are involved in the biosynthesis, inter- and intra-cellular trafficking, secretion and storage of monoterpenes in plants cells specialized for secondary metabolite production.



Past President: Dr. Sangeeta Dhaubhadel

Research interests: Seed quality and defense-related traits in legume crops such as soybean, pea and common bean. Our research goal is to understand the molecular mechanisms underlying the synthesis of specialized metabolites involved in those traits and identify the regulators that control the synthesis/accumulation of these beneficial compounds in legumes.



Treasurer: Dr. Jeongim Kim

Research interests: The Kim Lab studies plant secondary metabolism and hormones, as well as metabolic engineering and plant genetic modification using CRISPR.



Secretary: Dr. Nik Kovich

Research interests: The Kovich Lab focuses on understanding the transcription factor networks that regulate the conserved and lineage-specific metabolic defenses of plants.



Editor-in-Chief, Phytochemistry Reviews: Dr. De-Yu Xie

Research interests: Understanding the structure and biosynthesis of plant natural products, particularly flavonoids, terpenes, and alkaloids. Using a combinatorial approach involving phytochemistry, metabolomics, molecular biology, and biochemistry, we study their structures, biogenesis, and metabolic biology. We leverage these insights to produce novel pharmaceuticals and biofuels through metabolic engineering. Additionally, we are exploring innovative methods to screen for natural products with anti-cancer, anti-malaria, anti-viral, and anti-aging properties.

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65TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PHYTOCHEMICAL SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

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June 15 (Mon) to June 19 (Fri), 2026



The 65th Annual Meeting of the Phytochemical Society of North America (PSNA) will be held at the Memorial Union, University of Wisconsin–Madison (800 Langdon St, Madison, WI) on June 15–19, 2026. The conference will feature sessions on natural product chemistry and artificial intelligence, plant-derived nutrition and medicine, metabolic pathway discovery, chemical ecology, synthetic biology, and ethnobotany, along with workshops on AI integration and career development. Check out more here: <https://sites.google.com/wisc.edu/psna2026madison>





The 64th Annual Meeting of the Phytochemical Society of North America was held on June 24–28, 2025, at the Accolade East Building, York University, Toronto, Canada. The conference brought together 119 local, national, and international scholars. Cutting-edge findings and highlights in phytochemical research were presented by both early-career and senior scientists across eight interdisciplinary symposia:

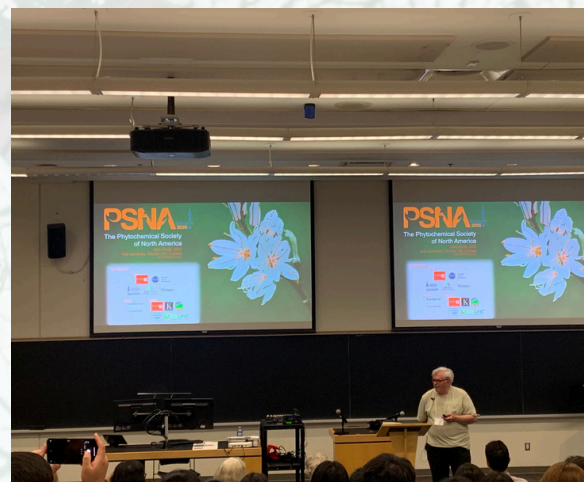
- Symposium I: Gene Discovery and Functional Plant Genomics — Nicholas Provart
- Symposium II: Plant Metabolomics and Pathway Discovery — Yang Qu
- Symposium III: Metabolic Engineering and Plant Synthetic Biology — Elizabeth Sattely
- Symposium IV: Cannabis and Plant-Derived Pharmaceuticals — Mark Lange
- Symposium V: Indigenous Connections and Traditional Botanical Medicines — Jonathan Ferrier
- Symposium VI: Phytochemistry of Functional Foods and Human Nutrition — Diana Roopchand
- Symposium VII: Chemical Ecology and Plant–Organismal Interactions — Bao-Hua Song
- Symposium VIII: Plant Immunity and Microbiome Interactions — Cristiana Argueso



64TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

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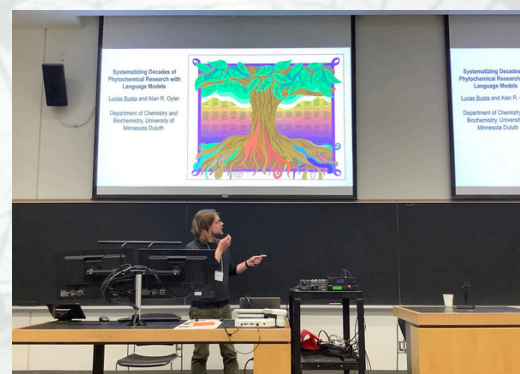
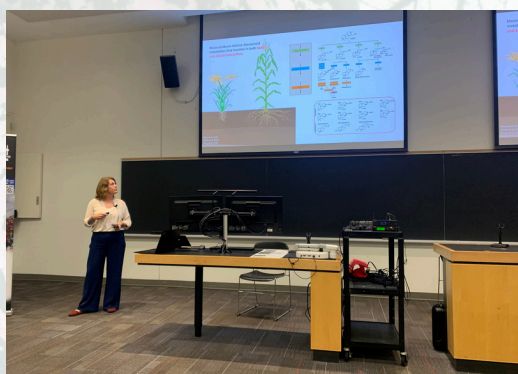
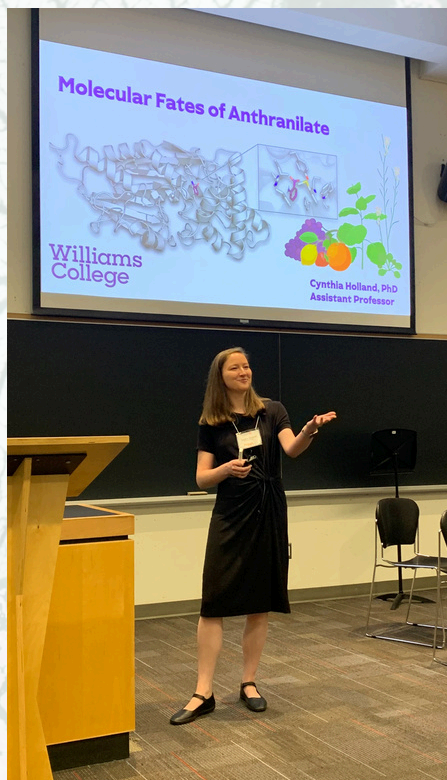
Opening remarks



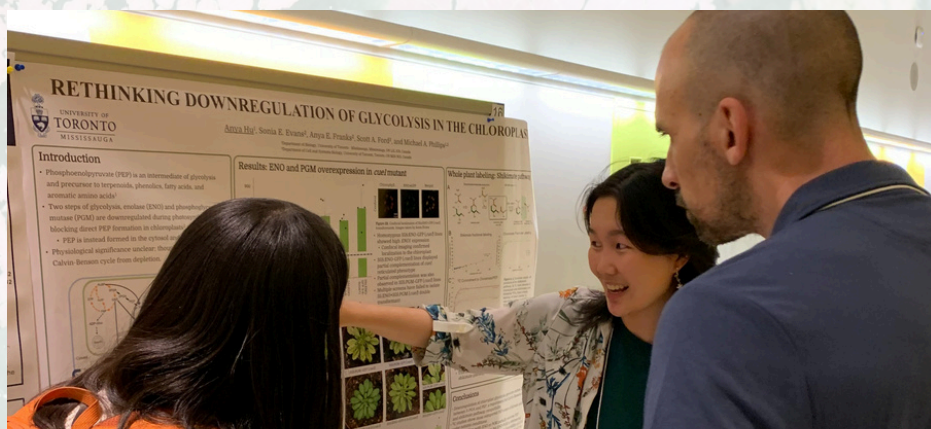
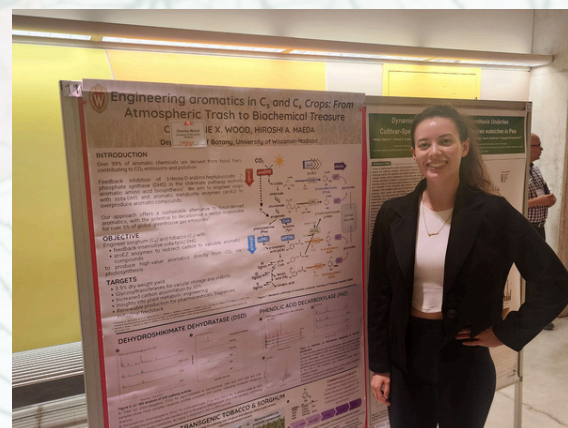
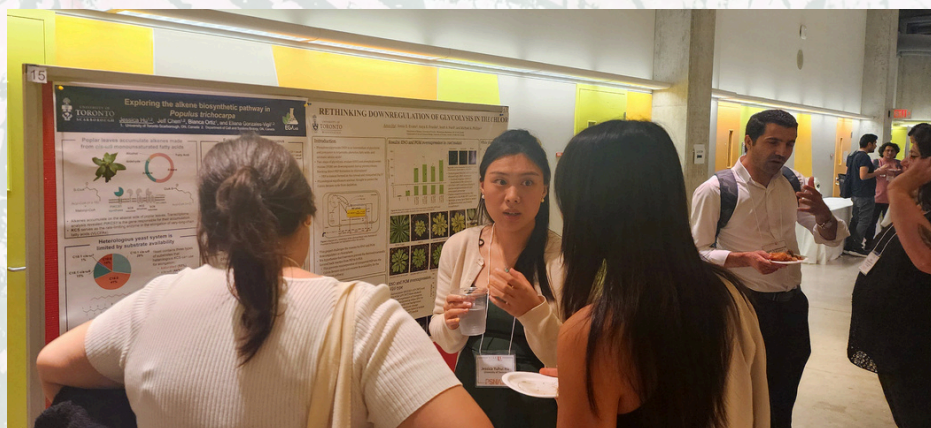
64TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Oral Presentations

