

AMP-UP Mentor Bios 2024



Name (pronouns): Colin Burke (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF Fellow (2023-, Yale University)

Current Institution: Yale University

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
 - University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience:
 - It's my first postdoc :)
- Research Interests:
 - Supermassive black hole evolution & demographics, AGN variability

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- STEM retention through mentoring, etc., particularly from students from low income backgrounds
- Yale Pathways to Science: Exposing New Haven public high school students to science outside of the classroom

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Identify a mentor at your new institution early on
- Keep up with your physical and mental health – common advice, but it's true!
- Can be a good time to learn a new skill or broaden your research interests somewhat

Other Interests:

- Cycling
- Cooking
- listening to podcasts



Name (pronouns): Sarah Blunt (she/her/hers)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF (2024-, UC Santa Cruz)

Current Institution: Northwestern/CIERA; moving to UCSC in the fall

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Caltech
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience:
 - CIERA Postdoctoral Fellow (2023-2024)
- Research Interests:
 - Observations of young exoplanets
 - Radial velocity detection
 - Orbit-fitting
 - Open-source software
 - Astro-statistics

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Preventing sexual harassment and assault
- Supporting minoritized students doing their first research projects
- Anti-racism and anti-war organizing

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- It's not the end of your career if you can't get a letter of rec from your adviser.
- Find people who value you and want you to succeed.

Other Interests:

- I like to sing and play the cello!
- I like to run and eat cake (not usually at the same time)
- Overly indulging my stupid dog who I love very much





Name (pronouns): Maren Cosens (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: Brinson Prize Fellow (2022-, Carnegie Observatories)

Current Institution: Carnegie Observatories, Pasadena, CA

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: UC San Diego
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: N/A
- Research Interests:
Optical and near-IR ground based instrumentation, galaxy evolution, stellar feedback

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

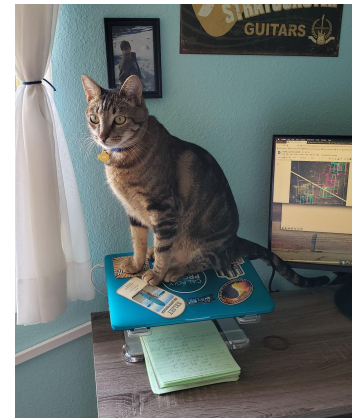
- Inclusive teaching and mentoring; inquiry based teaching; public outreach in schools; research and training opportunities for underrepresented students

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Be defensive of your time - it's easy to want to say yes to everything and end up with too many projects
- Prioritise a healthy work life balance
- Take this opportunity to try something new and see if it's a career direction you might enjoy – I started learning optical design for example

Other Interests:

- hiking
- camping
- (basically being outside)
- video games
- travelling
- hockey fan
- cat fan (Obi →)





Name (pronouns): Matthew Liska (he/him)

Nationality: Dutch

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (2023-, Georgia Tech)

Current Institution: Georgia Tech (started as faculty), Atlanta

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
University of Amsterdam (2015-2019, NL)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience:
John Harvard + ITC Fellow (2019-2023)
- Research Interests:
Black hole accretion, magnetohydrodynamics,
radiative transfer, plasma physics, high-performance
computing

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Helping non-US people transition into the US job
market
- Navigating academia as a dual-career academic
couple
- Applying for grants (incl. funding, computational time)
- Managing a rapidly growing collaboration/group

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- You will do the best science not by working on
what is `hot`, but on where your passion is
- Pick your host institute based on where you
want to live/work, not based on rankings

Other Interests:

- Rock climbing (lead, bouldering)
- Triathlon





Name (pronouns): Antranik A. Sefilian (he/him/his)

Nationality: Lebanon

Fellowship Held: 51 Pegasi b (2024-, University of Arizona)

Current Institution: University of Jena, Germany (starting at UA in November)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
University of Cambridge, UK
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience:
Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, University of Jena, Germany (2023-2024)
- Research Interests:
Planetary dynamics and formation; Planet-disk interactions; Debris disks; Celestial mechanics and Hamiltonian dynamics

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Scientific and public outreach (school visit, community events, etc).
- Anti-racism and empowering “minority” student voices; diversity should be celebrated!
- Navigating academic life as an expat / refugee / migrant.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Do the science that you enjoy and cultivate identifiable expertise.
- Quality over quantity.
- Find your happy place for work and living.
- Find and build your community; it takes a village to succeed.
- Long-term mentors will serve as a boon.
- Stay humble and kind.

