



ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

PLANT-INSECT ECOSYSTEMS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Message from the President...	1
P-IE positions open.....	2
P-IE Awards.....	3
New Travel Award.....	3
Where are they now?.....	4

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Message from the President



A few months ago, my son, who had just started university, brought up the topic of diversity at the dinner table. With his Goan (Indian) and Peruvian background, issues of cultural diversity are at the forefront of his mind. As my sons grew up, I always harbored concerns about their acceptance by their peers and the possibility of discrimination based on their skin color. Fortunately, they have not encountered such prejudice firsthand, but it's apparent that they contemplate these matters. Discussions on diversity can sometimes prove challenging for parents and their children, as well as for mentors and students. Nonetheless, I was delighted that my family engaged in a conversation about the importance of diversity in the work environment.

This topic resonates deeply with me, as I frequently discuss it with my lab members. I often recount personal anecdotes to underscore its significance. Upon arriving in the USA, I noticed a lack of representation of individuals who resembled me in my workplace. While this environment motivated me to learn English, it also subjected me to uncomfortable situations. Despite the kindness of my colleagues, I didn't feel as welcomed as I would have hoped. This sense of not belonging hindered my ability to connect with others, and it took time to overcome.

Because of this, a significant portion of my professional career has been dedicated to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in my program and our society. Now that I have a faculty position, I made 'paying back' a big part of my career. I spend much of my time in teaching and mentoring underrepresented/minority students and early career professionals on how to achieve their career goals. I have done this by providing summer internships to undergraduate and graduate students from USA, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Ghana, China, Peru, among others. I have also made sure to have a diverse and inclusive academic program that *welcomes all*.

I had the privilege of serving as Chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee for the Entomological Society of America from 2020-2021. During my tenure, we bolstered the visibility and participation of underrepresented minorities in ESA activities and communications. This included initiatives such as creating a D&I column in *American Entomologist*, establishing

[continued pg. 2]

Message from the president [cont.]

two D&I awards, collaborating with other ESA committees to advance DEI efforts, organizing symposia and workshops on D&I at the Annual Meeting, and hosting a 'New Member Reception' at the ESA Annual Meeting. Additionally, I actively engaged in the ESA EntoMentors program by mentoring underrepresented students, delivering seminars, and participating in events. As I assume other roles, such as P-IE president, I remain committed to promoting DEI in our society. As a part of this commitment, we are establishing Travel Awards for undergraduate, graduate, and early-career professionals in P-IE to support their attendance at the national meeting. As scientists, we recognize the vital role diversity plays in nature. It is imperative that we, as a community, actively advocate for and embrace diversity in our society. By doing so, we contribute to the health and vibrancy of our communities.

Cesar Rodriguez-Saona
President,
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Call for Nominations and Volunteers!

Elected positions

The P-IE Section is seeking nominations for 4 elected positions on the Governing Council. All nominees, along with their photo and bio, should be submitted via the online [ESA Nomination Submission Form](#) **by May 30, 2024**. The full list of open positions and eligibility requirements can be found [here](#).

■ ESA Governing Board Representative	3 year term (2024-2027)
■ Vice President-Elect	4 year term (2024-2028)
■ P-IE Student Representative	2 year term (2024-2026)
■ P-IE Early Career Professional Representative to the Governing Council	3 year term (2024-2027)

Appointed positions

The P-IE Section is seeking volunteers for 5 appointed positions to ESA national committees. Interested volunteers should submit an application via the online [ESA Volunteer Committee Interest Form](#) **by May 30, 2024**. Please contact members of the P-IE GC for more information on the positions.

■ Awards and Honors Committee	3 year term (2024-2027)
■ Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee	2 year term (2024-2026)
■ Science Policy Committee	3 year term (2024-2027)
■ Student Affairs Committee	2 year term (2024-2026)

Call for P-IE Award Applications

The P-IE Section would like to encourage our members to nominate themselves and encourage others to apply for the 2024 Section Awards. Detailed descriptions of the P-IE awards can be found on the ESA website. (<https://www.entsoc.org/pie/awards>) Please note that the IPM Team Award is now being offered only in odd years, with the next availability in 2025. The application deadline for all awards is **June 1**.

◀ Undergraduate Student Achievement in Entomology Award

◀ Master's Student Achievement in Entomology Award

◀ Kenneth and Barbara Starks Plant Resistance to Insects Graduate Student Award

◀ P-IE Lifetime Achievement Award in Entomology

◀ P-IE Recognition Award in Entomology (*Sponsored by Syngenta Crop Protection*)

New P-IE Travel Award!

Due June 1

Description: The Plant-Insect Ecosystems (P-IE) Section of the Entomological Society of America (ESA) seeks to increase participation of student and postdoctoral members in the national meeting, as part of an initiative to foster the next generation of entomologists. The section plans to grant six travel awards of \$1,000 each, with two undergraduate student awards, two graduate student awards, and two postdoctoral scholar awards. Funds should be used for expenses related to participating in the ESA national meeting.

Eligibility: To be eligible for these awards, individuals must be current members of the Entomological Society of America and the Plant-Insect Ecosystems Section. Individuals should be current undergraduate students (earning a B.S. or B.A. degree), graduate students (earning a M.S. or Ph.D.), or postdoctoral scholars at the time of application. Recipients must attend the P-IE Section Awards Ceremony and Networking Event at the ESA National Meeting and will be asked to present a 3-minute elevator pitch about their research. Recipients will also be encouraged to present a poster or oral presentation at the meeting.