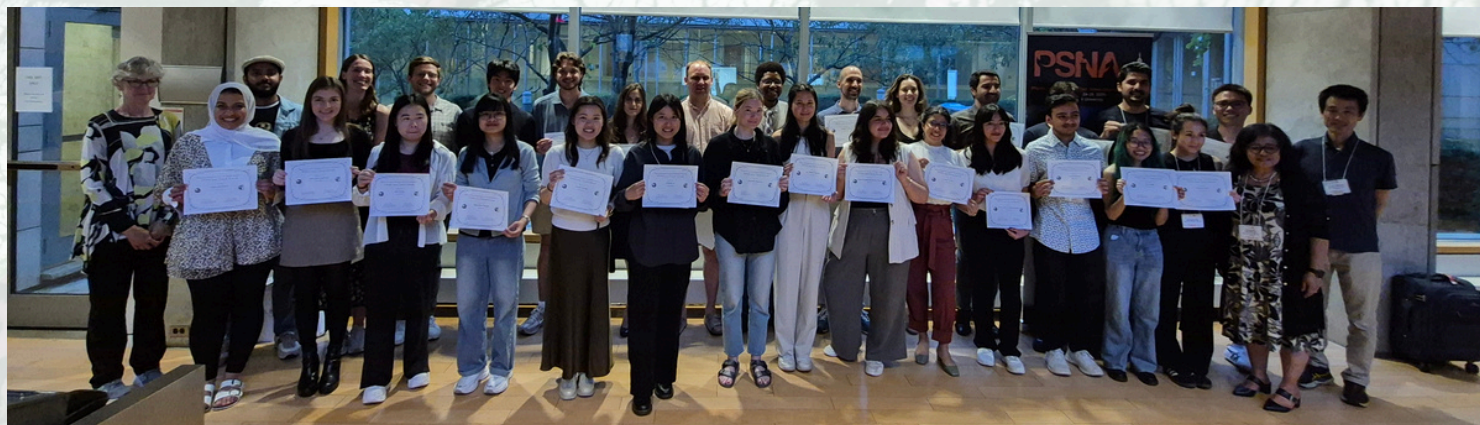
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Poster Presentations



Travel Award Winners



PSNA offers Travel Awards to support students and early-career researchers in attending the Annual Meeting. These awards help offset travel costs, encourage participation, and promote professional development in phytochemistry. Congratulations to all of the 2025 travel award winners!

Trivia Winners



The YMC hosted a fun and lively evening of trivia! Members were tested on their knowledge on York University, plant chemistry, natural products, and more. The winning team members were Anya Franks, Lillian Nowack, Deepak Duhan, Nicholas Moreno, Allison Bergan, and Sean Balogh.

Career Discussion



The YMC also hosted a breakfast event, Careers in Context: Real-Life Perspectives from Phytochemists, featuring a dynamic discussion on mentorship, funding, career transitions, and work-life balance across career stages.

64TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

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Dr. Vincenzo De Luca – PSNA Phytochemical Pioneer Award

The PSNA was proud to honor Dr. Vincenzo De Luca with the 2025 Phytochemical Pioneer Award for his pioneering and lasting contributions to phytochemistry. Over a career spanning more than 40 years, Dr. De Luca has advanced plant biochemistry and biotechnology through over 130 publications, leadership roles, including service as PSNA President, and mentorship across generations. His work has left a lasting impact on phytochemical research and the scientific community worldwide.



