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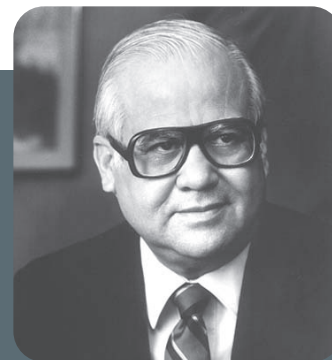
E. Kika De La Garza

Fellowship Program

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E. Kika De La Garza

United States representative
Eighty-ninth - One Hundred Fourth Congresses
Serving from January 3, 1965 - January 3, 1997

Eligio (Kika) de la Garza was born September 22, 1927 in Mercedes, Texas and passed away at the age of 89 on March 13, 2017.

De La Garza attained his Doctor of Jurisprudence from St. Mary's University Law School, in San Antonio, Texas. He was a member of the Texas State Bar Association and was admitted to practice in the Federal Courts and the U.S. Supreme Court.

De La Garza served six consecutive terms in the Texas House of Representatives before spending thirty-two years as a leading U.S. congressman in addition to working twelve years in the practice of law. In addition to becoming the first Hispanic congressman elected from Texas' 15th District, De La Garza also served as chairman of the Congressional Agriculture Committee during 1981-1994. He had influential roles in overhauling the agricultural lending system, implementing federal farm crop insurance, reforming commodity futures, reorganizing the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and providing numerous aid packages for American as well as international agriculture. Additionally, De La Garza co-founded the Congressional Hispanic Caucus during his time in Congress.

As an expert on national and international law related to agriculture and commerce, De La Garza played a major role in expanding trade with Japan, the former Soviet Union, China, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. A skilled and multilingual communicator, De La Garza developed close working relationships with top-level government officials throughout the world.

E. Kika De La Garza Fellowship Program



The USDA E. Kika De La Garza Fellowship Program offers faculty from Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) the opportunity to work collaboratively with USDA to gain insight and understanding of the federal government. This uniquely tailored experience brings together HSI staff and federal executives to address the spectrum of challenges faced in the development of a well-prepared Hispanic workforce.

Fellows spend their week with USDA increasing their understanding of federal programs and opportunities, particularly at the national level, and working to identify and explore mutual collaborative interests.

Education Fellows

Education Fellows learn first-hand the mission and programs of USDA by meeting with leadership and staff from each of the Department's agencies. Participants enrich the USDA with their diverse experiences and allow for on-going dialogue regarding the educational challenges facing the Hispanic community.



Blanca Acevedo

Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL

Blanca Acevedo is the associate director of the TRIO Upward Bound program at Northeastern Illinois University. Blanca holds an M.A. in higher education from the university's ENLACE leadership program. She currently works to develop 21st-century skills through the use of STEAM innovation to low-income and first-generation communities. She is a state, regional and national best practice presenter providing professional development on how to infuse maker education activities into the classroom.

Blanca is also the co-chair of the Fiesta del Sol festival in the Pilsen community, past co-chair of the University Roundtable, and the legislation and education co-chair for the Illinois TRIO professional association. Blanca is the co-author of the Today's Inspired Young Latina Volume 4.

As a first-generation DACA recipient and daughter of immigrants, she is committed to serving the underrepresented populations of Cicero and Berwyn in the southwest suburbs of Chicago.



Ryan Amaral

Modesto Junior College, Modesto, CA

Joaquin "Ryan" Amaral is a program specialist at Modesto Junior College (MJC). During his five years there, he has worked closely with career technical education programs across campus to provide support for more than 8,000 students by coordinating outreach, recruitment and marketing efforts. He is the advisor to MJC's Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) club, which is the first MANRRS club at a community college in California. He is also the co-advisor to the Young Farmers club.

As an adjunct faculty member, he teaches an introduction to college and careers course within the School of Agriculture. Ryan is an active member of the community and supports multiple high school agriculture programs by serving on their advisory committees. He is also an active member of the Turlock Sunrise Rotary club, serving as the club's recruitment chair and a District 5220 RYLA counselor. Ryan is a proud member of Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, where he competed in the Open Discussion Meet, placing in the top four for the last two years. Prior to MJC, Ryan was at Virginia Tech and National FFA in Indianapolis, Indiana. He graduated from California State University, Chico where he majored in agricultural business.



