Science Societies

Looking back on 2025

A year of growth and impact for the Graduate Student Committee

By Bala Subramanyam and Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira

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The ACS Graduate Student Committee led a variety of initiatives this year to benefit fellow students and early-career professionals. One of these resources was the Graduate Student Leadership Conference, held at CANVAS 2025. Photo courtesy of W. Scott Mitchell.

The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA (ACS) Graduate Student Committee met regularly throughout 2025 to develop CANVAS resources and year-round webinars to

support fellow graduate students. This year presented unique challenges as the Societies navigated significant transitions and system changes. Through collaboration, innovation, and sustained effort, the committee successfully overcame these challenges and concluded the year with a strong portfolio of impactful programming and initiatives. This article highlights the many activities, events, and opportunities organized by the Graduate Student Committee over the past year in support of graduate student success.

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The Graduate Student Leadership Conference

The Graduate Student Committee kicked off CANVAS 2025 with the Graduate Student Leadership Conference, “Sharpening Skills to Strengthen Your Graduate School

Experience and Beyond.”



Graduate students connecting and exchanging ideas during the Graduate Student Leadership Conference. Photo by Julia Barra-Neto Ferreira.

We received more than 100 applications, and 90 graduate students were selected to participate in the event. The morning program featured an engaging scientific communication workshop where participants learned to pitch their ideas effectively, use social media to communicate science, and speak confidently in public. In the afternoon, participants engaged in hands-on activities focused on addressing workplace issues and managing conflict. To conclude the session, we hosted an engaging panel featuring professionals from diverse career backgrounds, who participated in an interactive dialogue with graduate student attendees and shared valuable insights drawn from their lived professional experiences.

The final minutes of the leadership training were dedicated to interactive activities, during which students rotated through stations covering essential career soft skills, including elevator pitches and conflict management. The event also offered a welcoming and engaging atmosphere with breakfast, lunch, and snacks provided throughout the day. These shared meals created valuable opportunities for informal conversations and networking. Participants enjoyed connecting with graduate students from other universities and building relationships with professionals from a wide range of disciplines, making the event both enriching and collaborative beyond the formal sessions.

The Graduate Student Networking Session

The Graduate Student Networking Session returned to CANVAS 2025 for another successful year, continuing its mission to foster meaningful peer and mentor interactions among graduate students. Sponsored by Corteva Agriscience, the committee invited mentors from a wide range of disciplines and career paths to engage with graduate student mentees.



Graduate students chatting with mentors during a "speed-date" style interaction at the Graduate Student Networking Session. Photo courtesy of Julia Barra-Neto Ferreira.

Following an inspiring keynote address by David Bubeck (Corteva Agriscience), students and mentors took part in an interactive "speed-dating" style workshop, during which mentors spent 10 minutes at each table before rotating to meet new groups of students. This format encouraged dynamic conversations and enabled participants to gain diverse perspectives in a short time. The final 30 minutes transitioned into a casual mixer, giving students and mentors the opportunity to freely mingle, continue conversations, and build lasting professional connections.

With a packed room of more than 130 graduate students and an unprecedented attendance size, the networking session was a tremendous success. The Graduate Student Committee extends its sincere appreciation to the mentors and speakers who generously shared their time, experiences, and guidance with graduate student attendees, making this event both impactful and memorable.

Guidance for transitioning into the workforce

Another session brought back to CANVAS 2025 by popular demand was the panel “Life After Graduate School—Transitioning to Early Career.” This session was designed to support graduate students who are approaching the transition into their early careers as well as early career professionals seeking practical guidance on how to successfully navigate this important career milestone. The session attracted more than 80 attendees and received highly positive feedback with participants noting that the discussion was especially valuable for identifying career pathways, understanding expectations beyond graduate school, and exploring new professional opportunities.



Panelists sharing insights during the “Transitioning from Graduate School to Early Career” session. Photo by Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira.

The session featured a panel of early career professionals who openly shared their experiences, challenges, and lessons learned during their own transitions. Panelists

provided actionable advice on topics such as career decision-making, work–life balance, and professional development across academic, industry, and other careers. The Graduate Student Committee extends its sincere appreciation to our outstanding panelists: Carlos Pires (North Dakota State University), Deepak Joshi (Kansas State University), Alexandre Rosa (Bayer), and Emily Bedwell (University of Idaho), for their time, insights, and dedication to supporting the next generation of professionals.



Bala Subramanyam, organizer of the special session “Leveling Up: Preparing for Your Next Career Move,” welcoming the audience and introducing the speakers. Photo by Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira.