Other Interests:

- Coffee
- Music
- Languages
- History and cultures
- Sci-fi (reading and writing)
- Travel



Name (pronouns): Kaley Brauer (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF Fellow (2023-)

Current Institution: Harvard

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: MIT
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: N/A
- Research Interests: early galaxy formation, galactic archaeology, cosmological simulations

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Volunteer public elementary and middle school teacher
- MIT's Grad Student Council DEI Committee
- Frequent outreach events
- Mentorship - helping whenever I can, connecting students to resources/people whenever I can't

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- I'm new myself, but I try to have personal boundaries (e.g., limit the time I work/cities I'll live in) that I refuse to break because lots of things are more important than astronomy

Other Interests:

- Art (painting and illustration)
- Salsa dancing
- Bicycling
- Motor bikes



(I always wear a helmet I was just parking in this pic)



Name (pronouns): Charles Law (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2023–)

Current Institution: University of Virginia

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Harvard University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: protoplanetary disks, astrochemistry/ISM, star and planet formation

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Undergraduate mentorship programs, where I've had the privilege of mentoring 6 students
- Public and scientific outreach via community events and school visits
- Member of the NASA Community College Network and APS's National Mentoring Community
- Outreach Subcommittee Chair, AAS Education Committee

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Find a network of supportive people that you enjoy working with
- Talk to lots of people for guidance/advice but also trust your intuition

Other Interests:

- Cycling
- Baking
- Reading
- Hanging out with my cat Maggie





Name (pronouns): Joel Ong (he/him/his)

Nationality: Singaporean

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (2022-2025, University of Hawai‘i)

Current Institution: Institute for Astronomy, University of Hawai‘i

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Yale University
- Pre-fellowship postdoc experience: None, I'm a baby postdoc
- Research Interests: Asteroseismology, radial velocity instrumentation

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- I was one of the three organisers of last year's iteration of this program!
- Before getting involved in this I also helped set up a pair-mentorship program for graduate students at Yale.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- The vast majority of the advice you'll get from people who are already successful is going to be strongly modulated by survivorship bias.

Other Interests:

- Bringing baked goods to group meeting
- Unicode
- Sous vide cooking
- Applied mathematics



Name (pronouns): Ryan MacDonald (he/him)

Nationality: UK

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2022–)

Current Institution: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
University of Cambridge, UK.
- Pre-fellowship postdoc experience:
Research Associate at Cornell University for
3 years.
- Research Interests: exoplanet atmosphere
modelling, spectroscopy, Bayesian stats.

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Coming from a working-class and
international background, I work to raise
awareness of how socioeconomic class and
nationality raise equity barriers.
- I co-organised AMP-UP in 2023 :)

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Don't be worried if you don't win one of the
'fancy' fellowship on your first try! I had to try
three times, and honestly I found spending a
few years doing a postdoc an incredibly
enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Other Interests:

- I make YouTube videos about Mars (don't tell the
exoplanet folk that it's my favourite planet).
- Also, I like Vikings





Name (pronouns): Emily Griffith (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF (2022-2025, University of Colorado Boulder)

Current Institution: University of Colorado Boulder

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: The Ohio State University (2022)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None, this is my first post-doc
- Research Interests: Stellar nucleosynthesis, stellar abundances (APOGEE/GALAH), CCSN and SNIa yields, Galactic chemical evolution

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Undergraduate near-peer mentorship programs and pre-arrival summer programs
- Planetarium content development (bringing active science to the dome)
- Undergrad/grad professional development
- Women/LGBTQ+ in STEM
- Elementary school classroom visits

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Its ok to set and keep boundaries for yourself! You don't have to apply all over the world to 30+ postdocs unless you want to. When applying, I set strong location boundaries for myself in order to solve a two-body problem.

Other Interests:

- Cooking and baking (bread!)
- Embroidery
- Going to plays and musicals
- Playing with my puppy and parrot





Name (pronouns): David Jones (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Einstein Fellow (2020, UC Santa Cruz)

Current Institution: Institute for Astronomy, University of Hawai‘i

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Johns Hopkins University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: UC Santa Cruz
- Research Interests: supernova cosmology, transient astrophysics, astrophysical surveys

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Jane Huang and I co-led the first cycle of this program - it's been amazing getting to know everyone through the program, and it even helped me enjoy some parts of the application season in past years :)
- I also helped design the nhfp-equity.org website, so reach out if you have suggestions!
- I'm interested in helping junior scientists in any way I can, but especially if you need someone to read an application or look over a presentation

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Good time management is important (but also impossible)
- Try to take good vacations and enjoy your life!

Other Interests:

- Hiking, surfing, traveling



Name (pronouns): Sultan Hassan (he/him)

Nationality: Sudan

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (Jan/2023, NYU)

Current Institution: NYU

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-University of the Western Cape, South Africa
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: SKA fellow, UWC (2018), Tombaugh fellow, NMSU (2018-2020), Flatiron Fellow (2020-2022), Hubble Fellow (2023-)
- Research Interests: Reionization, galaxy formation, Ly α emitters, ISM, Probabilistic Machine Learning and Bayesian inference.