Tatevik Avetisyan

California State University, Chico, Chico, CA

Dr. Tatevik Avetisyan is an assistant professor of agricultural business at California State University, Chico (Chico State). She teaches agricultural markets, advanced agribusiness management, and agricultural and food marketing competition. Her research draws from multiple fields of study including entrepreneurship, economics, supply chain risk management, network science, agri-food business management, and sustainability science to analyze issues faced by farms and food enterprises. Her current and most recent research projects include exploring food hubs and fava bean markets in California, examining consumer willingness to pay premiums for local food in Northern California, as well as exploring regional food hubs in West Africa.

Her professional activities include coaching teams for various student competitions, advising undergraduate students, and serving as chair of the Future Farmers of America Marketing Plan Contest at Chico State. Tatevik serves as member of both the International Food and Agribusiness Management Association's Young Board and Chico State's Faculty Development Advisory Board.

She earned a B.A. and M.A. in economics with a focus on agribusiness and marketing, graduating summa cum laude from Armenian National Agrarian University. Tatevik later earned a second M.A. in agricultural, food and resource economics and Ph.D. in community sustainability from Michigan State University.



Maruthi Sridhar Balaji Bhaskar

Florida International University, Miami, FL

Dr. Maruthi Sridhar Balaji Bhaskar is an associate professor in the Department of Earth and Environment at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, Florida. He earned his Ph.D. in forest resources from Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi and his M.S. in soil science and agricultural chemistry and B.S. in agriculture from Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University in Hyderabad, India.

Maruthi is actively involved in agriculture research through the Agroecology Program at FIU, which offers several courses in sustainable agriculture, soil sciences, conservation biology, water resources, wetlands ecology, and natural resource economics and policy. His research interests include learning, adapting, and implementing novel precision agriculture techniques to improve crop yields and reduce waste while minimizing the carbon footprint of agriculture and mitigating the impacts of climate change. He is also interested in the application of remote sensing and geospatial techniques for environmental and agricultural management, soil and water pollution, landscape ecology, human and environmental health monitoring and economic development.

Maruthi was awarded five patents for his work on remote sensing. He was a Fulbright U.S. Faculty Scholar in 2018-2019 at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. He developed several satellite models to monitor soil and water quality, contaminant fate, environmental disasters, invasive plant species and evapotranspiration.

Over the past several years, he has served as a principal investigator on several research grants. He has several research publications and has made numerous presentations at national and international conferences and meetings.



Michelle Batchu

St. Francis College, Brooklyn Heights, NY

Michelle S. Batchu works at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York where she is the science coordinator and biology tutor, as well as an adjunct faculty in biology. She has a B.S. in biology from St. Francis College and an M.S. in biology from the City College of New York, with a focus on cell, molecular and developmental biology. Michelle has taught and tutored STEM students in the tri-state area for the past eight years. In her role as the science coordinator in the Center for Learning and Leadership at St. Francis College, she coordinates all science tutors and manages all student study sessions.

Michelle is passionate about many scientific topics, including climate change and conservation, as well as understanding complex molecular mechanisms like cyclooxygenase and prostaglandin associated cell signaling.

The daughter of Trinidadian American immigrants, a first-generation college student, and the first in her family to pursue a degree in STEM, Michelle is devoted to providing extensive opportunities for all her students. Michelle will commence her Ed.D. in higher education in Fall 2023 and looks forward to becoming an advocate for change and growth within STEM in higher education.



Baleshka Brenes

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Baleshka Brenes earned her bachelor's degree in socioeconomic development and environment at Zamorano University in Honduras. After graduation, she completed an internship at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Soon after, she earned her M.A. in agricultural sciences at Texas A&M University, Commerce. She earned her Ph.D. in agricultural education and communications at Texas Tech University.

She is currently the director of agriculture programs at the University of Arizona-Yuma. Her position allows her to work at different levels, including teaching, advising, outreach and recruitment, industry and workforce development, and grant writing, to support students' experiential learning. She teaches agriculture courses about leadership principles and practices, communicating knowledge in agriculture, and the life sciences as well as experiential learning courses emphasizing internship, preceptorship and research.

She conducts community outreach and writes grants to promote programs in agriculture that contribute to student self-efficacy and bachelor degree completion. She has been a principal investigator and co-investigator of USDA grant-funded projects worth \$2.4 million.