Closing Banquet



YOUNG MEMBERS COMMITTEE

From Gabrielle Wyatt, YMC Chair

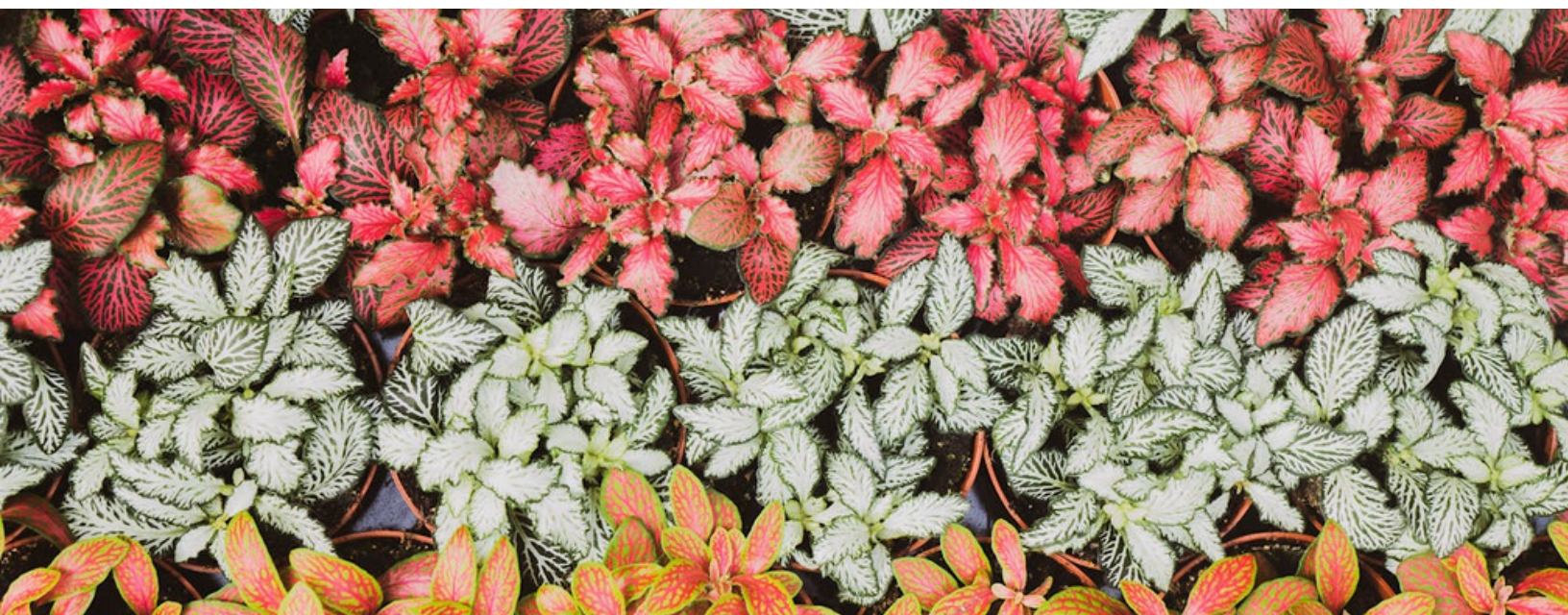
The Young Members Committee (YMC) had a wonderful time connecting with the community at PSNA 2025 in Toronto! Our signature Trivia Night was once again a crowd favorite. This year, we mixed things up by randomizing teams, turning the event into not only a night of laughter and learning but also a networking opportunity where many new friendships and collaborations began.

We were also proud to host the YMC Breakfast, Careers in Context: Real-Life Perspectives from Phytochemists. This session brought together voices across career stages for a dynamic discussion on mentorship, funding, industry transitions, and work-life balance. By fostering dialogue between early-career, mid-career, and senior scientists, we created an inclusive environment where everyone could both share and learn.

Looking ahead, we are already buzzing with plans for PSNA 2026 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Trivia Night will, of course, return with fresh challenges, and the YMC Breakfast will feature a special focus on celebrating diversity—something we view as essential in the current times. We're also planning an early YMC social event to connect young members at the very start of the meeting, and we're developing a new professional development workshop designed to equip young scientists with practical tools for their careers.

Beyond the annual meeting, we are continuing our efforts to increase engagement throughout the year. Building on the success of last year's interview with Dr. Vincenzo De Luca, we will expand this initiative by highlighting PSNA 2026 invited speakers. These interviews will be posted on our YouTube channel, giving members a chance to connect with and learn from the scientists shaping our field before we meet in Madison.

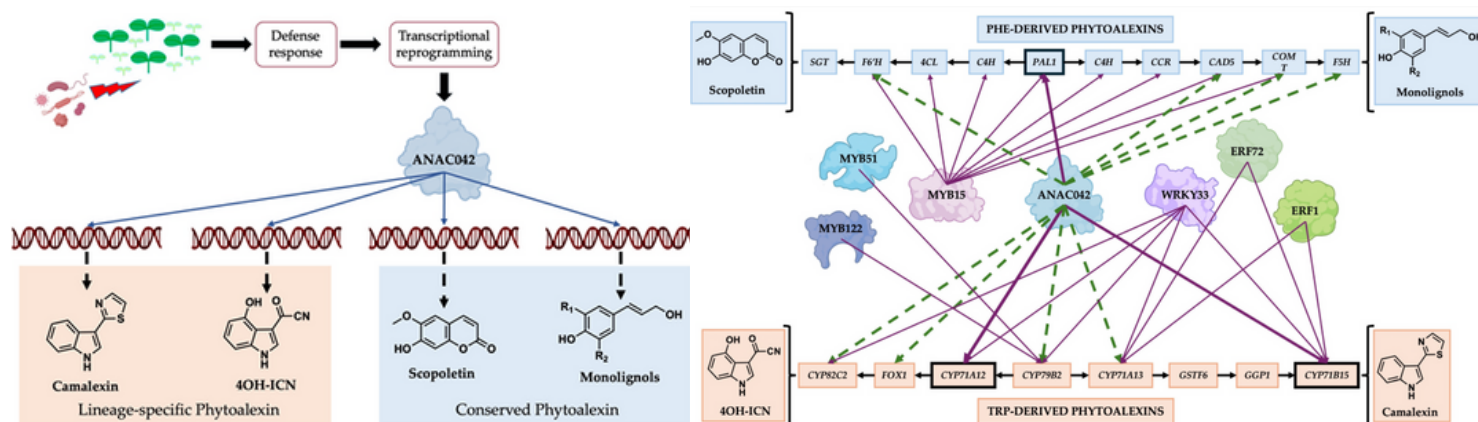
Stay tuned for more updates, and don't forget to follow us on Instagram @psna.official, X @psnaofficial, and Bluesky @psna-official.bsky.social to keep up with all things PSNA YMC. We can't wait to see you in Wisconsin!