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Member of the NSBP.
- All diversity programs.
- Creating a new mentoring program to help the next generation of astronomers from Sudan.
- Public outreach.
- Studying the systematic bias and best practices to reduce the minority of drop out rate.
- I have been mentoring diverse group of students who I met through summer schools, workshops, and national diversity programs.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Postdoc is a great opportunity to connect to different groups, expand knowledge, and work (at least) on one project that is completely different from PhD thesis. This was very rewarding to me.
- Start brainstorming ideas about what are the big questions you are interested in, and the focus of your future research/research group.
- Guiding research projects with surveys timeline.
- Interdisciplinary research (e.g. Astronomy X Computer Science).

Other Interests:

- Cooking.
- Table Tennis.
- Very long walks.
- Running
- Travel.
- Different schools of philosophy.
- Jazz/Blues music + Rye Whisky.



Name (pronouns): Luis Welbanks (He/Him/His)

Nationality: Mexico

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2021, Arizona State University)

Current Institution: ASU, Arizona

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-University of Cambridge, Institute of Astronomy
- Research Interests: Exoplanets, Atmospheres, Statistics, Planet Formation

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

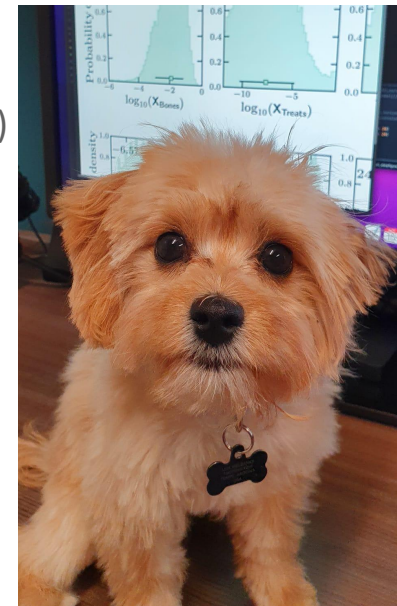
- I want to help improve the lives of others, make science more equitable, create more opportunities for personal growth, and overall make our communities more welcoming, diverse, and safe.
- Member of the Committee for Diversity in Astronomy & Geophysics of the Royal Astronomical Society
- Director of Membership for the Gates Cambridge Alumni Association (Americas West)
- Founder of the Latin American Students' Association (LASA) at the University of Calgary and served as its president.
- I enjoyed being a mentor in this program in previous years!

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Enjoy your work, don't be mean, and reach out if you need help. You are certainly not alone in this postdoc adventure!

Other Interests:

- AFOL (Adult Fan of Lego)
- Music (playing guitar)
- Enjoy Star Wars
- Learning how to raise my dog and teaching him Bayesian stats





Name (pronouns): Natalie Nicole Sanchez (she/her/ella)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF MPS-Ascend (2022–2025)

Current Institution: Caltech & Carnegie Observatories, CA

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Washington, Seattle
- Research Interests: galaxy evolution theory, cosmological simulations, supermassive black holes, circumgalactic medium

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- As a second-gen Latina and community college (CC) alum, I'm building opportunities for URM students at CCs in Southern California through the [FAST Workshop](#).
- My past mentoring experiences have been focused on early career scientists from CC to PhD candidates, with an emphasis on building supportive mentoring connections for women/women of color.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Building a supportive scientific community is key. I focus on working with people I can trust and that I like as people. It's been working great so far.



Other Interests:

- I'm the lead singer of Seattle's premiere (and only) all-astronomer band, [Night Lunch](#)
- Also, look at my dog



Name (pronouns): Ward Howard (he)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2023-, University of Colorado Boulder)

Current Institution: University of Colorado Boulder

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience
Previous mentor in program
- Research Interests: Multi-wavelength stellar flares, exoplanet characterization and astrobiology

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Mental health advocacy
- Anti-racism and lifting up the voices of minority students
- Have served as a panelist for large NASA grants; will share about this experience

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- It's a numbers game. Apply for each position and each year you are eligible. I applied for the NHFP three times
- A strong research program and ability to win funding are more important for faculty applications than a prize fellowship

Other Interests:

- Running
- Science fiction/fantasy
- Relationship between science and faith





Name (pronouns): Megan Weiner Mansfield (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2021-2024); 51 Peg (2024-2025)

Current Institution: Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ (but living in the DC area)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Chicago (Geophysical Sciences department)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None, I took NHFP straight from grad school
- Research Interests: observations of exoplanet atmospheres to figure out their compositions, with the hope of being able to understand habitability of other Earths some day!