Supporting Hispanic and other underserved and minority populations is her lifelong commitment and vision. She partners with community colleges on 2+2 agriculture programs, serving 75% Hispanic and 73% first-generation students. She is passionate about working with Hispanic individuals and communities and conducting research on Latino and Hispanic issues. Her other areas of interest include acculturation, food safety culture, leadership and international agriculture.



Cosmo Costales

College of the Sequoias, Visalia, CA

Cosmo Costales currently serves as the career technical education (CTE) career and academic success coordinator with College of the Sequoias – Tulare Campus. Cosmo attained a B.A. in sociology and a minor in Chicana/o studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. He oversees career services for the Agriculture Division, in addition to welding, architecture, and graphic design. For nearly five years (and more than seven years in previous roles), Cosmo has pursued, developed and maintained relationships with community education, employment and social services organizations.

This experience has helped him realize the significance of fostering collaboration and managing relationships among community stakeholders across multiple sectors. He believes that input, buy-in and ongoing information-sharing among partners is critical to the success of student career and academic development programs.

Cosmo envisions multiple agencies at the USDA as potential partners – specifically those dealing with community outreach, grant funding, education, research and student internships. As a USDA E. Kika De La Garza Fellow, he hopes to secure new USDA funding avenues and partnerships that will support applied academic learning and student work experiences at College of the Sequoias.



Dawn Cummings

Community College of Denver, Denver, CO

Dawn Cummings is a professor at the Community College of Denver (CCD) in Colorado. She is the course lead, developing curriculum and serving as the primary instructor for environmental science, animal biology and field biology. Dawn is also co-investigator on a National Science Foundation S-STEM program at CCD called ACE (Academic and Career Experience) that provides student mentoring, academic support and career exploration.

Dawn is passionate about mentoring students. She is always seeking opportunities for students to conduct research, build their confidence as scientists, network and find internships. Dawn collaborates with faculty at New Mexico Highlands University to develop and teach a field research experience for community college students. She also collaborates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help students conduct research projects at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado.

Prior to beginning her career as a community college professor, Dawn worked on several field research projects. She has worked in Canada, the arctic US, Mongolia and New Zealand conducting research on waterfowl, loons, vultures and kiwi. Dawn received her B.A. in anthropology and B.S. in biology from the University of Iowa. She then studied conservation biology at the University of Minnesota and received her M.A. in zoology from North Dakota State University.



Michelle Hasendonckx

California State University, Channel Islands, Camarillo, CA

An education equity professional with 15 years of federal grant administration experience, Michelle currently serves as the assistant vice president for Student Academic Success and Equity Initiatives (SASEI) in the Division of Academic Affairs at California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI). She has held roles ranging from activity manager to project director on various Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) grant projects and has managed various co-investigator, peer-mentor and faculty-led initiatives.

Michelle's career has been centered on working to better serve underrepresented, minoritized student populations. A first-generation college student herself, Michelle is committed to advancing the education and personal success of all students, and she recognizes the wealth of social and cultural capital they bring to the campus community.

She has also taught Chicana/o studies and CSUCI's experience program, served on the executive board of the Chicana/o Latina/o Faculty & Staff Association and Center for Community Engagement Advisory Board, and has also been active on many institutional committees working to advance CSUCI's equity agenda.

Prior to coming to CSUCI, Michelle served as the assistant director of the Upward Bound program at Loyola Marymount University. She holds an Ed.D. in educational leadership from CSUCI and Fresno State University, an M.A. in Education from Loyola Marymount University, and a B.A. from The Evergreen State College.



S. Otto Khera

Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM

S. Otto Khera is the program director of the Con Ganas Title V project and has served as the director of Grants and Rural Initiatives at Western New Mexico University since 2021. He is completing his dissertation on Hispanic-Serving Institution student travel mobility as a social framework of belongingness across physical and virtual domains. Khera is a published research scholar with award-winning journal articles focused on teaching and learning and mobility, including the "flipped classroom," eportfolios, DIY bicycle culture, and online library technology decisions.

Khera has served as principal investigator and co-investigator on USDA and other federal and private grant-funded projects, including a current USDA project focused on designing an interdisciplinary food and agriculture curriculum targeting New Mexico HSI learners. Khera is passionate about all aspects of food, agriculture, mobility and space as social constructs, rural and urban identity, and how people learn across modes of instruction.

