

Speaker Biographies, Careers Workshop 2016

I. Alexandra Amaro, Ph.D

Postdoctoral Associate, Cornell University

Alex completed her graduate degree in the lab of Dr. Tim Huffaker in 2009 at Cornell University, where she remained for her postdoctoral work in the lab of Dr. John Parker. From 2012-2014, Alex was a scientist at Vybion, a small biotechnology company focused on developing intrabodies as reagents for basic research, as well as therapeutic applications. Work from her and others culminated in a patent, as well as interest for initial clinical trials for an intrabody approach to treating Huntington's Disease. Following the company's transition to virtual status, she has returned to Cornell to continue work in plant research and mosquito reproductive biology.

Cissy Ballen, Ph.D.

Teaching/Research Postdoctoral Associate, Cornell University

Cissy is interested in ways to reduce the attrition of traditionally underserved groups in STEM fields. Her background is in biology, but she first became interested in her current line of research as an undergraduate teaching assistant in zoology at the University of Minnesota. She and undergraduate mentor Sehoya Cotner co-wrote a paper published in the Journal of Science Teaching that demonstrated female students largely benefit, disproportionately from men, by having a female role model teaching their Biology class. While the research has broad applications, the results also rang true on a personal level. As a result, she became sensitive to the need for role-models in the sciences that could introduce students to scientists from different backgrounds, genders, and cultural worldviews. After she finishes her postdoctoral position at Cornell she will return to the University of Minnesota to continue her work on institutional biases and solution-oriented strategies to promote diversity in the sciences.

Prior to Cornell, she received her PhD in evolutionary biology from the University of Sydney, Australia, studying the biology of color signaling in reptiles. Her B.S. degree is in Fisheries & Wildlife and Biology from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Christine Holmes, Director

Office of Postdoctoral Studies, Cornell University

Christine Holmes serves as the director of the Office of Postdoctoral Studies at Cornell University which provides support for over 500 postdocs on campus. Christine has worked at Cornell for over 20 years, and became the first director of the Office of Postdoctoral Studies in 1995. In that capacity, she monitors the status and needs of the campus postdoctoral community, and serves as an advocate for postdoctoral issues to the Graduate School and Cornell's administration; she provides career counseling for all postdocs and organizes workshops, seminars and social activities for postdocs.

She received her BS in Management from Nazareth College in 1985 and her MBA from St John Fisher College in 1988. Prior to joining Cornell she worked in the trade show Industry supporting diverse marketing efforts for her clients.

Maki Inada, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Biology Department, Ithaca College

Maki is an Associate Professor in Biology at Ithaca College. After receiving her B.S. in Chemistry at MIT, she completed her Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Biophysics at UCSF. Not knowing what she wanted to do with her life, she happened to land a one-year Visiting Assistant Professor position at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN where she fell in love with teaching. She then returned to the Bay Area for a postdoc position at UC Berkeley. She and her husband Jeff Pleiss moved to Ithaca in 2007. Maki was a Senior Research Associate and Lecturer in MBG where she developed a new research course for Cornell undergraduates. She then moved across the hill to Ithaca College in 2009, where she is the Biochemist/Molecular Biologist in the Biology Department. Maki's research with undergraduates focuses on understanding mechanisms for regulating gene expression via splicing in yeast.

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Brooke LaFlamme, Ph.D.
Associate Editor, *Nature Genetics*

Brooke LaFlamme is an Associate Editor at *Nature Genetics*. After receiving a B.S. in Molecular and Cellular Biology and a B.A. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from the University of Arizona, she went on to do her graduate research with Prof. Mariana Wolfner at Cornell University where she received her Ph.D. in Genetics in 2012. Brooke joined Prof. Shuibing Chen at Weill Cornell Medical College for her postdoctoral work, where she studied small molecules that function in pathways relevant for embryonic stem cell differentiation. She joined the team at *Nature Genetics* in late 2013. Her duties at the journal include choosing manuscripts for peer review and overseeing the peer review process, enforcing journal policies, attending and organizing conferences, and conducting lab visits.

Scott Saracco, Ph.D.
Team lead, Protein Analytics Monsanto Company

Scott Saracco has led the Protein Analytics team within Monsanto for two years and prior to this, he led the Nucleic Acids Analytics team. Both teams are responsible for characterizing and quantifying the expression of transgenic protein or RNA in plants from the discovery through commercial phases. In previous roles at Monsanto, Scott was involved with projects to improve yield and stress tolerance in corn and soybeans. Scott obtained a B.S. in Biotechnology from the University of Delaware and spent a year at DuPont examining plant gene expression. He obtained his Ph.D. at Cornell, under Dr. Tom Fox, studying yeast mitochondrial protein import. During his postdoctoral studies with Dr. Rick Vierstra at the University of Wisconsin, Scott focused on the biochemistry of ubiquitin and ubiquitin-like proteins in plants.

Susi Varvayanis, Senior Director
BEST Program, Cornell University

Susi is currently Senior Director for Cornell's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training, or BEST program. Previously, she was Business Development Officer at the Institute of Biotechnology, where she managed the Presidential Life Science Fellowship program, the Center for Advanced Technology (CAT) NYSTAR awards, and was host city coordinator for the statewide Pre-Seed Workshop (PSW) to evaluate high tech ideas for commercial potential. She served as Chief Operating Officer for a Swiss NSF Center for Research Excellence bringing together the fields of chemistry and biology, with responsibility for technology transfer, science communication, advancement of women in science, and education and training efforts.

Prior to Cornell, Susi worked in the NIH lab of Robert Gallo on retroviruses, and at Biotech Research Laboratories, a Maryland startup. She has co-authored over 30 peer-reviewed publications in cancer cell biology. Her past includes managing a flow cytometry laboratory and teaching at an international boys' school in Switzerland. Susi earned a BA in Biological Sciences and French from Mount Holyoke College, and a Master's in Microbiology & Immunology from Georgetown University.

