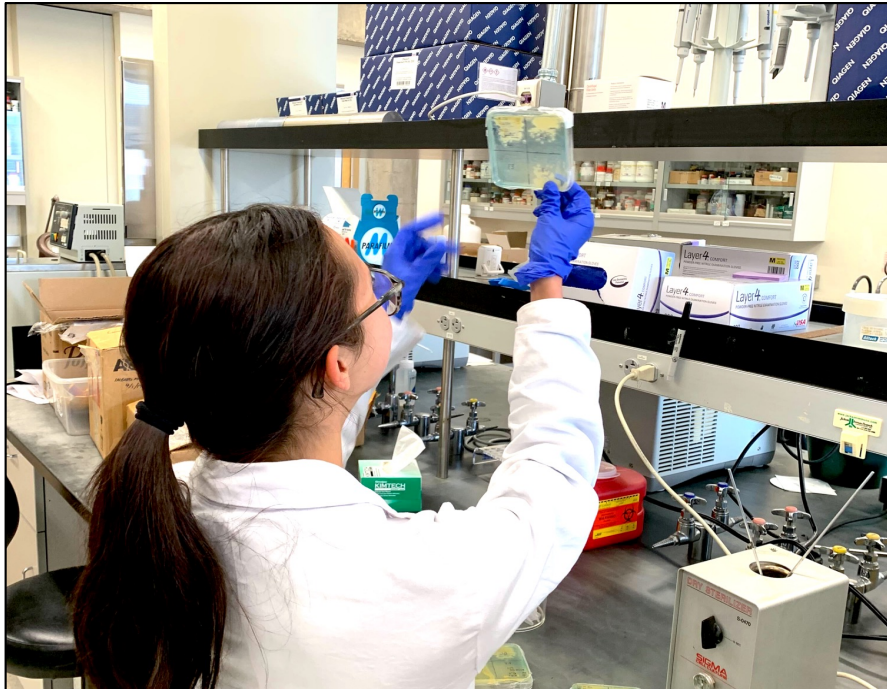


School of Plant Sciences

News and updates for our SPLS community

July 1, 2024



Emily Herrera, a UBRP student in the Favela lab, works to isolate free-living nitrogen-fixing bacteria on minimal nitrogen-free media. She will measure their nitrogen fixation rates and 'train' them to function in a diverse soil microbial community.

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

- **We are delighted to welcome our newest faculty member, Dr. Bhupinder Singh, who will join the unit in the coming weeks.** Dr. Singh will be based in Maricopa. Welcome Dr. Singh: we are delighted that you have joined us, and we look forward to connecting with you.
- **We continue to work on infrastructure matters,** including safety and functionality in Marley. If you were affected by recent leaks or similar, please be sure to connect with Christopher. I thank Christopher for working to orient new arrivals in Marley and for serving as an advocate for those whose labs and offices are there.
- **I am excited head to the high Arctic for long-planned fieldwork this week.** I will be out of the office, but in email contact, from July 3 until July 22. Please do not hesitate to reach out. I will be studying fungal symbionts of plants and lichens in the rapidly changing Arctic with support from the Canadian Polar Continental Shelf Program and NSF, as a guest of the Inuit people of Nunavut, Canada. Our work will help determine how climate-driven shifts in symbioses frame a hidden cost of climate change. For urgent matters while I am away from the office, please contact Kevin Teres (kteres@arizona.edu), except on July 5 (when he will also be out of the office - Amanda Stevens is our contact that day).

~ Good news ~

Congratulations to SPLS MS student Griffin Davis for receiving a ReaP Grant from the Graduate and Professional Student Council!

Griffin will use her award to survey fungal biodiversity at the Santa Rita Experimental Range. Her project will foster the growth, data depth, and data sharing of the Robert L. Gilbertson Mycological Herbarium (see page 3!), in conjunction with an NSF-funded project in the Arnold lab. Congratulations Griffin!

Congratulations to SPLS PhD student Chosen Obih, who has been selected for the Roots for Resilience Program!

In the words of the program leaders: "Much as roots anchor plants and ecosystems, data are the roots of science and discovery. The Roots for Resilience in Data Science Program is co-led by the Arizona Institute for Resilience (AIR), Data Science Institute, and CyVerse. The program trains selected graduate students working in resilience-focused areas in the use of open science and computational infrastructure, such as CyVerse, to apply data science tools to their dissertation research and discovery, as well as to increase their department's data science capacity." Look for updates from Chosen as the program gets rolling!