Currently he is collaborating on an undergraduate curriculum with Rutgers University focused on rural mobility and its relationship to workforce and economic development. This hybrid course engages students in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis relating to different forms of mobility and public perceptions and behaviors across mobility modes within a rural context.

Khera has nearly 30 years of higher education experience punctuated by private-sector media technology startup experience, including Desert Exposure newspaper (founded in 1995) and the Axon Television Network (1992-1995). He also served as the senior consultant to learning technology companies including Instructure (Canvas) and the Stanford Mobile Inquiry-Based Learning Environment (SMILE).



Maj-Britt Kimm

California State University, Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA

Maj-Britt Kimm is a lecturer in the College of Business at California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) where she teaches courses in management, marketing and economics. In her role as a manager of the College of Business Internship Excellence and Career Gateway Programs, Maj-Britt supports professional development events and facilitates internship opportunities at the CSUMB College of Business.

In addition, Maj-Britt is an adjunct faculty of business, economics, and career development programs at Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College. She holds her M.B.A. from the University of Alaska Anchorage College of Business and Public Policy.

With a goal to make a positive difference in the world, Maj-Britt believes in providing students with the tools and opportunities needed to make their voices heard. Passionate about supporting students in the agricultural sector and promoting responsible business practices, Maj-Britt envisions strengthening partnerships between USDA, CSUMB, area community colleges, and local businesses. She sees student success and the prosperity of the broader community as intertwined, and she is eager to make a positive impact through the extraordinary opportunity offered by the E. Kika De La Garza fellowship.



Xiangping Liu

Texas State University, San Marco, TX

Dr. Xiangping Liu is an assistant professor at the Department of Agricultural Sciences at Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas. Her primary research area is broadly in the field of agricultural, resource and environmental economics. Her research focus has been on natural resource policy design and evaluation, spatial and temporal factors in the optimal design of land conservation policy, the non-market value of land uses, and environmental amenities. She studies these issues through theoretical models and empirical analyses using big data. She has adopted an interdisciplinary approach as the study of natural resource and ecosystem conservation is an interdisciplinary endeavor.

Since her appointment at Texas State University, Xiangping has developed new research projects on cover crop as a soil conservation technic, food waste reduction, and the economic evaluation of integrated land and water conservation.

In addition to her primary research area, she also works on other microeconomic or interdisciplinary topics that she finds interesting and where her econometric skills are valuable. She explores the monetary value and environmental benefits of black soldier fly larvae as an alternative feed; the economic and environmental impacts of converting agricultural residues into eco-friendly construction materials; broadband loan programs in the United States; and disentangled moral hazard and adverse selection effects using hospital invoice data in Croatia.

Prior to joining Texas State University, she held research and teaching positions at North Carolina State University, the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.



Julie Ann Lucca

Los Medanos College, Pittsburg, CA

Julie Lucca received both her M.S. degree in food science and nutrition and B.S. in cell and molecular biology from California Polytechnic San Luis Obispo. She has also studied at Scuola Dante Alighieri in Italy and Chiang Mai University in Thailand. She has volunteered in various international work programs, including the U.S. Peace Corps and American Red Cross, and she is a University of California Master Gardener. As the lab coordinator of Los Medanos College, Julie prepares and coordinates biology, health and ecology courses. Additionally, she is an adjunct nutritional science instructor at Diablo Valley College as well as an instructor of water aerobics and yoga at a gym near her home.

Julie is an advocate for education and preventative medicine with the goal of achieving a higher quality of living. She promotes health through local and plant-based diets as a way to prevent premature morbidity and mortality. She has published works on the health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption and has worked multiple harvests in the California wine industry. She comes from the California Bay Area where she enjoys dance, gardening, wine, yoga, fishing, boating and music.



Benjamin C. Miele

University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX

Ben Miele teaches and studies early modern British literature and culture, the environmental humanities, surveillance studies, and sustainability studies. His recent research focuses on the intersection of environmental justice and social justice across time in ancient Rome, Elizabethan England and contemporary American culture. He is especially interested in the cultural histories of composting and various methods for enriching soil.

