



## MIT POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION

### Officer Candidate Booklet, 2015-2016

Elections will be held September 22, 2015 from 12-2pm at E25-401. Candidates are required to attend and pitch to the postdoc electorate. MIT postdocs must be present to vote at the elections. Here is the list of candidates:

#### President

- Virginia Burger
- Sepehr Ehsani
- Lilian Hsiao
- Amir Razmi

#### Vice President

- Sepehr Ehsani
- Wasifa Jamal
- Amir Razmi

#### Treasurer

- Sepehr Ehsani
- Lilian Hsiao

#### Corresponding Secretary

- Kathrin Graetz

#### Recording Secretary

- Soroush Vosoughi

#### Alumni Committee

- Elizabeth Canovic
- Mo Jiang
- Amir Razmi
- Yao Zhang

#### Advocacy Committee

- Sepehr Ehsani
- Wasifa Jamal
- Diego Mendoza-Halliday
- Amir Razmi

- Martin Stewart
- Murat Yildirim

#### **Community Building and Outreach Committee**

- Farrokh Sheibani
- Murat Yildirim

#### **Fundraising Committee**

- Open

#### **Human Affairs Committee**

- Kathrin Graetz
- Amir Razmi
- Claudia Wehrspaun

#### **IT/Information Flow Committee**

- Open

#### **Orientation Committee (Pilot)**

- Elizabeth Canovic
- Kathrin Graetz
- Martin Stewart
- Claudia Wehrspaun

#### **Postdoc Initiative Grant (PIInG) Committee (Pilot)**

- Mo Jiang
- Amir Razmi
- Farrokh Sheibani

#### **Professional Development Committee**

- Elizabeth Canovic
- Sepehr Ehsani
- Dinesh Kumar
- Amir Razmi
- Claudia Wehrspaun
- Murat Yildirim

#### **Sports Committee (Pilot)**

- Amir Razmi

## Candidate Biographies

### **VIRGINIA BURGER**

#### *Candidate for President*

I have been a postdoc at MIT for almost two years and have served as co-chair of the MIT PDA Community Building Committee for the past year. During my time as CBC co-chair, I have helped organize numerous PDA events, including last fall's PDA Cruise, the Postdoc Trivia Night, the Postdoc Socials at Firebrand Saints, and, most recently, the PDA BBQ. Additionally, I organized the Postdoc Seminar Series and helped start the newly formed Get Out Committee for Sports. I very much enjoyed meeting postdocs from across MIT and all over the world while planning and attending these events, and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with so many enthusiastic scientists. Through my regular attendance of PDA meeting and events during my time on the CBC and at MIT, I have learned about the activities and interests of the other PDA committees. Attending the monthly meetings and hearing about the progress each committee had made towards their cause has been a fabulous experience, as it has been very humbling and inspiring to be around so many talented people who choose to dedicate their time to improving the community that they care so much about. My favorite thing about the PDA is that it allows postdocs to identify an area of postdoc life that they think could be improved, and then gives them the means to improve it; it enables people to focus on the way to make a change instead of the need for a change. During my time on CBC, Vincent, the incumbent President, would often advocate or provide resources to CBC to help us reach our goals. I would like to be President of the PDA because of the opportunity to help every committee achieve its goals. Because of my prior PDA experience, I am familiar with the objectives of each committee and the elastic structure of the PDA with respect to determining new objectives. Additionally, I have substantial experience in organizing events through MIT. If President, I hope to improve access to, and awareness of, resources for MIT postdocs and to provide more opportunities for postdocs to network within and outside of their community at MIT. Furthermore, I would streamline the organization process for PDA events, improve PDA advertisement, and continue to reach out to the postdoc community for new ideas.

### **ELIZABETH CANOVIC**

#### *Candidate for Alumni, Orientation, & Professional Development*

I have been at MIT for a year and am a postdoc in the Research Laboratory of Electronics. I completed my Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering at Boston University, where I was involved with several student run groups. I helped to organize and chair our department's first Graduate Student Committee, which allowed for better communication between the department and students. I also was chair of the Outreach and Mentoring Committee for the student group

Graduate Women in Science and Engineering. In that role, I organized many programs such as a weekly after-school science club for elementary school girls, peer mentoring groups for graduate students, and fellowship application workshops. At MIT I have been involved with the PDA's professional development committee and have helped organize poster judging at the Postdocs Share their Science Event this past Spring. I would like to become more involved with the PDA in either the Professional Development Committee, the Alumni Committee or the Orientation Committee.

