



ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

PLANT-INSECT ECOSYSTEMS

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Message from the President



** Trigger Warning: I would like to use this platform to share personal experiences in the hope to help others. This piece thus contains sensitive material about bullying and suicidal feelings.*

As a child, I was naturally reserved, and unfortunately, society often interprets shyness as weakness. Consequently, I became the target of bullying from a very young age. My schoolmates would mock me and even resort to intimidation tactics, following me to the bathroom and threatening me. This led to embarrassing incidents at school, prompting my mother to intervene with the other children. While her efforts did offer some relief, they also brought unwanted attention and embarrassment.

Growing up bullied casts a shadow over one's perception of life. There were moments when I felt overwhelmed and considered ending it all. The worst part is the self-blame it instills. You start believing that you are the problem, that something is inherently wrong with you. In the society I grew up, this was a topic that was rarely discussed, leading me to hide my feelings. However, I found comfort in the love and support of my parents. If you can relate to this experience, don't hesitate to reach out to your parents, friends, or mentors for support. Additionally, there are resources available to assist you (see information below). Although this cycle persisted through my life, influencing my personal and professional development, its impact lessened with time. However, it undeniably shaped my character and interactions with others.



In loving memory of
my mother.

One aspect of my personality that proved challenging to alter was my discomfort in public speaking. The fear of being judged deeply eroded my confidence. The insecurity of being scrutinized or ridiculed for every word or action haunted me since childhood. Overcoming this fear became imperative as I pursued academia, including assuming leadership roles such as being president of P-IE.

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Message from the president [cont.]

Drawing from my personal experiences, I constantly remind myself to treat others with kindness, reflecting the treatment I wish to receive. My goal is for this message to resonate with **courage in the face of adversity**. Throughout life, you will encounter individuals who may dislike or disapprove of you for various reasons. It is crucial to disregard their negativity and remain true to yourself. If I have managed to persevere this far, so can you!

Information about Student-Wellness Services:

988 is now active across the United States. This new, shorter phone number will make it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, call or text 988 to be connected to trained crisis counselors who will listen to your concerns, provide support, and get you additional help if needed.

Cesar Rodriguez-Saona

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What's going on in P-IE?

Recent updates, news and more

- We are **seeking proposals for our Wildly Important Goals (WIGs)**, which promote P-IE related activities. Please send questions or proposals to President Cesar Rodriguez-Saona at crodriguez@njaes.rutgers.edu.
- Please make sure to **attend our P-IE Networking and Awards Ceremony** at the 2024 Entomology annual meeting on Monday, November 11, at 2:30 pm. There will be pie and new swag!
- This year, we will have a **booth in the Exhibitors Hall on Tuesday, November 12**, from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Please come visit us; we will have gifts for you at the booth!
- Lastly, **please volunteer** to be a judge or moderator for the student competition at the 2024 Entomology annual meeting. Your service is much needed and appreciated.

Updates from the P-IE Representatives to ESA Committees

The **ESA Science Policy Committee (SPC)** is updating the ESA's Transition Documents in preparation for the 2024 election year. These documents, which outline key policy priorities, are distributed to campaigns, transition teams, and newly elected members of Congress. The current version of these documents is available online. Additionally, the Farm Bill under consideration was marked up by the House of Representatives starting on May 23, 2024, though the Senate has yet to set a date for their review. Key points of the current Farm Bill include reductions in SNAP funding, a doubling of funds for scholarships in food and agricultural science at 1890 universities under Title 7, and significant cuts to Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program funding, which will adversely affect regional Integrated Pest Management (IPM) centers, a priority for the ESA.

Silvana Paula-Moraes, the ESA Liaison to the EPA, reported on several significant developments. In February, the EPA proposed an interim decision to cancel all uses of the pesticide acephate except one. Additionally, the EPA is working to reduce the use of pesticides such as chlorpyrifos, diazinon, and malathion. The EPA is planning to host 2-3 new webinars on topics including row crops and the acephate repeal. Furthermore, the ESA is collaborating with the Weed Science Society of

America and the American Phytopathological Society to produce a one-page document on the Endangered Species Act and EPA's efforts to mitigate pesticide use.