He is an associate professor of English at the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) in San Antonio, Texas as well as the coordinator of UIW's Sustainability Studies program, supervisor of UIW's community gardens, and chair of the UIW Sustainability Advisory Board, a committee of faculty, students, staff and community leaders who advocate for more sustainable practices at UIW and in the greater San Antonio community. Ben has been at UIW for seven years and previously worked at the University of Iowa. His alma mater is Colorado College.



Syndia A. Nazario-Cardona

Universidad Ana G. Méndez, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Syndia A. Nazario-Cardona understands that education influences society, ignites motivation and creates opportunities for change. With over 30 years of experience, this passionate education advocate has dedicated her professional life to making educational opportunities available to youth, immigrant and adult learners. She has also worked throughout her career on government relations, social justice and immigration issues. In addition, she has been actively involved in her community, promoting social and educational opportunities and economic well-being.

Syndia is the associate vice president of Government Affairs and Community Relations for the Universidad Ana G. Méndez (UAGM). In 2006 she joined Sistema Universitario Ana G. Méndez's team as campus director of the South Florida Campus and has since occupied different leadership roles. Since joining UAGM, she has expanded her advocacy for access to higher education. She was instrumental in implementing portions of the university's expansion plan to reinforce its commitment to providing quality higher education to all U.S. Hispanics.

Her work has been recognized at local, state and international levels. In 2022 she was recognized as one of the 100 Successful Women in Business in London at a global event honoring women worldwide who transformed their communities by becoming agents of change. However, her greatest satisfaction continues to be having the opportunity to influence students while empowering them to achieve better futures through educational opportunities.

She has made academic presentations in Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Bolivia, the continental United States, Spain, Germany, London and Nigeria.



Sierra Netz

Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque, NM

Professor Sierra Netz is a distinguished faculty of biology and environmental science at Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) with over 14 years of experience in teaching and curriculum development of in-person and online lectures and labs. Her dedication to student success is evident in her hands-on and personalized learning approach, which emphasizes the unique strengths and needs of each student. She believes that every student can learn and excel in STEM subjects, and she uses CNM campuses as living labs for student data collection and hands-on learning for general science students through STEM majors.

She actively collaborates with community organizations and faculty from four-year universities to provide unique classroom, internship and transfer opportunities for CNM students. Sierra is an active member of the Accelerating Latinx Representation in STEM Education (ALRISE) alliance and aims to equip her students with scientific literacy, critical thinking skills and the self-confidence to step into their future roles as scientists, healthcare workers and other professionals in the greater Albuquerque community and beyond.



Circe Niezen

Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, Hato Ray, Puerto Rico

Dr. Circe Niezen is a professor of industrial engineering with a deep passion for teaching and research. Committed to fostering the next generation of engineers, she mentors undergraduate students, providing guidance and support to help them develop their research interests and navigate their academic journeys.

Throughout her career, Circe has consistently demonstrated a deep understanding of the importance of the research aspects of engineering education. Her keen analytical skills and ability to think strategically have allowed her to identify and seize opportunities for organizational growth and improvement.

She is equally dedicated to sharing her expertise outside of work through speaking engagements and by mentoring aspiring engineers. Her dedication to fostering the next generation of talent reflects her belief in the importance of nurturing the industry's future leaders.

Currently, Circe holds a position as an associate professor of industrial engineering at Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico. She leads research projects, supervises undergraduate students, and contributes to curriculum development to ensure that students receive a comprehensive and relevant education.



Vanessa Oddo

University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

Vanessa Oddo is an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition at the University of Illinois Chicago. She holds an M.P.H. in public health nutrition from Tufts University and a Ph.D. in human nutrition from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Her research broadly focuses on the social determinants of nutrition-related health.

Currently, Vanessa is leading a study funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities that is investigating the role of employment quality on diet, obesity and cardiometabolic risk in the U.S. Vanessa also studies the impacts of nutrition policies that aim to improve diets and prevent obesity among vulnerable populations. She is a co-investigator on a Bloomberg Philanthropies-funded study that is evaluating five key nutrition policy areas: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, healthy retail and restaurant menu labeling, improved school nutrition, and warning labels on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs). Her prior work also includes evaluating the impact of SSB taxes and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, both critical drivers of diet quality in the United States.