Congratulations to SPLS PhD candidates Brooke Sykes and Ciara Garcia, who have been invited to give oral presentations at national and international meetings!

Brooke will give an oral presentation at the 12th International Mycological Congress in Maastricht, The Netherlands, in August. Ciara just spoke at the American Society for Microbiology meetings in Atlanta. Congratulations on these prestigious invitations!

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

<https://forms.gle/xBbxZMKG5Bkb83eB9>

Priorities on the Interim Director's desk this week

- **SPLS committee assignments** will be finalized in the coming month. I thank everyone who took the time to respond to my emails and all who completed our spring poll. Thank you!

- **Preparing to finalize position descriptions**, to be completed in late July/early August. Position descriptions are our vehicle for documenting expectations, and they are part of our annual review process. We have an opportunity to get these up to date, corrected, signed, and filed as our new academic year begins.

- **Finalizing SPLS TA assignments for students and courses for fall 2024, and addressing needs for instructional support.** Thank you to all graduate faculty who collaborated with students to submit responses for our unit's TA poll. Mark will arrange to speak with instructional faculty teaching relatively large courses about instructional support for the coming year.

- **Advancing our understanding of the implications and outcomes of CALES and University budget matters.** It's the new fiscal year. We have a new Provost. What do these things mean for us? The short story is that we don't yet know – and we're not alone in that. I'm advised that we will have more information by mid-late July regarding how we will move into the financial year ahead. Please stay tuned. I will update the unit when I have news.

- **Addressing infrastructure needs** in terms of safety, accessibility, functionality, availability, and more. Special thanks this week to Marc and Jesse for their work with our growth chambers.

- **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. ☺

REMINDER: Nominations requested: consider serving on ALVSCE Faculty Council – Deadline extended

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.

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 July 10 and we will elect our representative thereafter.

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

Advising for the PLS major

Going forward, our advisor for the PLS major will be Daniel Jiménez Flores, Academic Advisor II. Daniel's office is in 319 Forbes. He can be contacted at [520-626-3632](tel:520-626-3632) and jimenez@arizona.edu.



Did you know...

The Robert L. Gilbertson Mycological Herbarium, located in Herring Hall and administered through SPLS, is the southwest's premier collection of fungal biodiversity. Fungi comprise millions of species, but only a tiny minority have been described. Our Mycological Herbarium is a biodiversity resource, a source of DNA for diverse studies ranging from systematics to ecology, and increasingly, home to the world's largest living culture collection of endophytic fungi. Contact Betsy to learn more!

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

Things to know...

- **We have new rules regarding requests for a Leave of Absence.**

Starting July 1, employees must submit a new leave of absence request through the [Leave of Absence Request Form](#) and work directly with a leave specialist to complete the required paperwork. The leave specialist will also be the point of contact when it is time to transition back to work. The leave specialist will work with supervisors to ensure they know the start and end dates of employees' leave, the time reporting codes to use in UAccess and the transition procedures for the return to work.

- **We are reminded to follow the University's policy for use of state-owned vehicles.** Please read the policy carefully if you happen to use a UA vehicle in your group. It's active now as the (enforced) policy Division-wide in ALVSCE: <https://compass.arizona.edu/alvsce-proper-vehicle-usage-policy>.

- **Please recall the important note from Jon Chorover, Interim Associate Vice President/Associate Dean for Research in CALES, regarding postdoc salaries:** "Our division adheres to the UA-wide requirement that all postdoctoral employees, regardless of title, be provided a minimum salary that aligns with National Institutes of Health (NIH) policy. ALVSCE policy has been stated [here](#). However, please note that NIH has recently increased the minimum salary for first year postdoctoral employees from \$56,484 to \$61,008 [...]. As a result, our website will soon be updated with this new information. In the meantime, please ensure that, when your grant submissions or job postings include postdoctoral employees, they adhere to these NIH guidelines. Salaries of current postdocs will likewise need to be adjusted in accordance with these standards for FY25."

- **Need to dispose of documents in a secure manner?** Please let me know – we will request secure shredding service via Christopher.

Please post your photo for the directory pages of our new SPLS website ... as soon as we have an updated link, that is.

