Science Societies

Graduate Student Committee 2024: Reflecting on a year of achievements

By Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira, Ph.D. student at the Kansas State University and the 2025 Chair of the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA (ACS) Graduate Student Committee; and Ariana Lazo, Ph.D. student at Purdue University and the 2024 Chair of the ACS Graduate Student Committee.

January 27, 2025



Graduate Student Committee member Ana Morales-Ona leading a rapid interactive activity at the Graduate Student Leadership Training workshop during the 2024 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting (now known as CANVAS). Photo by Daniela Orjuela-Diaz

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The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Graduate Student Committee (ACS238) met throughout 2024 to plan programming and provide resources for graduate students both at CANVAS (formerly known as the Annual Meeting) and via webinars. This article reflects the many activities and opportunities hosted by the graduate student committee over the past year.

Leadership training workshop

The Graduate Student Committee kicked off the CANVAS 2024 with the first-ever free leadership training workshop. This two-hour session, titled "Graduate Student Leadership Training: Sharpening Skills to Strengthen Your Grad School Experience and Beyond," was designed to help graduate students build and/or enhance leadership skills crucial for success in graduate school and early in one's career. The leadership training workshop began with a panel discussion revolving around two key topics: leadership skills and conflict management. The panelists from diverse work experiences and backgrounds engaged in interactive dialogue with graduate student attendees and provided valuable insights based on their lived experience in their careers. The remaining 45 minutes of the leadership training was dedicated to interactive activities with students visiting different stations covering career-essential soft skills such as elevator pitches and conflict management. The Graduate Student

Committee would like to thank panelists Dr. Megan Bourns, Dr. Jaya Nepal, Mala Ganiger, and Dr. Leandro Otavio Vieira-Filho for their time and perspective during the leadership training workshop.

Networking session

In Annual Meeting tradition, the Graduate Student Networking Session was brought back for another year to encourage graduate student peer and mentor interaction. Sponsored by Corteva Agriscience, this year, the ACS Graduate Student Committee collaborated with the C5 Division (Turfgrass Science) Graduate Student Committee to invite mentors from various disciplines and career paths to engage with graduate student mentees. After hearing from keynote speaker Dr. Chrissie Segars (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service turfgrass specialist) and corporate sponsor Dr. Chris Schaefer (Soybean Evaluation Zone Lead at Corteva), students and mentors participated in an interactive “speed-date” style workshop with mentors spending 10 minutes at a table before rotating to meet new students. The last 30 minutes was spent as a casual mixer where students and mentors could freely mingle and network. With a packed room, the networking session was a tremendous success! The Committee would like to thank the mentors and speakers who took the time to connect with graduate student attendees during this event.



Graduate students chatting with mentors during the “speed-date” style interaction period at the Graduate Student Networking Session. Photo by Dr. Megan Bourns.