Jhones Sarturi

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Dr. Jhones O. Sarturi has been a tenured associate professor of beef cattle nutrition and rumen metabolism within the Department of Animal and Food Sciences at Texas Tech University, Lubbock since early 2013. He received his Ph.D. in veterinary medicine from the University for the Development of Pantanal – Brazil, his M.S. in agronomy from the University of Sao Paulo – Brazil, and his Ph.D. in animal science from the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Before his current faculty position, Jhones worked as a post-doctoral research associate at Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Amarillo. His research focus has been on digestive physiology, and he has developed strategies to improve, evaluate and better utilize byproducts, forages and grains in ruminant diets. As the manager for the Ruminant Nutrition Laboratory and the Ruminant Nutrition Center (cattle metabolism area), he fosters basic and applied research.

Empowering undergraduate and graduate students has been one of Jhones' passions and focuses; he teaches undergraduate (service learning and production classes) and graduate levels, with six classes offered at his home department. He currently resides in Lubbock, Texas.



Edward D. Vargas

Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

Edward D. Vargas is an associate professor in the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University. He also serves as a senior analyst for Barreto Segura Partners research and a nonresident senior fellow in governance studies at The Brookings Institution. His primary area of interest is the effects of poverty and inequality on quality of life, specifically on how health, immigration status and social policy contribute to the well-being of vulnerable families. Poverty and inequality are strongly tied to race and ethnicity; thus, he is also interested in the methodological issues involved in the quantitative study of race and ethnicity.

Edward has served as co-investigator on the 2016 and 2020 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (funded by the National Science Foundation) and a Robert W. Johnson Foundation project focused on intersectionality and data collection strategies by federal agencies.



Maureen Victoria

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Dr. Maureen Victoria is a visiting assistant professor at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. She received her undergraduate degree in agricultural education from Texas State University-San Marcos, Texas and her master's degree in Agricultural Systems Management at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Missouri. She then went on to teach agricultural mechanics for four years before pursuing a doctorate in agricultural leadership, education and communications from Texas A&M University. Teaching high school students inspired her to conduct research to help students who speak English as a Second Language and those with developmental disabilities who work in skilled trades by meeting their need for specialized instruction and developing instructional aids.

Maureen currently supervises an agricultural advocacy and communications research lab consisting of four undergraduate research students. She also mentors and supervises pre-service agricultural educators during their student teaching semester to help them develop their transformational learning goals with students through instructional management strategies that enhance experiential learning and problem-solving skills.



Nancy Vue

California State University, Fresno, Fresno, CA

Nancy Vue is the coordinator of internships and professional experiences for the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State). She received her B.A. in psychology from the University of California, Merced (UCM) and shortly after completed her M.Ed. with an option in leadership from the Kremen School of Education and Human Development at Fresno State. Nancy is a returning alumna of Fresno State and is local to California's Central Valley.

Previously, she worked as an academic coach in the School of Natural Sciences at UCM before transitioning into her current role. She entered her current position in November 2022 and is dedicated to serving students interested in entering the agricultural sector. Many of the students she serves identify as first-generation underrepresented students that are highly passionate about their specialized major in agriculture.

Focusing in career counseling and stakeholder engagement, Nancy uses her experience to establish new opportunities for students while also strengthening the existing relationships between the university and the agricultural community and industry. She aspires to promote the mission and vision of Fresno State, which is "to educate and empower students for success."

Science Fellows

Science Fellows collaborate with leading scientists from either USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Participants learn about state-of-the-art agricultural research that solves problems affecting Hispanic Americans and the rest of our nation on a daily basis.

Fellows share their expertise with students at their respective HSIs, motivating Hispanic students to pursue careers in agriculture, science, research, and technology.



Pride Abongwa

Texas A&M University-San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

Dr. Pride Abongwa serves as an assistant professor of geosciences at the Department of Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Before arriving in San Antonio, he was a visiting assistant professor of geology at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington in 2017 as well as a Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma from 2015-2017.

Pride has taught courses in introductory geology, hydrology, hydrogeology, geochemistry, environmental geology, environmental studies, and geology field camps. His research interest is in the energy-water nexus: carbon in the environment, water resource evaluation (quantity and quality), and ecological conservation and nutrient cycling. These themes are studied in areas such as water-rock interactions; groundwater-surface water interactions; bio-remediation of hydrocarbon produced water; groundwater flow in porous media; spatial and temporal monitoring of the behavior of carbon in hydrological settings; and biogeochemical studies in wetlands and ecological management.