Ivan Monsalvo

York University, Ph.D. Candidate

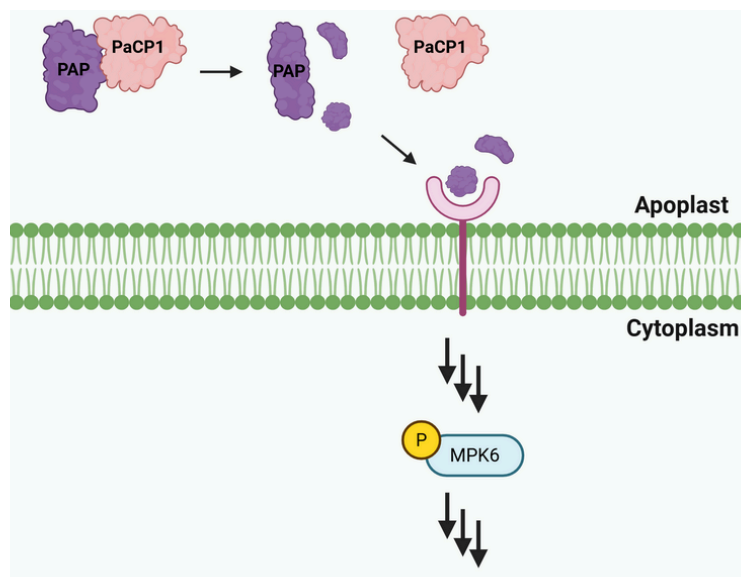
Ph.D. candidate Ivan Monsalvo is the lead author of a new study uncovering how the transcription factor ANAC042 directly regulates both conserved and lineage-specific biochemical defenses in Arabidopsis. Published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences, this work demonstrates that ANAC042 acts as a central regulator of tryptophan- and phenylalanine-derived phytoalexins, bridging ancient and lineage-adapted metabolic pathways. These findings provide key insight into how plants coordinate diverse chemical defenses through a shared regulatory hub, with broad implications for understanding plant resilience and engineering disease resistance. Publication link: <https://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/26/8/3683>



Annabelle Audette

York University, Ph.D. Candidate

The apoplast is often the first point of contact between plant cells and invading pathogens, serving as an important site for defense signaling. Pokeweed antiviral protein (PAP), a ribosome-inactivating protein from *Phytolacca americana* (pokeweed), comprises 1% of the total plant protein and accumulates in the apoplast despite the lack of ribosomes within this space. Annabelle Audette, a Master's student with the Hudak lab at York University in Toronto investigated whether this protein had an unknown function within the apoplast. Annabelle identified a cysteine protease she named PaCP1 (*Phytolacca americana* cysteine proteinase 1) within the extracellular

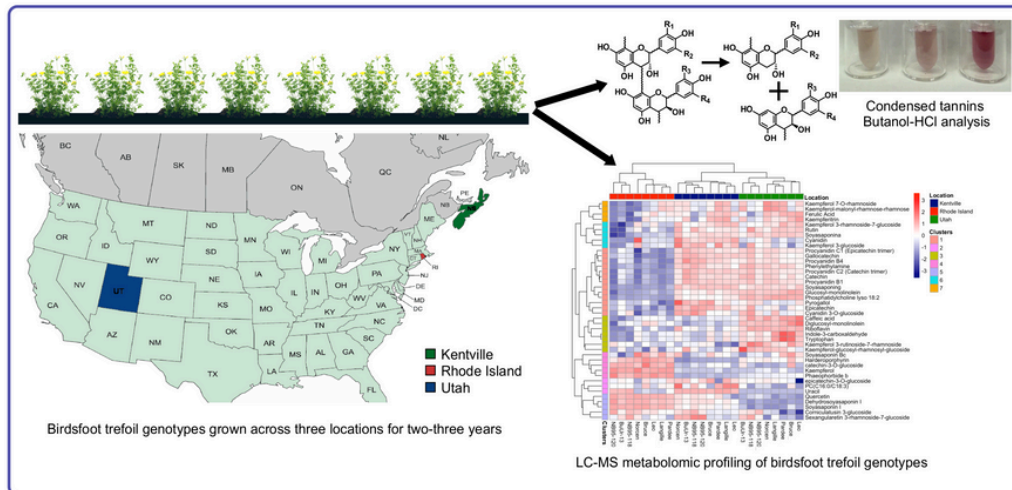


space that bound to PAP. Her sequence and structural analyses classified the enzyme as a member of the C1A subfamily of papain-like cysteine proteases. Immunoprecipitation, mass spectrometry, and yeast two-hybrid analysis showed that PAP specifically binds the mature, active form of this cysteine protease. Curiously, PaCP1 cleaves PAP at its N- and C-termini, generating peptides that enhance MAPK phosphorylation in pokeweed leaves, indicating their potential role in stress signaling. Annabelle's study showing how PaCP1 processing of PAP generates bioactive peptides is the first description of a role for a ribosome-inactivating protein beyond its canonical inhibition of translation. Her findings present a novel extracellular function for PAP and advance our understanding of how protein interactions in the apoplast contribute to plant immune responses. Annabelle's findings were published in the journal *Plants* (<https://doi.org/10.3390/plants14152441>) earlier this year.