Leveling up

Grateful for the journey

Serving on the Graduate Student Committee has truly been one of the most meaningful parts of my graduate journey, and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity. Although the time seemed to pass in the blink of an eye, it was filled with growth, collaboration, and lasting connections. This experience allowed me to work alongside inspiring individuals, learn from diverse perspectives, and grow in ways that extended far beyond my academic training.

When I stepped into the role of committee Chair in January 2025, I remember feeling both excited and nervous, fully aware of the responsibility that came with the position. Reflecting on my time on the committee, first as a member and later as Chair, I feel a deep sense of pride in what we accomplished together, especially in seeing our ideas come to life through meaningful and impactful programming at CANVAS.



Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira, 2025 Chair of the ACS Graduate Student Committee.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible people behind the scenes. I am deeply thankful to both past and current members of the ACS Graduate Student Committee for their dedication, teamwork, and constant support. I am also sincerely grateful to the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA staff for their guidance and partnership, with special thanks to DJ May and Ingrid Anderson for always helping turn ideas into reality.

To Bala, who will serve as the 2026 committee Chair: I have no doubt that you will be an exceptional leader, and I am excited to see the committee continue to grow and thrive under your guidance.

To my fellow graduate students, I encourage you to get involved and reach out. Serving on this committee was both challenging and deeply rewarding. While taking that first step may feel intimidating, the experience is truly worth it.

Thank you once again to everyone who supported me throughout this journey. I am incredibly grateful for the memories, the growth, and the people who made this experience so special.

—Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira, 2025 Chair

For the first time, the Graduate Student Committee hosted a dedicated symposium, “Leveling Up: Preparing for Your Next Career Move.” This highly successful interactive workshop was designed to help students confidently take the next step in their careers, whether pursuing opportunities in academia or industry after completing undergraduate or graduate training. The workshop focused on essential career-preparation skills, including crafting strong resumes and cover letters, preparing for interviews, and effectively positioning oneself in a competitive job market.

With over 55 attendees, the session received enthusiastic feedback and proved to be a valuable resource for students seeking clarity and confidence as they prepare for their next professional stage. The Graduate Student Committee is deeply grateful to our speakers for their time, expertise, and insightful contributions: Leo Bastos (University of Georgia), Aaron Lee M. Daigh (University of Nebraska–Lincoln), Dianna Bagnall (Soil Health Institute), and Nathan Hein (Bayer).



Graduate Student Committee members representing the committee at the career fair booth during CANVAS 2025. Photo by Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira.

Conversations at CANVAS booths

Also for the first time, the Graduate Student Committee hosted a dedicated booth at CANVAS 2025. The booth was present throughout the entire conference and served as a space to showcase committee activities, explain opportunities for involvement, and foster networking.

We connected with a wide range of attendees, including graduate students, faculty members, and professionals from diverse disciplines. The booth provided a valuable platform for meaningful conversations, outreach, and relationship-building, making it a truly rewarding experience for the committee.



A banner displayed at our booth highlighting who we are and the work we do. Scan the QR code for more information. Banner by Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira and Julia Barra-Neto Ferreira.

As a direct result of this increased visibility, the Graduate Student Committee held its in-person meeting during the conference with the highest attendance to date. Approximately 60 graduate students participated after learning about the committee through the booth and expressed a strong interest in getting involved and understanding how the committee operates.

The Graduate Student Travel Scholarship

In its fifth year of supporting graduate student travel to CANVAS 2025, the Graduate Student Travel Scholarship reached a major milestone by becoming a permanently endowed fund. Since its inception, the travel scholarship has supported more than 50 graduate students, investing over $37,500 in graduate student success. “I am grateful to be selected for this travel grant, which supported my attendance at the meeting in Salt Lake City,” says one of the 2025 award recipients. “Through this opportunity, I gained access to valuable mentorship, leadership training, and collaborative experiences offered by [CANVAS].”

For CANVAS 2025, the travel scholarship received an impressive 120 applications, from which 10 recipients were selected. The strong applicant pool reflects both the growing interest in CANVAS and the continued need for financial support to enable graduate student participation.

Applications for the travel scholarship typically open in March and close in July. Students are strongly encouraged to monitor announcements and promotional

materials closely to ensure they do not miss the application deadline.

The Graduate Student Committee would like to thank all donors who have contributed to the travel fund along with the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) for assisting with the establishment of the grant as a permanent ASF fund. If you would like to learn more about the travel grant or donate to the fund, you can visit the website here.