Erin Cadwalader, the ESA Director of Strategic Leadership & Policy, met with representatives from the Insecticide Resistance Action Committee (IRAC). They discussed concerns that private consultants and extension personnel are not fully aware of the changes the EPA is proposing. To stay informed, members are encouraged to subscribe to the latest news from the EPA. More information on ESA's policy initiatives is available on their website, and members can receive monthly updates through the ESA Science Policy News by checking their email preferences.

Other committee updates include preparations for the **2024 Entomology Games** at the annual meeting in November, organized by the Entomology Games Committee. The Student Affairs Committee is meeting monthly and planning various activities for the upcoming meeting, including a mini workshop and symposia. They are addressing low registration for student debates and are organizing a new networking event. The Publications Committee will host a symposium on Artificial Intelligence in research and teaching at the annual meeting.

2024 Camp Sketchapod was a success!

P-IE was a sponsor for the second annual Camp Sketchapod. This was held in Manhattan, KS, from May 24-26, with 13 campers from across the US coming together to enhance their insect illustration skills. Most attendees were undergraduate or graduate students, including two art students interested in scientific illustration.

Instructor Jack Whisenant led warm-up exercises on traditional sketching techniques on the first day. The second day combined “old school” drawing with “new school” digital transformations, teaching campers how to create raster and vector images from their scanned drawings. The final day was spent at the Konza Prairie Biological Station for free-form nature sketching, where attendees learned about depth and quick sketching of plants and animals from Kansas State University art faculty.

The camp also included a tour of the original CV Riley Prints at the KSU library and a visit to the KSU Insect Zoo. Additionally, the KSU Entomology Department hosted a picnic with yard games. Overall, the camp was a success, with positive feedback from participants and visible growth in their skills.



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

Interview with prior Awardee Dr. Jess Kansman

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

I was awarded the P-IE Undergraduate Achievement Award in 2015. Zsafia Szendrei nominated me for the award after working together for just over two years for my independent project on the chemical ecology of a lepidopteran pest of celery. We tried all sorts of contraptions to understand the pheromone of this moth in the field (notably, tea infusers) and tested several methods to identify the pheromone compounds. I learned a lot about troubleshooting and muck soil. If I remember correctly, Dr. Jared Ali (currently at Penn State) wrote me a supporting letter since we were also working together at the time. Zsafia and Jared are still great advocates of mine.

◀ **What do you recall your initial reaction was in getting the news that you had won the P-IE Undergraduate Achievement Award in Entomology?**

I was overjoyed! It was very meaningful to be recognized for my research early on, but even more, it was impactful that I had mentors that were advocating for me. The award also allowed me to attend the ESA meeting during my first year of graduate school and present on this project in Minneapolis.



Where are they now? [cont.]

◀ What have you been up to in the intervening time since you won the award in 2015?

After the award, I completed a PhD on plant-insect interactions with Dr. Debbie Finke at the University of Missouri and then moved to Penn State in State College for a postdoc position revisiting the world of chemical ecology with Dr. Sara Hermann.

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

I am now an Assistant Professor at Montana State University in the Plant Sciences Department as of August 2023. I have a research lab focused on insect behavior and ecology in agroecosystems, and I am currently teaching an undergraduate non-science major entomology course (which I love). The best part of the job is all the incredible students that I get to work with. I just nominated a student for the P-IE achievement award this cycle, so this is feeling very full circle.

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

I think winning this award early on in my career really enhanced my applications for other awards and fellowships during my graduate degree. I think it also was a great confidence boost at the start of graduate school – evidence that I may know something about research to help keep the imposter syndrome at bay.

◀ If you could communicate one or two key messages to the next generation of entomologists on ‘leaving the world better than you found it’, what would it be?

Make sure to keep holding the door open for the people who come after you. Start mentoring others early and maintain those relationships as long as you can. My success in this field is due to the mentors that held open doors for me and continue to advocate for me well beyond our time working together, and I strive to lead by this example.

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.