Solihu Kayode Sakariyahu

University of Western Ontario, Ph.D. Candidate

Lotus corniculatus L. (birdsfoot trefoil, BFT) is a perennial temperate forage legume valued for its high levels of condensed tannins (CT), which reduce bloating in livestock. Despite its importance, the influence of environmental and yearly factors on CT and other metabolite levels in different BFT genotypes under field conditions remains poorly understood. This study combines conventional CT quantification with metabolomic profiling using high-resolution LC-MS to examine how environmental conditions affect CT and metabolite composition. Eight BFT genotypes were grown in three distinct locations—Kentville (Canada), Rhode Island, and Utah (USA). Results showed significant genotypic variation in soluble CT content, with metabolomic



profiles clustering primarily by geographical location. These findings indicate that environment plays a key role in shaping both CT levels and overall metabolite composition. This insight opens the door to environment-specific selection of BFT genotypes, supporting breeding programs aimed at optimizing CT content, enhancing forage quality, and improving plant resilience.

Larissa Laforest

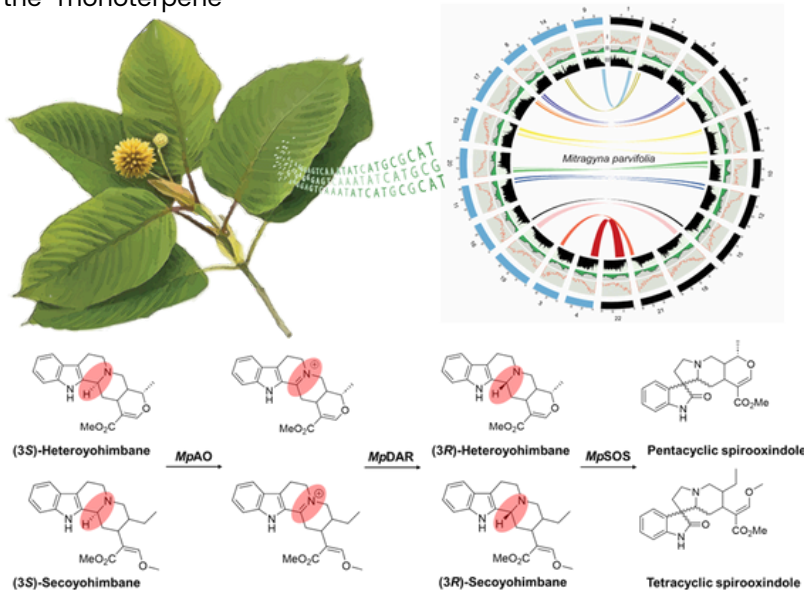
University of Florida, Ph.D.

Tuan-Anh Minh Nguyen

University of British Columbia, Ph.D. Candidate

A US-Canada collaborative team has published a high-quality chromosome-scale genome assembly of *Mitragyna parvifolia*, a spirooxindole alkaloid-producing tree in the Rubiaceae family. By integrating comparative genomics, transcriptomics, and metabolite profiling, the study uncovered candidate genes in the monoterpene indole alkaloid (MIA) pathway and functionally elucidated the biosynthesis of mitraphylline, an anti-proliferative spirooxindole.

This effort was co-led by PhD candidates Larissa Laforest (now graduated, University of Florida, Nadakuduti group) and Tuan-Anh Minh Nguyen (University of British Columbia, Dang group). The collaboration was initiated at PSNA 2023 and has since resulted in both a successful NSERC Alliance International Collaboration grant (Dang) and a USDA-NIFA grant (Nadakuduti), culminating in this joint publication. Notably, Thuy Dang and Swathi Nadakuduti were recently recognized with the PSNA Arthur C. Neish Award, and Anh Nguyen received a PSNA Travel Award, recognitions that highlight the strength and future promise of this collaborative team.



Madison Larson

University of Minnesota Duluth, Ph.D. Candidate

This study examines how epicuticular wax production in *Sorghum bicolor* responds dynamically to environmental signals, particularly light and drought. Epicuticular waxes form visible “blooms” on leaf surfaces that help reduce water loss, making them an important trait for drought tolerance. Using an in vitro induction system, we quantified both the amount and composition of wax under drought and simulated shade treatments. Gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC–MS) was used alongside RNA sequencing to link chemical changes to transcriptional responses, identifying candidate signaling genes associated with wax extrusion.