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

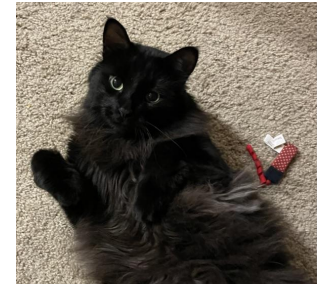
- I'm particularly interested in working with women or gender minority students as having female mentors was integral to my own decisions to go into and stay in science. I come from a relatively privileged background though so I'm generally interested in working to make academia more inclusive.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- It can be hard to find a work/life balance, but I think the best step in the right direction is being comfortable with saying no sometimes!

Other Interests:

- Music (I sing and play viola)
- Running
- My cats Luna (black and white) and Orion (super floof black)





Name (pronouns): Jenny Calahan (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: Kavli-Laukien Origins of Life Fellowship

Current Institution: Harvard CfA

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Michigan
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: Protoplanetary disks, thermo-chemical modeling, astrochemistry

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- LGBTQ+ community building
- Inclusive hiring/admissions practices



Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Start early, and with a solid project idea. The idea/3-year plan is fundamental to getting the job you want. The rest is just polishing.
- Find people outside of your field to read your application material, as many fellowship will consist of panels that are not in your field of expertise

Other Interests:

- Singing, biking, traveling, general tom-foolery



Name (pronouns): Jiayi Sun (he/him)

Nationality: China

Fellowship Held: CITA National Fellow (2021-2023), NHFP Hubble Fellow (2023-)

Current Institution: Princeton University

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: The™ Ohio State University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: star formation, ISM, and galaxy evolution probed by long-wavelength observations

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Academic mentoring (prior experience: 6 undergraduate and ~2 graduate over the past three years)
- Spontaneous public outreach (public observing, podcast interviews, etc)
- Raising awareness of challenges faced by international students & scholars

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- To build a good research plan for an independent postdoc position: try to think big about what major questions to answer, rather than starting from what we have done before and can naturally do as a next step
- Try not to take it personally if postdoc/faculty/ grant applications didn't go as well as we hoped – it's a very stochastic process with most factors not under anyone's control

Other Interests:

- Classical music (listening and playing piano)
- Racket sports (esp. ping-pong right now)
- Japanese anime



Name (pronouns): Becca Phillipson (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF MPS-Ascend (2021-22, U. of Washington, 2022-24 Villanova University)

Current Institution: Villanova University

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Drexel University
- Pre-fellowship postdoc experience: 1 year at University of Washington
- Research Interests: timing variability of accreting compact objects; nonlinear dynamics and chaos

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Undergraduate mentorship through programs like Pre-MAP (UW), NASA space grant consortium, Villanova Match (freshmen research experience)
- Data equity (access to research resources, data repositories, and creating accessible data/analysis products from research)
- Broadening participation in astrophysics through science advocacy/policy and providing quality research experiences to diverse undergraduates

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- The postdoc life can be very isolating, especially after spending time in a grad program with a designated cohort. Consider the people and location of your postdoc/fellowship in addition to the resources/activity around your research. The best thing I did for myself was establish work-life balance and find a welcoming/active work environment.

Other Interests:

- Rock-climbing, cross-training for climbing, all things outdoors!
- I am working on a degree in vocal performance and sing in several local choirs
- D&D every week with my friends near and far is my therapy





Name (pronouns): Sarah E. Moran (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2024-, NASA Goddard)

Current Institution: NASA Goddard (Greenbelt, MD)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Johns Hopkins University (Earth & Planetary Sciences department)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: Director's Postdoctoral Fellow at University of Arizona for 2.5 years
- Research Interests: (exo)-planetary atmospheres clouds/hazes, atmospheric theory, laboratory astrochemistry

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Created pair-mentoring program at JHU as a grad student and believe very strongly in near-peer mentors
- Lots of public outreach speaking (schools, community centers, etc)
- I'm very concerned with *retention* rather than recruitment -- if we can improve working conditions and expectations within the field, we can keep a wider diversity of folks, talents, and life experiences
- I'm very interested in science policy -- both science for policy and policy for science.
- I'm trying to fold accessibility concerns more completely into my way of thinking and worldview so it's never an afterthought

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Applications -- of any kind -- are a crapshoot. Luck is such a heavy factor in anything at this level. Don't take failure to heart.
- Ask for help when you need it! People like helping others -- you're doing them a little bit of a favor and giving them an ego boost when you ask for help.
- Choose mentors/colleagues who see you as a person first and an academic second. Life/family always comes first and don't let others trick you into acting otherwise

Other Interests:

- Running
- Ballet
- Yoga
- Hiking
- Science fiction/fantasy
- My cats
- Cooking
- Fancy cocktails
- Theatre