Application Materials:

1. One-page cover letter/personal statement with the following information:

- a. Area of study
- b. Professional goals and how attending the ESA Annual Meeting will benefit the applicant

2. Letter of recommendation in support of the application from a mentor or supervisor with the following information:

- a. Affirmation the applicant is eligible for the award
- b. How this award will benefit the applicant
- c. Summary of applicant's relevant achievements

3. Two-page resume/C.V. with the following:

- a. Educational and employment background
- b. Publications and presentations
- c. Grants, scholarships, fellowships, and awards
- d. Teaching and mentoring activities
- e. Service and outreach activities

Judging Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated using the following criteria for a total of 100 points:

1. Academic record and accomplishments; resume/ C.V. (20)
2. Letter of support (20)
3. Contributions to teaching and mentoring (15)
4. Contributions to service and outreach, especially to ESA (15)
4. How impactful will participating in the meeting be for this individual (30)

Submission Deadline: June 1 Annually

To apply, please visit:

<https://entsoc.org/membership/sections/pie/awards/travel-awards>

Where are they now? Checking in with Past P-IE Award Winners.

Interview with prior Awardee Rachel Wilkins

◀ Can you remind us which P-IE Award you won, the time frame, and what the basis for your nomination was?

I was presented with the P-IE Master's Student Achievement Award at the Annual Meeting of the Entomological Society of America in the Fall of 2019. I was near the end of my M.S. student experience and only had a semester left until my defense and graduation. I was nominated for the award by my advisor Dr. Rob Morrison (USDA-ARS) based on my novel research regarding the use of long-lasting insecticide netting in stored product IPM programs. I also previously placed in several competitions at ESA and local conferences and was active in outreach events within my community.

◀ What do you recall your initial reaction was in getting the news that you had won the PIE MS Achievement Award in Entomology?

I was surprised! Out of all the other master's students doing exceptional research, I could not believe that I had won the award. After the shock wore off, I felt honored to be recognized for the work that I had



Where are they now? [cont.]

done and grateful for the initial nomination. I think winning the award also helped fight off those nagging feelings of imposter syndrome that we all know so well.

◀ What have you been up to in the intervening time since you won the award?

I graduated from Kansas State University with my MS in entomology in spring 2020. Shortly after, I moved to Springfield, Missouri and began looking for a job. I considered continuing onto a PhD, but there were many factors that guided my decision to begin the job hunt. Ultimately, I wanted to see what I could do as an entomologist with a master's degree. Notably, during this time, I became a dog mom to my wonderful chihuahua-terrier, Pebbles. 2021 came around, and I started two temporary jobs. One was a part-time position at Missouri State University in Dr. Avery Russell's lab. Although funding was limited, he graciously hired me as his first research associate upon my reaching out to him. Concurrently, I served in the AmeriCorps VISTA program at an environmental non-profit organization. Both positions provided me with new skills and perspectives that helped shape my career goals. Shortly after those positions ended, I was told that the Kansas Department of Agriculture was hiring a state entomologist. Of course, I jumped at the opportunity. I applied, was offered the position, moved back to Kansas, and have been working here since July 2022.

◀ a) What is your current position, and what do your responsibilities entail? b) What is your favorite part of your current position?

I am the State Entomologist with the Kansas Department of Agriculture. The department is comprised of several programs, and my position falls under Plant Protection and Weed Control. The main goal of this program is to protect the state's native and cultivated plant resources from pests and disease. We also provide services to facilitate the movement of plants and plant products to other states and countries. Lastly, we ensure that Kansas plant products and seed meet the requirements of several acts and laws. Many of these goals are accomplished through regulatory action (inspections, certifications, quarantines, etc.), but also pest and disease intervention when necessary. As the sole entomologist within the department, I manage the entomology component of our program. A large portion of what I do is trapping and monitoring for invasive insect species. I also take the lead on outreach events and share information about invasive species to diverse audiences—from growers and nursery managers to parents and their kids. Other responsibilities include writing reports and risk assessments, biological control releases, green-

house and nursery inspections, collaborating on projects with other state and federal agencies, attending trainings and conferences, and following up with the public's insect inquiries. In the simplest of terms, my favorite part of my position is looking for insects! Conducting insect surveys around the state is not only exciting, but extremely rewarding. Invasive species are detrimental to native ecosystems and biodiversity; I'm grateful that my job plays a small role in detecting and advocating against invasive insects. I also like when people ask, "what insect is this?" It might be my favorite question.

◀ How do you think winning the award has affected the trajectory of your career?

After I won, I added the award to my CV. In job interviews, I was able to bring up winning this prestigious award which then facilitated a conversation about my accomplishments in graduate school. I tend to struggle talking about myself, but this award provided an outlet to do just that, which likely helped get me into the role I am in today. Further, this award was a huge boost to my confidence. I experienced a lot of growth during graduate school, and this win kept the momentum going—reminding me that I'm doing a good job.

◀ If you could communicate one or two key messages to the next generation of entomologists on 'making it', what would it be?

While I am very much content in my current position, there are a few sayings I continue to remind myself that others may find helpful. First, get out of your comfort zone. Taking on a challenge that requires you to do, speak, or lead more than what your comfort level allows can further your professional development. At the very least, you learn more about yourself—your skills, preferences, dislikes, etc. On that note, it's equally important to know when to take a step back and give yourself a break. You are your best advocate. Second, embrace the unknown. Typically, the unknown is not so glamorous, but it's a necessary part of making a new career move or life change. The unknown can also lead to exciting new opportunities... or important lessons learned. I have found that things work out the way they are meant to, albeit with some hard work and determination. Also, hard work is a little less hard when you're working in a field you love, so lastly, find your passion and follow it.

Future Call

We would love an update on "where are they now" from past award winners, so if you are a proud nominator who would like interview your awardee, or an awardee who would like to share your story, get in touch for future editions of this section by reaching out to *Dr. Rob Morrison* (William.morrison@usda.gov) to get scheduled for upcoming newsletters.