Another year of growth and collaboration

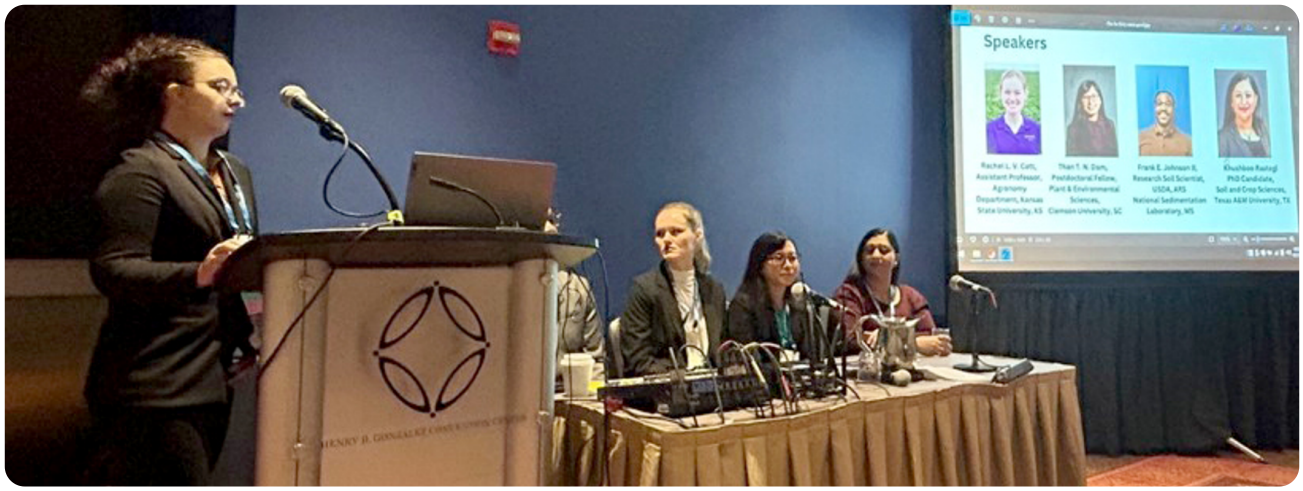
As my first year on the ACS Graduate Student Committee wraps up, I find myself reflecting on the incredible work completed and feeling excited for what lies ahead in 2025. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the 2024 committee members for their dedication and hard work. Their commitment has been truly inspiring. I am thrilled to take on the role of committee chair for 2025 and to continue working alongside such talented and driven colleagues. I also want to acknowledge my predecessor, Ariana Lazo, for being an exceptional chair and for offering invaluable guidance during this transition. It has been an honor to serve with you!

To all graduate students within ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, I am eager to continue supporting your success through our programs and initiatives. In 2025, we will be continuing key programs, including but not limited to, the Graduate Student Travel Grant, the Graduate Student Networking Session, and the Graduate Student Leadership Training; and we are exploring exciting ideas for workshops and additional resources. Your feedback and involvement are crucial, so if you would like to share your thoughts or volunteer with the committee, please feel free to reach out to me at jbezerra@ksu.edu. Here is to another year of growth and collaboration!

—Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira

Transitioning from graduate school to early career

Another session brought back to the Annual Meeting by popular demand was the special session "Life After Graduate School—Transitioning to Early Career." This session was aimed at graduate students nearing the transition to early career along with early career professionals looking for insights on how to make the most of their transition. The session featured a panel of early career professionals who shared their experiences and insights on navigating the transition process. The Graduate Student Committee would like to think our wondaful panelists; Dr. Rachel Cott (Kansas State University), Dr. Than Dam (Clemson University), Dr. Frank Johnson (USDA-ARS), and Dr. Khushboo Rastogi (Texas A&M University).



Dr. Tina Sullivan fielding questions for our early career specialists from graduate students and post-doctoral attendees. Photo by Om Prakash Ghimire.

Webinars

Apart from CANVAS activities and programming, the Graduate Student Committee hosted seven webinars throughout the year. Our first webinar, titled “Designing and Analyzing Agricultural Studies: An Intro and Example in R,” was expertly delivered by Dr. Leonardos Bastos from the University of Georgia and offered valuable insights on utilizing R software for data analysis. The second webinar, titled “Corn Nitrogen Management in Florida: Past, Present, and Future,” was presented by Dr. Diego Arruda from the University of Florida. Following the first two webinars, the committee hosted a two-part webinar series focused on transitioning from graduate school to a career in industry and/or academia. The first session, titled “Navigating the Transition: From Ph.D. to Industry,” was presented by Dr. Singhu Shandu from University of Clemson. The second, “Navigating the Route from Grad School to Academic Jobs,” featured Dr. Gaurav Jha from Kansas State University as the speaker. For the fifth webinar of 2024, we had a highly specialized talk from Dr. Sachin Rustgi from Clemson University on genetics and plant breeding, imparting knowledge of his research to graduate student

attendees. The Webinar was titled “Innovative Plant Breeding and Management Strategies to Achieve Crops With Reduced Immunogenicity.”