Thank you to Samantha for letting me know that the link we received was not particularly receptive to uploads! We do have the green light to populate the directory pages of our SPLS website, and a new link has been requested. Please keep an eye out for an email from me, and *then* please take a moment and upload yours by July 15 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 forthcoming link. Please include your first and last name in the file name, and use a photo that is 1000x1000 pixels, minimum.

Reminder: The University of Arizona observes July 4th, the Independence Day holiday. Buildings will be locked and our SPLS office will be closed that day.

Congratulations to Dr. Barry Pryor

As we look ahead to fall, we have several faculty planning to retire. The first to do so this fall will be Barry Pryor, on Aug. 30.

Please join me in congratulating Barry not only on his upcoming retirement and many accomplishments across his career, but also, on the exciting news that he has been awarded Emeritus status by the University of Arizona. Thus, our congratulations need not be a farewell – we will see Barry from time to time as he continues to grow his mushroom cultivation initiatives.

Barry has been an appreciated member of our faculty. He is well known among students for his courses in plant pathology, mushrooms/molds, and more. We wish Barry the best as he moves on to greener locales, and we look forward to making special note of his retirement from the University near the start of our fall term.

Congratulations Barry!



A word of thanks: Finn Galpin

Finn Galpin has been a welcome and much-appreciated member of SPLS. They will be missed greatly, and I wish them the best in their future endeavors. We thank them for their compassionate support of students and their professional engagement with our faculty, staff, and our PLS Curriculum Committee in support of SPLS.

Celebrating our SPLS strengths, vol. 3: new faculty spotlight

The School of Plant Sciences has incredible resources. The more we know about them, the more we can communicate those strengths to others. Our greatest resource is our people. Today I'm happy to introduce our two newest faculty members, Dr. Alonso Favela and Dr. Ali Mohammed.



Greetings, I'm Alonso Favela! I am a born and raised Arizonan, the son of Mexican Campesinos from Durango, Mexico, and as of recently, an Assistant Professor of Plant-Microbe Interactions.

I earned my B.S. (2015) from the University of Arizona and Ph.D. (2021) from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I was an NSF Graduate Research Fellow and IGERT trainee in Genomic Biology under the mentorship of Angela Kent. Subsequently, I was awarded an NSF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Biology, working with Steven Allison at the University of California, Irvine.

I'm driven by a desire to understand how the smallest, most diverse communities on this planet function and how civilization has and continues to transform their ecology and evolution. My research program has three major focuses: 1) understanding plant genomic mechanisms involved in rhizosphere microbiome function, 2) characterizing the domestication of our agricultural and urban microbiomes, and 3) applying microbial solutions and understanding microbial limitations in real-world agronomic settings. I hope that this research will contribute to advancing human sustainability and mitigating ecocide. I returned to Arizona because I believe that this region will be critical in determining how we (society) respond to our climate future. Compromises, discoveries, and injustices made in the Arid Southwest will set the precedent for how we deal with our ever-increasing ecological limitations into the next century. When I'm not contemplating our collective future and microbiomes, I enjoy reading, watching prestige dramas, hiking, studying to become a tequila snob, and scent training my beagle.

Dr. Ali Mohammed joined SPLS on May 28, 2024. He earned his BS in Agricultural Mechanization at the University of Mosul, Iraq, his MS in Mechanized Systems Management at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL), and his Ph.D. in Biological Engineering, specializing in Irrigation Engineering and Management, at UNL. Before joining SPLS, he was a Post-Doctorate Research Associate in Biological Systems Engineering at UNL, where he focused on utilizing an efficient and systematic approach to develop and gauge novel technologies and concepts for sustainable irrigation and nitrogen management specific to the needs of Nebraska's areas. He aimed to improve consumption efficiencies of both resources and minimize groundwater pollution. He is a member of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers and the ASCE-EWRI Evapotranspiration in Irrigation and Hydrology Committee.



At SPLS, Dr. Mohammed's program will establish an integrated research and extension initiative focused on developing organic cropping systems. He plans to integrate this with sustainable agricultural water and biofertilizer management strategies to advance management practices, enhance sustainable organic crop production, and improve climate resilience and adaptive capacity for the diverse organic production systems in Yuma and the region. He plans to implement cutting-edge technologies like wireless moisture sensors, drones, and close-canopy imagery tools to monitor and estimate water storage, fluxes, and consumptive evaporative water use at both point and field scales. His program will connect with stakeholders to test advanced technologies at production field scales and provide valuable hands-on experience for students.