Zorya (fluffy grey tabby) and Set (black void)



Name (pronouns): Samantha Scibelli (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: Jansky Fellow (2023 -)

Current Institution: NRAO Charlottesville



Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Arizona
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: low-mass star formation, astrochemistry, submillimeter radio astronomy, molecular spectroscopy

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

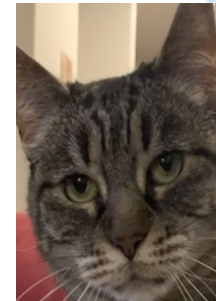
- Counselor and/or mentor for...
 - High school students during “Advanced Astronomy Camps”
 - NRAO REU summer students
- DEI Journal Clubs
- Science Communication (giving public lectures, teaching public courses, writing science articles)

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Meet with and chat with different people/groups to inspire new ideas/projects
- Something I’m still working on... don’t be afraid to say no to things!
- Make time for life outside astronomy

Other Interests:

- Sleeping :)
- Hiking
- Birding
- Cooking
- Puzzles
- My cat Tabatha!





Name (pronouns): Lily Zhao (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow 2024, University of Chicago

Current Institution: Center for Computational Astrophysics, Flatiron Institute

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Yale University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: Center for Computational Astrophysics, Flatiron Institute
- Research Interests: radial velocity exoplanet detection and characterization, precision spectroscopy

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

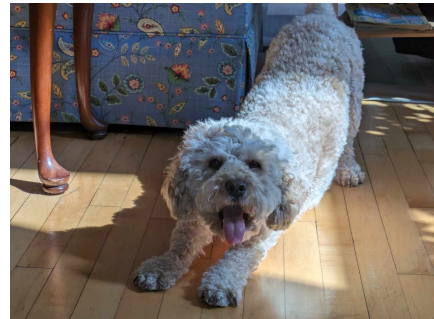
- Peer mentoring/building community
- Open educational resources
- Supporting people that are first-gen and/or low socioeconomic status

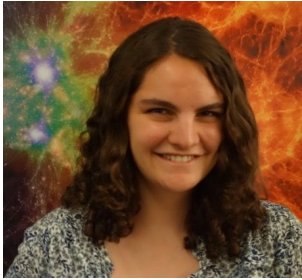
Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Do a proposal review panel; they're really fun!
- Don't do more than one a year; they're a lot.

Other Interests:

- Farming sims
- Scavenger hunts
- Interspecies friendships
- Here's a picture of my dog





Name (pronouns): Danielle Frostig (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF (2024-2027, Harvard/Smithsonian CfA)

Current Institution: MIT

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: MIT
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: Infrared instrumentation, time-domain astronomy

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

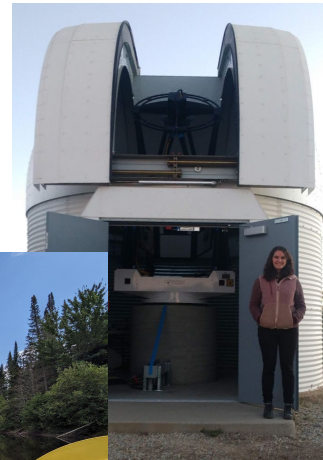
- Sidewalk astronomy and public lectures
- Classroom-based telescope build course to teach students hands-on STEM skills
- Peer and undergrad mentoring

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- I have not yet been a postdoc/fellow. I'll let you know when I figure it out!

Other Interests:

- Creating and appreciating art
- Kayaking, hiking, gardening, and other ways to be outside
- Road trips





Name (pronouns): Iryna Butsky (she/her)

Nationality: USA (born in Ukraine)

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (2023-2026, Stanford)

Current Institution: Stanford University (Palo Alto, CA)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Washington, Seattle
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: DuBridge Fellow at Caltech (2021-2023)
- Research Interests: galaxy theory, magnetohydrodynamics, CGM and ISM, diffuse plasmas, cosmic rays, magnetic fields

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Peer mentorship and building community
- Navigating two-body problems and starting a family as a postdoc
- Navigating career uncertainty
- Helping people from first-gen, low-income, or marginalized backgrounds

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Seek out mentorship from a faculty sponsor that is invested in your success
- Protecting your time / learning to say no is an important skill to cultivate
- Explore your options. Take note of what parts of your job energize you and which parts bring you down. There are likely many more career paths that meet your criteria than you think!