## **SEPEHR EHSANI**

### ***Candidate for President, Vice President, Treasurer, Advocacy, & Professional Development***

My name is Sepehr Ehsani and I am currently a postdoctoral fellow at CSAIL. My research focuses on protein folding in neurodegenerative diseases. I completed my graduate training at the University of Toronto in the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology, where I studied the mammalian prion protein. I have followed the work of the PDA since starting my postdoc in 2013, and, to build on the excellent work of the PDA over the past years, I would like to put forward four proposals as examples of issues that could be considered by the incoming PDA representatives: (i) Employment status for postdoctoral fellows: As opposed to postdoctoral associates, postdoctoral fellows are not technically considered employees, which prevents them from using their employment status to build credit, etc. Although administratively challenging, the PDA can begin the process of negotiating an avenue through which all postdocs are at least nominally considered employees of the institute. (ii) Academic connections amongst postdocs while at MIT: Most postdoc-directed initiatives, understandably, focus on future career opportunities in industry and academia. However, opportunities for postdocs to connect with each other academically while at MIT are limited. The PDA's involvement in this domain can be expanded. One such initiative that I have worked on is called "MIT Notions" (proposal details available from link [1]). (iii) Postdoc directory on PDA website: To increase the engagement of the more than 1,500 postdoctoral scholars with the PDA, we could tailor the PDA's website such that postdocs can choose to have a profile page on the website and for their contact details to be added to an amalgamated directory, possibly populated from the MIT directory listings. This, in addition to regular biweekly or monthly e-mail updates from the PDA, can increase the visibility of the association to more postdocs at the institute. (iv) Rotating leadership: We could consider modifying the governing structure of the PDA such that the position of president and/or vice-president rotates monthly amongst committee chairs. This might create a bigger pool of ideas and initiatives within the PDA and help solidify the sense of community amongst the association's officers. I look forward to discussing these and other ideas together on September 22nd.

[1] <http://ehsani.csail.mit.edu/initiatives>

## KATHRIN GRAETZ

### *Candidate for Corresponding Secretary, Human Affairs, & Orientation*

Hi, my name is Kathrin Graetz, I am 30 years old and from Germany. I grew up in Berlin, moved to the small city of Clausthal-Zellerfeld (which is roughly at the barycenter of Germany) to study Materials Science and Engineering, and then moved to Aachen (next to the border to the Netherlands and Belgium) to start my PhD. Five years later (which was this July) I moved again and even much further afar. I moved here to start my Postdoc at the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at MIT. That is my story in short.

But what is probably more important/interesting here is why I want to be part of PDA. The answer is quite easy: I like to be part of something that pushes forward, that always tries to improve. And of course, I also want to use PDA to meet new people and to build friendships and networks. In Germany, I am part of two students' organizations (in contrast to the US, you are part of the organization your whole life) and executed different positions (secretary, president). I am part of the German Materials Society: member of the education committee and chairwoman of the junior regional group of North Rhine-Westphalia (until April 2015). And I was the organizing one in my old Institute (excursions, events etc.). I hope that this list shows that I am not satisfied with just doing my project work here at MIT.

However, as I just started (mid-July) and thus have to focus primarily on my project, I want to start (but not finish) with smaller responsibilities to be able to do a competent job at work and at PDA.

## LILIAN HSIAO

### *Candidate for President & Treasurer*

I am a postdoctoral researcher in the ChemE department. My vision for the MIT PDA: To facilitate a welcoming and dedicated environment for all postdocs by fostering communication between departments, working closely with administration, and interfacing with the broader postdoc community from other institutions. I will be focused on initiatives to provide equal benefits to fellows and associates, to make the options available to international postdocs more transparent and organized, and to promote strong community relationships with opportunities for direct engagement with faculty and staff. Prior to joining MIT, I actively engaged in outreach activities by mentoring middle school students and leading science outreach activities designed to teach them how to think like an engineer. This year, I am the founding chair of the Postdoctoral Organization for Women Engaged in Research (POWER@MIT), where we strive to provide professional and personal support to all postdocs with a focus on addressing women's work/life balance needs. This has given me the experience to start an initiative from scratch, find funding sources, and leading a team of highly talented postdocs to achieve a common goal.

I believe that structure, teamwork, and self-motivation is key to a successful organization, and I am ready to work with the PDA advocacy committees and key personnel at the institute level to improve professional and social resources. First, I will work to ensure more effective communication, for instance by combining postdoc listserv emails into a weekly digest with compelling topics. Second, I have extensive experience spearheading interdisciplinary research collaborations, and similarly would enjoy reaching out to higher levels of administration and the broader community to advance our goals for policy changes. As a specific example, I will ask the MIT postdoc community to nominate exceptional faculty for the 2016 Mentor Award given by the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA), and submit a proposal to represent MIT at the NPA annual meeting (both due on 10/2). Third, I will work with the fundraising committee on increasing our support from the institution and the local industry, beginning with alumni networks who will be more sympathetic to our cause. Ultimately, my long-term goal is to build and sustain an inclusive support system for MIT postdocs, both socially and professionally – with input from postdocs themselves.

## **WASIFA JAMAL**

### ***Candidate for Vice President & Advocacy***

Wasifa Jamal is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Brain and Cognitive Science (BSC) department at MIT. Her research interest include signal processing, machine learning, computational cognitive science, complex networks, statistical analysis, pattern recognition and neuroscience. She received her PhD in Electronic Engineering from the University of Southampton, School of Electronics and Computer Science, UK in 2015. She is recipient of the “University of Southampton Research Studentship”, 2011-2014. She is also the present co-chair of the BCS building 46 postdoc community and a member of the POWER (Postdoctoral organization of Women engaged in Research) committee at MIT. She loves hiking, traveling and gardening. She is actively involved in the fundraising committees of various charitable organizations in the indian sub-continent.

