

School of Plant Sciences

News and updates for our SPLS community

June 14, 2024



SPLS graduate students Dakota Salyer, Griffin Davis, and Sallu Nepal were among those who presented their summer research experience pitches at the 2024 Ecosystem Genomics Convergence Institute in May. Their adventures in fungal volatiles, diversity, and mycotoxin dynamics are supported via partnerships with the USDA, NSF, Santa Rita Experimental Range, Highlands Biological Station, and more.

What's new in SPLS?

Greetings from Forbes 303C, where I am honored to be working on behalf of the unit as our Interim Director. I'd like to share a few updates with our community. - Betsy Arnold

- **Our business office team continues to move forward in clarifying and stabilizing our unit's finances.** Major progress this week includes clearing up our state IDC account, a return to simplified and more correct faculty reports, successful distribution of two years' worth of faculty F&A return (see below), and a resolve that emails to the 'spls-bizoffice@arizona.edu' address will receive prompt replies.
- **I thank Kevin, Amanda, and our SPLS team for completing the mandated distribution of F&A return for fiscal years 2023 and 2024.** The policy for the past two years has been that 2% of qualified indirect costs must be returned to the PI. This mandate was fostered by our Faculty Senate under the (soon-to-end) AIB model. Two-year returns to faculty in SPLS range from a few hundred dollars to over \$10,000 per PI. We await news on the future of this mandate and the model that will replace AIB.
- **Safety in Marley remains an essential concern.** As an update, concerns regarding the often inaudible fire alarms, the low stair railings in the northeast stairwell, and safety in the southern stairwell have all been conveyed to Jeff Ratje and Facilities Management, for action this summer. Many thanks to Christopher Portugay-Delaney for continuing to advocate for us.

~ Good news ~

Congratulations to SPLS MS student Yong Zhang for defending her MS in Plant Pathology on April 26!

Congratulations to SPLS graduate student Josh Oyekanmi for being accepted to the DOE-EMSL 1000 Fungal Proteins summer program!

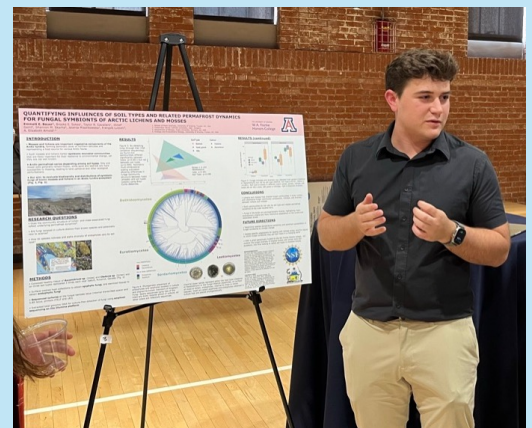
Josh will be part of a week-long, fully funded training experience at the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, a DOE Office of Science User Facility, in summer 2024.

<https://tinyurl.com/26e23w9b>

Congratulations to SPLS undergraduate majors and community members for presentations at the 2024 Honors Pinnacle event!

Some of our presenters included Emmett Bauer (Arnold lab) and Ariel Heinrich and Audrey Sweten (Baltrus lab)...perhaps among others! Further congratulations go to Emmett for receiving a 2024 Exploratory Mini-Grant (\$5000) from the W.A. Franke Honors College to support his project in Panama this summer. Learn more about this superb funding opportunity for Honors undergraduates here:

<https://tinyurl.com/mt5s89rx>



As always, thank you to all of our faculty members who support undergraduate research and experiential learning!

**HAVE NEWS TO SHARE?
PLEASE LET US KNOW!**

<https://forms.gle/xBbxZMKG5Bkb83eB9>

Priorities on the Interim Director's desk this week

- **SPLS committee assignments**, which will follow the committee service poll and principles of equity and fairness, will be discussed in person/by email with individuals before assignments are finalized. Stay tuned for communication on this before the fiscal year turnover.