Other Interests:

- Misc. sports (e.g. running, skiing, climbing, hiking, dance)
- Cooking and baking
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Interior decorating
- Languages



Name (pronouns): Quang Tran (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: 51 Peg b Fellow (2024, Yale University)

Current Institution: The University of Texas at Austin

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: The University of Texas at Austin
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: exoplanets, precision RVs, stellar variability, statistical modeling

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Peer-to-peer, empathetic, and culturally responsive mentorship for folks from minoritized communities (e.g., racial, socio-economic, first-gen)
- Increasing accessibility to academia (through open software, data, and research experiences)

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- (not a postdoc yet but here's some unsolicited advice)
Don't be afraid to ask for help and to collaborate with folks! Most people are excited to hear from you!
- Be confident in yourself and your work. You've worked hard to be in your position and you deserve to enjoy that feeling.

Other Interests:

- Lifting weights
- (watching) Basketball
- Playing pool
- Video games
- Eating tacos and drinking Boba tea!



Name (pronouns): Shangjia Zhang (He/Him)

Nationality: China

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2024-, Columbia University)

Current Institution: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Nevada

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: Protoplanetary disks, Radiation-hydrodynamics

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Supporting students from underrepresented institutions to access more opportunities
- Public outreach talks, sidewalk astronomy
- Assist international students/scholars in navigating challenges the U.S.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Not much advice as a fresh PhD. I would ask for opinions from different perspectives, but ultimately my situation is unique so I think through what is the best for me.

Other Interests:

- Traveling
- Misc. Sports. Hiking, Climbing, Skiing
- Learning Languages
- Spending time with family





Name (pronouns): Stella Koch Ocker (she/her)

Nationality: USA, Germany

Fellowship Held: Caltech-Carnegie Brinson Prize (2023-)

Current Institution: Caltech & Carnegie Observatories

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Cornell University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: N/A
- Research Interests: Pulsars & fast radio bursts, & their use as probes of ionized gas in ISM, CGM, & IGM

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Creating institutional support structures & demystifying academia (co-founded the graduate peer mentoring network at Cornell, worked on our Graduate Student Handbook)
- Inclusive teaching practices & pedagogies
- Interfacing with local communities (so far have largely focused on middle/high-school ages, gender minorities)

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Set boundaries for your time early on. People will invite you to do much more than there realistically is time for.
- Identify a faculty mentor whose style matches what you need (& reflect on what you need).
- This is a time of transition & growth – be patient with yourself.

Other Interests:

- Books! Especially fantasy & period dramas. Also bookbinding (a family profession).
- Being outside, hiking or just reclining on a chair
- Exploring the never-ending, grubby wonder that is LA



Name (pronouns): Michael Calzadilla (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (2024-, Harvard-Smithsonian CfA)

Current Institution: MIT

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: MIT
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: N/A
- Research Interests: AGN feedback, galaxy clusters, galaxy evolution, machine learning, multiwavelength observations

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Promoting and delivering STEM education to URM students, especially latinx backgrounds
- Sidewalk astronomy
- Science communication/outreach

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

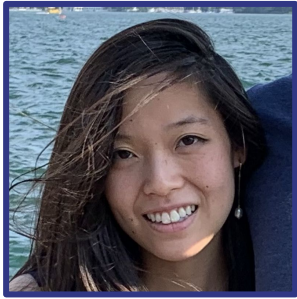
- Not a postdoc yet! But...
- You'll find lots of good scientists anywhere you go – but try to be a good human first and foremost, and look to work with those too. This career path is much more sustainable if you can manage to just collaborate with people you like
- Speaking of sustainability, strive to cultivate a good work-life balance and enjoy things outside of work

Other Interests:

- Painting
- Latin dancing
- Cooking
- Traveling
- Singing
- Weight lifting
- Astrophotography

(e.g. I took this aurora pic at a conference in Iceland 😊)





Name (pronouns): Caroline Huang (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF Fellow (2024-, Harvard-Smithsonian CfA)

Current Institution: Harvard-Smithsonian CfA, Cambridge, MA

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: Johns Hopkins University
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: 1-yr postdoc at JHU/STScI, postdoc at CfA
- Research Interests: variable stars, distance ladder, cosmology, evolved stars, asymptotic giant branch stars

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- I care a lot about achieving equity
- Outreach events
- I am also interested in science communication – I wrote for Astrobites in grad school
- Women and BIPOC issues in STEM and academia

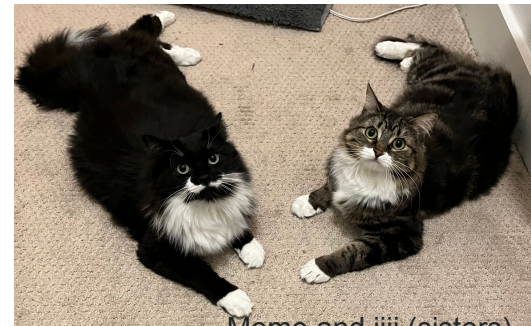
Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Calendars, lists, and watches are more useful than I thought they'd be
- Be realistic about how much you can do in a day