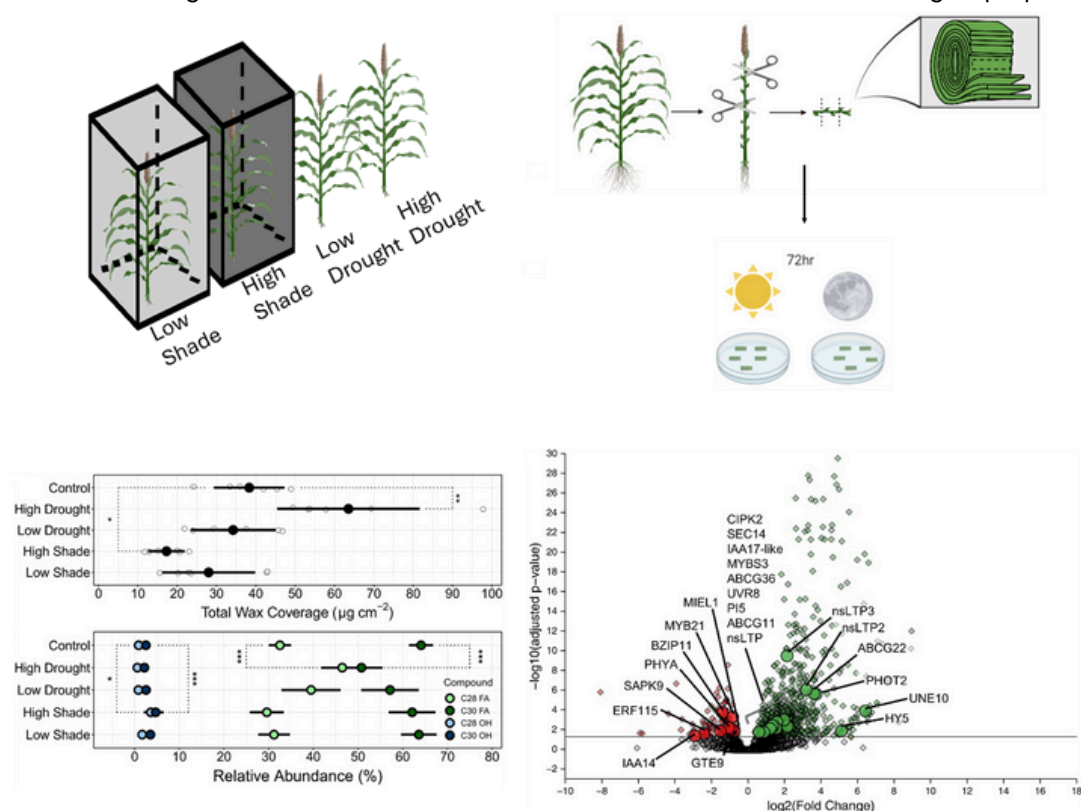
We also established a rapid, non-destructive approach for measuring wax coverage. By analyzing reflectance differences in the visible region of the spectrum, we demonstrated that wax-rich and wax-deficient surfaces could be distinguished spectrally. Building on this, we developed a smartphone-based imaging system with which we detected significant wax differences between control and shade-treated groups, providing a practical tool for field or



greenhouse applications.

The study also highlighted the timescale of wax regulation. Light cues were sufficient to induce visible wax blooms within days, far faster than the months typically required to observe changes under drought or shade in greenhouse conditions. This rapid response emphasizes that wax production is highly dynamic and environmentally sensitive, rather than static or developmentally fixed.

Overall, this work establishes a link between environmental signaling and leaf sheath surface chemistry in sorghum, while providing a scalable tool for wax trait screening. These insights may accelerate breeding and genetic strategies aimed at improving drought resilience in crops.



Highlight Your Publication in the PSNA Newsletter!

The PSNA newsletter (also shared via social media) highlights your recent publications and features first authors that are current PSNA members. Interested? Then, please send us a brief non-technical summary of your paper including the title and authors, and a publication link and graphical abstract or image, if possible. In addition, provide a photo and a brief statement including the first author’s affiliation and research interests. Please send your contributions (text as word document; images as pdf or jpg files) by email to Nik Kovich (kovich@yorku.ca)

We look forward to hearing from you!

An Appreciation from Thuy Dang: Recipient of the PSNA 2025 Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award

I am deeply honoured to receive the Arthur C. Neish Young Investigator Award and to follow in the footsteps of past awardees who have made such significant contributions to the field of phytochemistry. This recognition inspires me to work even harder, not only to advance my own research but also to give back to our scientific community by fostering opportunities for early-career researchers, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds and first-generation scientists like myself. I am sincerely grateful to PSNA for this honour and for cultivating a community that values excellence, mentorship, and inclusivity.



An Appreciation from Cynthia Holland: Recipient of the PSNA 2025 Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award