Vision: The postdocs make up a large part of the community here at MIT we contribute significantly to academic mission of the institution. I want our voices to be heard and I want to make MIT one of the best places to work for postdocs by advocating for better benefits, professional training and career development opportunities. I want to organise events to promote interactions amongst the postdocs on social and academic issues. I hope to organise open forums once every semester to allow the postdocs to voice there concerns and comments to the MIT PDA.

## MO JIANG

### *Candidate for Alumni & Postdoc Initiative Grant*

Mo Jiang got his PhD on Chemical Engineering from MIT this June, when he continued as a postdoc here. During 5 years of research collaboration, volunteer activities, and classes, he has maintained supportive connections with MIT graduates/scholars in different departments/centers, and function units of MIT. For example, Mo is a Member of the first Graduate Student Advisory Board of MIT Chemical Engineering, and was a reviewer for MIT IDEAS Global Challenge Development Grant. In the future, Mo plans to contribute to PDA Alumni Committee and Grant Committee.

## DINESH KUMAR

### *Candidate for Professional Development*

Dinesh is a Swedish Medical Society postdoctoral fellow at the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of MIT. He is also affiliated with the Broad Institute. Dinesh did his Ph.D. in Medical Biochemistry from the Swedish node of European Molecular Biology at Umeå University in Sweden. Before joining MIT he was a visiting researcher at the McKnight Brain Institute, UAB. Dinesh is working at the interface of computational biology and molecular biology to understand the molecular mechanisms of how memories are encoded in the brain and what happens when we forget-to-learn, like in Alzheimer's. Before starting his Ph.D., Dinesh worked at the Indian Institute of Science, India. Dinesh is very much interested in both, basic research and translating the basic research from bench- and system- side to bedside. Dinesh has taken entrepreneurship courses in the past and also currently enrolled in Harvard Healthcare Innovation and Commercialization Course. Dinesh is not only interested in understanding science, but also passionate about communicating science. Dinesh loves hiking and traveling and when he is not in the lab he is playing with his daughter.

The role of PDA chair for professional development is going to be a challenging one, because of the obvious reasons you might know: the funding in academia is going down heavily, and not every postdoc is aware of that properly; the opportunities in the industries in turns are selectively growing, and we are not aware of that fully either. So, as a PDA chair the first and foremost goal for me would be to help all the postdocs, by organizing talks and workshops, to carefully analyze their options. Because I believe in the following:

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know." -  
-- William Wilberforce

## MARTIN STEWART

### *Candidate for Advocacy & Orientation*

Martin comes to MIT by way of Australia, Germany, and Switzerland. He grew up in Sydney where he did a Bachelor of Science majoring in nanotechnology before transitioning to a PhD role in cell biophysics in Dresden, Germany in 2007, then moving with his lab to Basel, Switzerland in 2010. His doctoral research focussed on the mechanics of cell shape in mitosis. Now at MIT as a postdoctoral fellow in the Jensen and Langer Labs, interests include cell biophysics, and novel approaches to intracellular delivery. The topic of his current work is the mechanisms of intracellular delivery via cell squeezing, an innovative new approach spun out of the Jensen and Langer labs. Outside of science, Martin enjoys going to see live music, traveling to tropical locations, and yoga. He is passionate about post-doc advocacy issues and seeing that the PDA do their utmost to help post-docs have a pleasant and fair experience at MIT. Martin has been the advocacy co-chair, along with Piyush Jain, since September 2014.

## CLAUDIA WEHRSPAUN

### *Candidate for Human Affairs, Orientation, & Professional Development*

My name is Claudia, recently I have started a Postdoc at the RLE. Very recently, as in three weeks ago. After my arrival at MIT, I got interested in the activities of the PDA, because I think a Postdoc-run committee is the ideal way to foster the postdoctoral community across different labs or research areas, and to allow scientists at this career stage to make the most of their time at MIT. To actively participate in developing this community, and to support the interests of different groups on the MIT campus, I applied for a position at the PDA.

My background? As most Postdocs (I guess), I have spent a lot of time at Universities. End of last year, I finished my PhD in England, and stayed at my lab there for a short-term postdoctoral fellowship. During my studies (actually even at high school), I made very good experiences with engaging in student-run organizations, their impact on building networks, connecting people, and supporting students' activities. More specifically, I organized social events, seminars, assisted with welcoming events for foreign students, and ran a Yoga group for college members. These projects allowed me to meet a lot of very interesting people, and – hopefully – helped to provide them with a more rewarding time during their degrees or visits. Furthermore, I believe that in a group that is as diverse as the Postdocs at MIT, in terms of interests, backgrounds, special needs, or career aspirations, it is crucial to build and maintain an organization that can officially address their concerns, and facilitate access to all resources at MIT and beyond.