- **Discussion of teaching plans** with many faculty as we address challenges and opportunities in our curricula and shared majors. As you reflect on your APR and your plans for 2024, are you open to teaching more? We will revisit position descriptions late this summer. Feel free to contact me. Please note this important statement in the Faculty Council update kindly shared by Ramin on 12 June:

"...there should be a written communication to each faculty member prior to the start of each academic year that documents parameters of their teaching assignment for the academic year. . . Faculty may choose to volunteer to teach above their assigned FTE for no additional compensation. Such cases must be formalized in writing and approved by the unit head and the faculty member."

Position descriptions are our vehicle for this written documentation, and we have an opportunity to get these up to date, corrected, signed, and filed as our new academic year begins.

- **Initiating SPLS TA assignments for students and courses for fall 2024**, with thanks to Mark, our DGS. Please expect news next week.

- **Advancing our understanding of the implications and outcomes of CALES and University budget matters.**

- **Working on our shared behalf to position SPLS so that we may recruit an outstanding Director at the earliest opportunity.** We don't yet have clarity on the timeline for our external search. I am asking weekly. ☺

Nominations requested: consider serving on ALVSCE Faculty Council

The ALVSCE Faculty Council (formerly CALES Faculty Council) (<https://compass.arizona.edu/faculty-council>) is a key element of faculty governance as observed in CALES/ALSVCE. Membership includes Faculty Senators, one elected representative per department and two elected representatives per school, and elected representatives of county-based Cooperative Extension. We are fortunate to have two elected representatives, Ramin and Xiong, and we thank them sincerely for their service.

At this time, Xiong's term is expiring and it is time for us to begin the process to elect a new representative for a two-year term. Therefore, **I am opening the nomination process for faculty at any rank.** Self-nominations are welcome. If you nominate someone, please be sure they are willing to serve if elected. I'll compile the nomination list on June 30 and we will elect our representative thereafter.

Please submit nominations here:
<https://forms.gle/bqh1FKwfqCnEghJ88>.

Opportunity for graduate students: data science training

The **Roots for Resilience Research Assistantships in Data Science**, led by the Arizona Institute for Resilience, CyVerse, and the University of Arizona Data Science Institute, trains **selected graduate students** in the use of open science and computational infrastructure. Program participants learn to apply data science tools to their dissertation's research and discovery, as well as increase their unit's data science capacity. Check out these R4R benefits, plus a \$7000 stipend:

- Accelerate research projects of fellows and their home units
- Build professional networks for addressing large-scale challenges
- Develop collaborations via AIR, DSI, CyVerse, and academic units
- Cultivate a cohort of participants (and Data Science Ambassadors) to support each other in their own research and engage their units

Each unit can nominate only one applicant. Please review the applicant requirements here: <https://datascience.arizona.edu/r4r>.

Students interested in being considered, please fill out this form with your advisor by June 20 at 11:59pm.

<https://forms.gle/rrz9DFzTZvmQGm8N7>

Do you have questions or concerns?
Please reach out.
Arnold@ag.arizona.edu
520.396.0854

Things to know...

- **Mimecast is here.** Mario provided us some helpful information from UITS on June 12, ahead of Mimecast's deployment on June 13. This new spam filter may be a bit full of itself to start. Keep an eye out for trapped emails and for the digest emails you should receive several times daily about them. Links in those digest emails will direct you to messages that have been
- **Completed this week for SPLS:** our APRs, the CY2023 Post-Tenure Review Audit, and my activities relevant to PT&C for this cycle.
- **Interested in learning more about what our committees do in SPLS?** Documents are posted online through an effort initiated under Judy's leadership, for which we are grateful. Faculty can find these under the Box folder 'SPLS faculty resources'. Let me know if you can't see that Box and I'll double-check access for our faculty members.
- **Under leadership by the Provost, the initiative to transition our colleagues with Extension appointments from 'continuing track' to rank-equivalence on the tenure track is nearly complete.** We welcome Glenn, Ursula, and Alex H as they make this transition at the fiscal year turnover.
- **We have an opportunity for course development in microbiology.** Would you like to foster student learning in diverse settings while supporting long-term unit- and major-level goals? Investing in high-quality delivery of courses in virology and bacteriology in the seven-week format is a great option. Contact me if you'd like to learn more.
- **Shantz renovations are still under discussion** but appear likely (tentatively) to start in July of next year. We will see an influx of short-term and permanent occupants in Marley based on decisions made in mid-spring 2024. More on this as news comes forward.