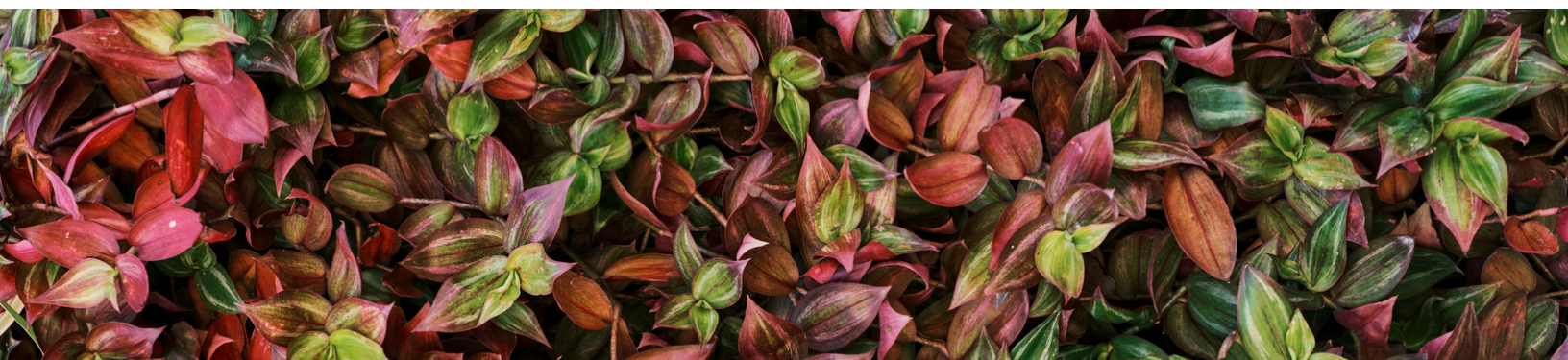
I am deeply honored to be one of the 2025 Arthur Neish Young Investigator Awardees. This recognition is particularly humbling as I look at the list of past award winners, many of them leaders in the field whom I am fortunate to call mentors, collaborators, and friends. I am especially grateful to my graduate school advisor and nominator, Joe Jez, for his support and guidance.

The PSNA meetings have been an excellent place to exchange ideas with fellow experts and learn more about the cutting-edge research being done in our community. Sharing my lab's research on methyl anthranilate biosynthesis at this year's conference was particularly special because Vincenzo De Luca was in the audience.



When I started my lab at Williams College during the pandemic, I anticipated that we would focus on tryptophan biosynthesis in plants. In reading about enzymes that divert tryptophan pathway intermediates toward specialized metabolite biosynthesis, I came across the methyl ester of anthranilate, which is responsible for the aroma of grapes. Reading the 2005 Plant Journal paper from Dr. De Luca's lab describing a two-step pathway for methyl anthranilate biosynthesis in grapes inspired the direction of my independent research. This work laid the foundation for my lab, which has since been supported by an NSF RUI and a NSF CAREER award.

The Neish Award is very meaningful to me and affirms that high-quality phytochemistry research can be conducted at a primarily undergraduate institution. Mentoring students and sparking their excitement for the beauty of plant metabolism and natural products is among the most rewarding aspects of my career, and I am grateful to have such dedicated undergraduate collaborators. Thank you for this honor, and I look forward to connecting with you all in Madison next year.



An Appreciation from Satya Swati Nedakuduti: Recipient of the PSNA 2025 Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award

Receiving the Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award this year (2025) has been an incredibly humbling and inspiring milestone in my academic journey. I am deeply honored to be recognized among such a distinguished group of researchers.

As an Assistant Professor at the University of Florida since 2020, my research program focuses on unraveling the genetic and molecular basis of plants' specialized metabolism, with a particular emphasis on ethnobotanical species. My lab employs multidisciplinary approaches to investigate the genetic basis of chemical diversity in plant-derived bioactive compounds and their biosynthetic pathways, advancing their applications in pharmaceutical, nutritional, and agricultural disciplines. My teaching program is also structured around medicinal plants and phytochemistry, aiming to deepen understanding of plant-derived natural products. As a junior faculty member on the tenure track, the PSNA meetings have been an invaluable platform for professional growth and collaboration within the phytochemistry research community. These meetings have a focused audience and a supportive environment for presenting our research, facilitating meaningful scientific exchange and connections that have directly influenced both my research trajectory and teaching program. For example, at my very first PSNA conference held at Michigan State University in 2023, I met Dr. Thuy Dang, and we initiated a collaboration focused on medicinal tree species *Mitragyna* and the monoterpene indole alkaloid biosynthetic pathway. This partnership led to significant outcomes, including a USDA-NIFA grant awarded the same year and a publication in *Plant Cell* within less than a year. Our PhD students from both labs also benefited immensely, collaborating across labs, presenting at PSNA, and earning travel awards. The most memorable moment for me, however, was receiving the PSNA Young Investigator Award alongside Dr. Dang, a testament to the strength of our collaboration. Furthermore, every year I update my course content to incorporate new insights and developments shared at the PSNA meetings.

The leadership at PSNA has been truly exceptional in fostering the growth of young faculty, particularly women, in the field of phytochemistry. Beyond the high-quality research presentations, the conference sessions – such as career development panels and celebration of women and diversity in phytochemistry, have provided insights into the broader academic experience and life as a scientist. Serving on the Young Members Committee and, more recently, the Phytochem Talks committee has been a rewarding experience. I genuinely look forward to PSNA meetings not just for scientific exchange, but for the sense of community they cultivate. These meetings consistently inspire and foster enduring professional relationships. Each time, I return feeling recharged, with fresh ideas and new perspectives that enrich both my teaching and my journey as a scientist. Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award is both humbling and empowering and is a reminder of the responsibility I carry forward to contribute meaningfully to our society and support other members along the way.



Become a PSNA Member!

Membership in the PSNA is open to anyone with an interest in phytochemistry and the role of plant substances in related fields. Please visit psna-online.org for details!