Other Interests:

- Gardening/growing plants
- Annoying my cats
- Playing squash (recently) and piano
- Walking, hiking, sometimes running, exploring
- Buying things on sale and shopping
- Reading and podcasts
- Trying new restaurants, bakeries, and bars

Me and odin



Momo and jiji (sisters)



Name (pronouns): Justin Pierel (he/him)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Einstein Fellow (2023-2026, STScI)

Current Institution: Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI; Baltimore, MD)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of South Carolina
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: STScI Postdoc (2021-2023)
- Research Interests: supernovae, high-redshift supernovae, Type Ia supernova cosmology, gravitationally lensed supernova cosmology

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Helping people with non-traditional paths to astronomy (e.g., from a non-physics/astronomy undergrad)
- Navigating two-body problems (including outside of astronomy), including living far from your host institution (I live in DC and not Baltimore!)
- Ensuring graduate students and early-career postdocs have opportunities to lead high-impact science programs
- Helping people from first-gen/low-income backgrounds

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Choose a postdoc location that has a supportive/collaborative group
- Lead some proposals, either for general research funding or telescope time depending on your science
- Do not feel chained to your graduate school research, follow your interests and opportunities

Other Interests:

- Disc golf
- Traveling (for work and fun!)
- Scuba Diving
- Fostering cats/dogs (three kittens right now!)
- Activities with my three excellent pets (2 cats and 1 dog)
- Reading/audiobooks (Primarily sci-fi/fantasy)



Name (pronouns): Abhishek Desai (He/Him)

Nationality: India

Fellowship Held: NPP Fellow (2023-present, NASA GSFC)

Current Institution: NASA GSFC, Maryland

Academic Background:

- Ph.D. from Clemson University
- Postdoc experience: Bahcall Fellow at WIPAC/IceCube at UW Madison
- Research Interests: AGN Correlation with IceCube neutrinos and multiwavelength photon data, Galactic neutrino sources, supernova neutrinos, neutrino transients.

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Helping researchers by sharing my experience on writing and looking for proposals.
- Mentoring interested individuals build a successful career in Academia or in Industry.
- Helping people from non-US nationalities like India identify opportunities that are available to them.
- I am interested in bringing multiple collaborations together to discuss common science.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- If you are serious about a career in Academia, you should start looking for proposals and ideas.
- Building upon your individual idea/research and talking about it to senior researchers (at a conference or in form of a paper) is extremely important for your individual growth.
- If you are aiming for a career in industry after your fellowship, you should make sure you gain the skills required at least half a year before you start looking for opportunities.

Other Interests:

- Travelling
- Cooking
- Going to the gym (tip: a college gym is generally way better than the public gyms)
- Playing on Nintendo Switch
- I will adopt a dog or cat (or both!) soon :)



Name (pronouns): Lia Hankla (she/her)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NHFP Einstein Fellow (2024, University of Maryland, College Park)

Current Institution: University of Maryland, College Park

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Colorado, Boulder
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: JSI/MPPC Fellow at UMD
- Research Interests: plasma astrophysics, black holes, accretion disks, magnetized turbulence, particle acceleration

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- One-on-one mentoring, high school, undergraduate, and graduate students
- DEI journal club, seminars
- Building community: the best science is done when everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- There is a lot of shot noise in fellowship applications, so don't get discouraged if you don't get anything. Just apply again next year.
- For me, it's easy to get caught up in the stress of publishing, what other scientists think, etc. Focusing on doing science because it's what I love can help mitigate that stress (and help me be more productive)

Other Interests:

- Backpacking, hiking
- Cats, birds
- Cheesemaking
- Gaming (Stellaris, Civ 6, Pathfinder)





Name (pronouns): Loren Matilsky (he/him/his)

Nationality: USA

Fellowship Held: NSF AAPF Fellow (2022-)

Current Institution: University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC)

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Colorado Boulder
- Pre-fellowship postdoc experience: None
- Research Interests: Geophysical and astrophysical fluid dynamics (GAFD), stellar dynamo theory, accretion discs, peer mentoring

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Peer mentorship (I just started a peer-mentoring program between Ph.D. and masters students and postdocs at UCSC)
- Mental health awareness and tackling impostor phenomenon
- Working toward achieving departments and institutions free of discrimination, harassment, and other forms of toxicity

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- I personally find the extreme freedom of a prize postdoc both empowering and intimidating. I struggled the first year with a lack of structure (and still do sometimes).
- I would suggest mostly “stick to your plan.” A panel of experts decided your research plan was rather compelling. For *that* reason, you should consider doing largely what you said you would.
- *And* don't beat yourself if your research takes some wildly unexpected turns! (But maybe don't play that up in progress reports...)