He received his Ph.D. in geology from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2014, his M.S. in hydrology and water resources from IHE Institute of Water Education in Delft, The Netherlands, and his B.S. with honors in geology from The University of Buea in Cameroon.



Felipe Aburto

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Dr. Felipe Aburto received his B.S. in agricultural sciences in 2007 from the University of Chile and his M.S. and Ph.D. in soil and biogeochemistry from the University of California, Davis in 2011 and 2014 respectively. In 2014, he took an assistant professor position at the University of Concepción (UdeC) in Chile and was promoted to associate professor in 2019. He joined Texas A&M University (TAMU) as an assistant professor in October 2021.

His international research program applies an interdisciplinary approach to studying soil development and the effect of land use change and management intensification on soil functionality, focusing on biogeochemical soil processes and mineral weathering. He currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in soil morphology and interpretations, soil genesis, and leads the TAMU Soil Judging Team.

Felipe also holds an adjunct professor position in the Faculty of Environmental Sciences at UdeC. He has mentored dozens of undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds. He is a first-generation graduate and a Fulbright Scholarship awardee. He has published 26 articles in high-impact journals and has been awarded for multiple scientific projects that he managed. His research has been featured in newspapers, radio, television and social media. He has served as associate and technical editor of the Soil Science Society of America Journal and an ad-hoc reviewer for many other journals in his discipline.



Kalynn Baldock

Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, NM

Kalynn Baldock is an assistant professor of agricultural science at Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU). She serves as the co-chair for the Agriculture, Food Science and Kinesiology Department and teaches agricultural education, animal science, and career and technical education courses. She also advises students and supervises student research in the agricultural laboratories. She oversees the ENMU agriculture dual credit program working with public school districts throughout New Mexico. In her role as department co-chair, she supervises faculty, plans curricular schedules, and manages budgets.

Kalynn holds a B.S. in animal and dairy science and an M.S. in secondary education from ENMU. She earned her Ed.D. in agricultural education through Texas A&M and Texas Tech University (TTU) and a certificate in agricultural communication and leadership from TTU.

She has more than eight years of teaching experience in secondary agricultural science and served as a Future Farmers of America advisor. Before starting her educational and academic career, Kalynn spent eight years working in the dairy industry managing herd health and general operations. She is from a farming family and was raised in eastern New Mexico, where she resides. She is known in the eastern New Mexico community for her expertise in dairy cattle and artificial insemination.



Samuel Discua Duarte

University of Arizona, Yuma, AZ

Samuel Discua is a postdoctoral research associate and lecturer at the University of Arizona Department of Entomology working under Dr. John Palumbo's guidance at the University of Arizona Yuma Agricultural Center. Samuel's current research focuses on different aspects of the thrips transmitted disease Impatiens Necrotic Spot Virus (INSV), a major threat to lettuce crop production in the United States that costs California growers \$50 to \$100 million in losses annually. His research includes investigating the role of weeds as hosts of INSV, studying the impact of lettuce transplants on introducing viruliferous thrips in the Yuma, Arizona growing region, and chemical control strategies for western flower thrips.

Samuel also teaches crop production, agricultural systems management, and independent study courses at the University of Arizona in Yuma. Prior to that, he worked at Helena Agri-Enterprises in the Research and Development Department as the research and development manager for Arizona and Southern California.

He obtained his doctoral degree in plant and soil science with emphasis in entomology from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, his master's degree in entomology from Ohio State University in Columbus, and his bachelor's degree in crop science and production from Zamorano University in Honduras.

Samuel is excited to participate in the E. Kika De La Garza Science Fellowship program and learn about collaborative opportunities and USDA programs designed to strengthen Hispanic-Serving Institutions and the communities they serve.



Isolde Francis

California State University, Bakersfield, Bakersfield, CA

Isolde Francis is an associate professor in the Department of Biology at California State University Bakersfield (CSUB). She received her education in Belgium where she obtained a B.S. in biology from Hasselt University, an M.S. in biochemistry from KU Leuven, and a Ph.D. in biotechnology from Ghent University. During her time as a graduate student, she discovered her passion for plant pathology by studying the plant pathogenic bacterium *Rhodococcus fascians*.