Year-round webinars

The Graduate Student Committee was able to plan an impressive number of webinars in 2025. The first webinar, “Leveraging the Societies for Networking and Connection,” featured the 2025 Presidents of the Societies, Samira Daroub (SSSA Past President), Peter Kyveryga (ASA Past President), and Mark Sorrells (CSSA Past President). This webinar attracted over 800 registrations and more than 500 attendees, highlighting strong interest among graduate students in learning how to maximize engagement and networking opportunities within the professional societies.



Flyer from one of our webinars presented in August 2025, showcasing a discussion with farmers and Extension specialists on current challenges in agriculture. Flyer by Jamie Nix.

The second webinar, “When Weather Hits Hard,” featured an outstanding panel discussion focused on the challenges facing farmers and their future solutions. Panelists included Kansas farmers Justin Knopf and Hayden Guetterman, along with Amanda de Oliveira, Oklahoma State University extension specialist. This engaging discussion provided valuable, real-world perspectives on agricultural challenges, innovation, and sustainability from both producer and university extension viewpoints.

Another highly impactful webinar, “Emerging Research on Environmental Challenges: Graduate Student Research Spotlight,” provided graduate students with a platform to present their research, strengthen their science communication skills, and receive constructive feedback from a diverse audience.

The webinar showcased innovative environmental research led by emerging scientists, with presentations addressing critical topics such as the risks that PFAS “forever chemicals” pose on crop production. Together, these presentations highlighted how the next generation of researchers is addressing pollution, sustainability, and the future of land and resource management.

Looking forward to a year of growth, collaboration, and impact



Bala Subramanyam Sivarathri, 2026 Chair of the ACS Graduate

As my first year serving as a member on the *Student Committee.* ACS Graduate Student Committee comes to a close, I reflect with pride on the significant accomplishments of the past year and look ahead with enthusiasm to 2026. I extend my sincere gratitude to the 2025 committee members for their dedication, hard work, and unwavering support for all the activities that we have done so far. Their commitment and collaborative spirit have been truly inspiring, and I am honored to step into the role of committee Chair for 2026 while continuing to work alongside such talented and motivated colleagues from universities across the country.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my predecessor, Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira, for her outstanding leadership and for providing invaluable guidance during this transition. It has been a privilege to serve under your leadership.

To all graduate students within ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, I look forward to continuing to support your success through our programs and initiatives. In 2026, we will maintain several key offerings—including the Graduate Student Travel Grant, the Graduate Student Networking Session, and the Graduate Student Leadership Conference—while also exploring new workshops and resources. Your feedback and involvement are essential to shaping our efforts. If you would like to share your ideas or volunteer with the committee, please contact me. Here's another year of growth, collaboration, and impact.

—Bala Subramanyam Sivarathri, 2026 Chair

It is important to highlight that this was the first time graduate students had the opportunity to organize and host webinars in close collaboration with the Societies, utilizing their official platforms and available tools. Although this transition presented challenges at the beginning, the process ultimately went very smoothly and resulted in outstanding participation and engagement. These successful outcomes demonstrate the value of empowering graduate students to take an active role in Society programming, and they set a strong foundation for future initiatives. Looking ahead to 2026, we are excited to continue building on this momentum by delivering high-quality webinars that serve and strengthen our community. Stay tuned for more to come!



Members of the 2025 Graduate Student Committee. From left to right: Duncan McSorley, Christopher Barron, Tina Sullivan (Ex Officio), Bala Subramanyam (2026 Chair), Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira (2025 Chair), and Megan Bourns (Ex Officio). Not pictured: Swas Kaushal, Austen Lambert, Gunvant Patil, Gustavo Roa, Ravi Seelam, Lauren Schwarck (Ex Officio), Amrinder Jakhar, Aaron Lee M. Daigh (Ex Officio), Julia Barra-Netto Ferreira, Pabitra Joshi, Katherine MacKenzie, Pratima Poudel, Ayush Sharma, and Lovepreet Singh.

Graduate Student Committee: Connect with us!

This article is a contribution of the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Graduate Student Committee. If you would like to provide feedback to this committee on its work or want to volunteer with the committee, please reach out to Bala Subramanyam, the 2026 Chair of the committee!

If you would like to stay up to date with our committee, learn more about our work, contribute to one of our *CSA News* articles, or suggest activities you would like us to promote, watch your emails, connect with us on X, or visit: agronomy.org/membership/committees/view/ACS238/members, crops.org/membership/committees/view/ACS238/members, or soils.org/membership/committees/view/ACS238/members.

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