In October, we hosted our sixth webinar, titled “Inside the Hiring Process: Perspectives from the Other Side of the Table.” This webinar offered a unique perspective on the recruitment and hiring process at academic institutions. Our speakers from Kansas State University, Dr. Dorivar Ruiz Diaz and Dr. Tina Sullivan, delved into the viewpoints and mindsets of both sides of the recruitment process—the hiring committee and the faculty candidate. Finally, to wrap up the year, our seventh webinar of 2024 was titled “Getting to Know the ACS Graduate Student Committee: Who We Are and What We Do.” In this webinar, graduate students learned about the ACS Graduate Student Committee operations and connected with current committee members for questions and feedback.

Reflecting on my two years with the committee



The ACS Graduate Student Committee members meeting in person at CANVAS 2025. Photo by Ayush K. Sharma.

To begin with, I want to state how grateful I am to have had the wonderful opportunity to serve on the Graduate Student Committee. Though the time passed by in a flash, I have met the most incredible individuals, learned valuable lessons, and grown in my personal and professional life. When I began my position as chair of the committee back in January 2024, I remember the nerves I felt knowing I had big shoes to fill. Now, as I reflect on the past two years of being on the committee (both as a member and chair), I feel so much pride in accomplishment in the committee's work, especially seeing programming coming into fruition at CANVAS.

As the saying goes, "It takes a village," and that is no different when it comes to the work of this committee. I want to thank the past and current ACS Graduate Student Committee members for their time, dedication, and endless support in helping me both as a committee member and as chair. I would also like to thank ASA, CSSA, and SSSA staff, especially DJ May and Ingrid Anderson, for their constant support and assistance in making committee ideas a reality.
To Jessica, the 2025 chair of the committee: You are going to do an absolutely amazing job as a leader! I look forward to seeing the committee flourish under your guidance!

For graduate students, get involved and reach out! My experience on the graduate committee has been an enriching opportunity, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in participating in the work of the committees to email the chair, even if it seems a bit daunting. It will be worth it, I promise!

Once again, thank you to everyone who has supported me during my time on the committee. I am profoundly grateful.

—Ariana Lazo

Graduate Student Travel Scholarship

In its fourth year of funding students' travel to the Annual Meeting (now CANVAS), the Graduate Student Travel Scholarship successfully reached its milestone goal of becoming a permanently endowed fund! Since its inception, the travel grant has funded more than 40 graduate students investing $30,000 over the past four years in graduate student success. For CANVAS 2024 in San Antonio, TX, the travel grant received 113 applications, 35 more than in 2023! One of the 2024 recipients shared,

"This travel grant will greatly assist me in attending the meeting in San Antonio, TX. I am excited about the opportunities for mentorship, leadership training, and collaboration that this event will offer."

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, please visit

https://www.sciencesocieties.org/asf/donate/list.



Joshua Asiamah, a recipient of the 2024 Graduate Student Travel Grant, presenting his poster at CANVAS in San Antonio.

A Texas gardens and spirits tour … for graduate students

For the second year in a row, the Graduate Student Committee offered a graduate student exclusive tour during the Annual Meeting where participants learned about science and agriculture local to the city where the meeting was held. For the first tour stop, students visited the beautiful San Antonio Botanical Gardens where they had the opportunity to explore 38 acres of diverse plant collections and themed areas. After the gardens, tour guests enjoyed lunch in San Antonio before the final stop of the day, Rebecca Creek Distillery. At the distillery, tour participants learned about the craft of distilling and the fascinating science behind artisanal spirits. Pabitra Joshi, one of the tour organizers, said: “Organizing this tour was an incredible experience, and we’re thrilled to have created a space for networking, learning, and fun.”



Participants of the CANVAS 2024 graduate student tour wrapping up the day at the Rebecca Creek Distillery in San Antonio, TX. Photo by Chandler Gruener.

Connecting with us

If you would like to give us feedback on our work or want to volunteer to join the committee to help plan any of our activities, please reach out to Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira (jbezerra@ksu.edu), the 2025 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 (Twitter) and Facebook, or view the committee page.

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