Prior to her appointment at CSUB, Isolde was a postdoctoral scholar in the lab of Professor Rosemary Loria at Cornell University and later at the University of Florida, where she worked on *Streptomyces scabies*. Pathogenic bacteria *R. fascians* and *S. scabies* remain an important part of her current research, but since moving to Bakersfield, her focus has shifted to more applied research by connecting with the local agricultural industry.

She introduced students at CSUB to plant pathology by creating a specific course and engaging them in biotechnological and applied research projects with the goal of furthering knowledge on agriculturally important plant diseases and developing practical applications that can be used in the field.



Kalyani Maitra

California State University, Fresno, Fresno, CA

Kalyani Maitra is an associate professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at California State University, Fresno. She received her Ph.D. in organometallic chemistry from the University of Nevada, Reno, where she designed model achiral phosphine complexes for use in asymmetric organic catalysis reactions. Her post-doctoral research work at The University of California, Davis involved the study of fullerene-metalloporphyrin adducts to function as electron sinks. Her second post-doctoral research at the University of California, Irvine focused on the design of artificial beta-sheets to better understand the molecular basis of amyloid formation associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Kalyani later joined the pharmaceutical company, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories in India, where she worked as research scientist in the analytical and the bio-catalysis division. Her current research explores the sustainable use of algae in capturing and sequestering the greenhouse gas CO₂, its role in wastewater remediation, and its potential to function as an alternate resource for feedstock in agriculture, bioenergy and bioproduct. She also focuses on research to understand the structural aspects of polypeptide/peptidomimetics for their potential use as therapeutics in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, as well as their function as antimicrobial agents. She has co-authored two book chapters on algae cultivation and algae-derived bioproducts.

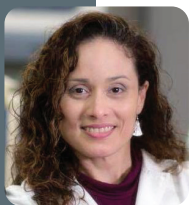


Adela Olivia Chavez

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Dr. Adela Oliva Chavez is an assistant professor in the Department of Entomology at Texas A&M University. She is Hispanic, originally from Honduras. Coming from a family of cattle farmers, she witnessed firsthand the impact that ticks and tick-borne pathogens have on livestock. Her research focuses on molecular host-pathogen and vector-pathogen interactions. She is interested in how vector-borne pathogens influence host and vector cellular responses, such as immune responses, cellular trafficking, and vesicle secretion. She is also interested in finding management alternatives to stop tick feeding and pathogen transmission in animal systems and in humans. Her current work focuses on identifying antigens within extracellular vesicles that may provide protection to ticks.

She has published her research in several high-impact journals, including Nature Communications, PNAS, and PLoS Pathogens. She has also contributed to a book chapter titled "Protozoal and Rickettsial Vaccines" in Veterinary Vaccines by the Food and Agriculture Organization and another titled "Intracellular Pathogens II: Rickettsiales" in The Way Forward: Improving Genetic Systems. During her four years at Texas A&M University, she has secured around \$1 million to support her research program as principal investigator and co-investigator.



Elizabeth Padilla-Crespo

Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico

Dr. Elizabeth Padilla Crespo is a distinguished research professor at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico-Aguadilla. She has a double degree in biotechnology and industrial microbiology from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez, an M.S. in biology from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and a Ph.D. in microbiology from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. She has performed research at top research centers such as Harvard Medical School, the Department of Energy Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying biofilms and the bioremediation of pesticides, hydrocarbons and chlorinated solvents.

As a National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellow, Elizabeth won several research competitions in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. She was selected as the 2013 Congressional Hispanic Institute Fellow and worked at the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space and Technology and led a policy summit of Green and Sustainable Remediation of Superfund sites. She has also worked at the Molecular and Cellular Division at NSF.

Her current research expands the areas of environmental microbiology, molecular microbial ecology, and geoscience. Elizabeth decided to return to Puerto Rico to contribute the island's knowledge-based economy by offering smart solutions to enhance detoxification of contaminated sites; help in the biotechnology and agricultural sectors; and inspire students, especially woman and minorities, to pursue careers in science.

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Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program

JULIO C. PUENTES
HSI National Program Manager
Julio.Puentes@usda.gov
Cell: 773-633-8822

**Office of Partnerships and
Public Engagement**
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Stop 0601
Washington, DC 20250- 9821

Main: 202-720-6350
Email: partnerships@usda.gov
Website: www.usda.gov/partnerships

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