Other Interests:

- Bicycling
- Folk music
- Watching cringe comedy with my awkwardest friends
- Redwoods



Name (pronouns): ZJ Zhang (he/him)

Nationality: China

Fellowship Held: NHFP Sagan Fellow (2022, UC Santa Cruz)

Current Institution: UC Santa Cruz

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
 - University of Hawaii (2015–2021)
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: N/A
- Research Interests:
 - Atmosphere and formation of exoplanets, AFGKM stars, and brown dwarfs

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- I hope to enhance the representation of underserved researchers in the STEM fields.
- I served as mentors for programs such as TAURUS (at UT Austin), Lamat (at UC Santa Cruz), and NSF REU programs (at University of Hawaii).
- Cultivating strong STEM identities.
- Peer mentoring programs and outreach activities.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- I think it's important to prioritize work-life balance, protect our own time, and learn to be comfortable saying No. Never give up!

Other Interests:

- Singing
- Hiking
- Board game
- Ukulele





Name (pronouns): Rixin Li (he/him)

Nationality: China

Fellowship Held: 51 Pegasi b Fellowship (2023, UC Berkeley)

Current Institution: UC Berkeley

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution:
 - University of Arizona
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience:
 - Postdoc at Cornell University
- Research Interests:
 - Computational and theoretical astrophysics
 - star and planet formation; dusty accretion disks
 - small bodies in the solar system
 - gravitational wave sources, AGN disks

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Creating and maintaining supportive, inclusive working environment where people from international backgrounds (like myself) can feel safe, respected, and encouraged to conduct science research
- Voice my support for marginalized individuals and make my contribution to promote the retention of under-represented groups in astronomy
- Science communication & public outreach to share the excitements of astronomy and hopefully inspire kids' interest in STEM in local communities

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Don't be afraid to branch out far away from your original field in grad school
- I try to keep Saturday away from work so there is time for family, friends, and other stuff

Other Interests:

- Stargazing
- Gaming
- Coding
- Hiking
- Procrastination



Name (pronouns): Alice Booth (they/she)

Nationality: Scottish

Fellowship Held: Clay Fellowship (2023, Harvard and Smithsonian)

Current Institution: Center for Astrophysics, Harvard and Smithsonian

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: University of Leeds, UK
- Postdoc experience: Leiden University, NL
- Research Interests: planet formation, protoplanetary disk evolution, astrochemistry, exoplanets

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

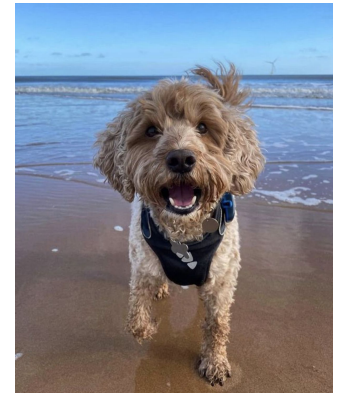
- Fostering supportive intergenerational communities
- 1-1 student mentorship
- LGBTQ+ visibility and awareness

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Attend social gatherings to meet new people
- Find new avenues to share your work in your new institute
- Try small projects outside of your immediate area

Other Interests:

- Weightlifting
- Cooking
- Coffee
- Dogs





Name (pronouns): Thavisha Dharmawardena (she/her)

Nationality: Sri Lanka

Fellowship Held: NHFP Hubble Fellow (2024 onwards)

Current Institution: New York University

Academic Background:

- Ph.D.-granting institution: National Central University + Academia Sinica Institute for Astronomy & Astrophysics, Taiwan.
- Pre/post-fellowship postdoc experience: Postdoc at MPIA, Germany for 3 years; 1 year as Flatiron research fellow, New York.
- Research Interests: Dust properties and structure of local group galaxies, 3D structure of the Milky Way.

DEI and Mentorship Interests:

- Work on improving representation from communities and countries underrepresented in astronomy. I want to encourage students from these communities in astronomy or to using astronomy as a gateway to STEM.
- Struggled with burnout, anxiety and imposter syndrome; passionate about mental health awareness.
- I was Gender Equality Officer at MPIA for two years and part of mental health & resilience and workplace environment working groups at MPIA.

Advice for new fellows/postdocs:

- Follow your gut
- You don't need a fancy fellowship for a wonderful career in astronomy.
- Surround yourself with supportive people.

Other Interests:

- I enjoy sharing my data and results with other astronomers and the public in fun ways like planetarium shows and augmented and virtual reality presentations.
- I love to surf and recently discovered a love for bouldering.
- I am obsessed with cats and dogs. I have two extremely well travelled cats (4 continents!) and have found it very relaxing to sit near dog parks in New York.