Please post your photo for the directory pages of our new SPLS website

We have the green light to populate the directory pages of our SPLS website. Please take a moment and upload yours by June 30 so that we can be 'as present as possible' online. Uploading your image should be straightforward: just submit your picture (jpg or similar) to Box at the link below. Please include your first and last name in the file name, and use a photo that is 1000x1000 pixels, minimum.

<https://arizona.box.com/s/eihr4da2vppfnqwo2e6zjf7oky1e5ojd>

Reminder: The University of Arizona observes Juneteenth. Buildings will be locked and our SPLS office will be closed that day.

Did you know...

Outreach activities are engaging students beyond SPLS, and beyond our campus borders, helping foster an interest in Plant Sciences and its affiliated majors for incoming undergraduates and prospective graduate students.

Here is but one highlight from summer 2024 so far. Please share yours at the 'announcement' link on page 1 for inclusion in future newsletters.

Outreach for undergraduate student engagement at a US-HBCU and with partners in Africa

A NSF-supported project led by collaborating faculty at Bowie State University, a US Historically Black College / University, is engaging SPLS graduate students in teaching and mentoring to foster the study of plant microbiomes. Students from Bowie State are presently in Kenya, in partnership with the University of Nairobi, conducting field research. A group of three outstanding students will join SPLS for a four-week summer internship in July. While here, the students will learn molecular biology methods relevant to biodiversity discovery and translational sciences. This month, SPLS graduate students Caroline Maro and Josh Oyekanmi are outstanding remote mentors for the program. Stay tuned to hear more about our visiting students in July.

Arizona Native Plant Society

The Arizona Native Plant Society invites abstracts to be presented at its annual Symposium, to be held on August 17, 2024. The meeting will be held at Pima Community College West in Tucson. Submissions are welcome on the ecology, physiology, or systematics of native plant species of Arizona. Abstracts are due July 17.

<https://aznps.com/>

Celebrating our SPLS strengths, vol. 2

The School of Plant Sciences has incredible resources. The more we know about them, the more we can share with others. Please read below about the innovative program in Kazakhstan, with thanks to Samantha Orchard

[Kozybayev University](#) (KU) in [Petropavl](#), Kazakhstan, has partnered with [Arizona International](#) and CALES to deliver a [dual-degree program](#) in biotechnology for Kazakhstan-based students. The students will earn two degrees: one in Biotechnology from Kozybayev University and one in Applied Biotechnology from the University of Arizona. Their studies are paid for by the Kazakhstan Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the funding also covers a semester of in-person studies in Tucson.

The program launched in Fall 2022 and has 60 students enrolled in the first two cohorts. Recruiting is underway for the third cohort, which will start in Fall 2024. The program is expected to grow to 50 students per cohort and thus 200 students total at a time in the 4-year program. Unlike students on the main UA campus, students in the program at the KU microcampus take a prescribed set of courses each semester and do not choose their own electives. In their first 2 years, they take English as a Second Language to bring them up to the English fluency level required by UA, while also taking foundational courses such as Calculus, Chemistry, and Microbiology.

The first cohort of students in the program will begin taking SPLS-based courses in Fall 2024. First up is PLS 340, Introduction to Biotechnology, which will be delivered to the students online. In Spring 2025, the first cohort will take PLS 312 Animal and Plant Genetics and PLP 428R Microbial Genetics, both of which will also be delivered online. However, we might exercise the option of working with an on-the-ground instructor at KU to have in-person discussion sections for PLS 312. In Fall 2025, we will welcome the first cohort of students to the main campus, where they will take 15 units of courses in person. We plan to take advantage of their being here in person by offering two lab courses to the students that semester.

KU is interested in fostering additional collaborations with faculty at UA, including research collaborations, mentoring dual-degree students during virtual research projects, providing in-person one-semester-long research projects to visiting students, or being a guest instructor in person in Petropavl. Please let Samantha know if you are interested in any of these opportunities!



Samantha Orchard (center) with the second cohort of students in Fall, 2023. The students enjoy getting UA-branded 'swag' during site visits.