

## Doctoral Students



### Joseph Basalla

[jbssella@umich.edu](mailto:jbssella@umich.edu)

I am Joe. I was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, and I studied microbial genetics at Bowling Green State University. I plan to continue working with microbial systems and look forward to learning many of the molecular techniques used by the faculty here at MCDB! Outside the lab, I enjoy hiking, nonfiction, cold beer, caffeine, and blues music. I'm excited to spend some time in Ann Arbor and exploring Michigan, and can't wait to get started this fall!



### Malak Bazzi

[bazzimh@umich.edu](mailto:bazzimh@umich.edu)

I recently graduated with a B.S. degree in Microbiology from the University of Michigan. I am excited to merge my knowledge in this field with the diverse disciplines in MCDB. My research interests lie in host-microbiome interaction, particularly how changes in the human microbiome affect health and disease. In my free time, I like to play sports and travel to new places.



### Wei Chen

[wweichen@umich.edu](mailto:wweichen@umich.edu)

My name is Wei. I am from China and I got my bachelor's degree in Zhejiang University. I have worked on a ubiquitin proteomics study as my undergraduate thesis project. Before that, I worked in a pathogenic fungal lab and an autophagy related protein structure lab. MCDB program is really very diversified in research topics and I want to try labs in different fields when rotating.



### Suzanne Craig

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I just graduated with my master's degree where I studied stem cell-driven tissue regeneration using freshwater planarians. My scientific interests include development, genetics and cell biology. I'm interested in investigating the pathways that allow cells to make "decisions" that affect their function or fate. When I'm not in the lab I enjoy horseback riding, playing video games, and exploring new places.



### Griffin Downing

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I'm from California and surprisingly— I like snow! U of M drew me in because of the community of scientists, and the research being conducted here. Broadly speaking, I'm interested in how the brain develops complex connections that give rise to emergent behaviors. If I'm not in the lab, you can find me probably outdoors hiking, or at a beach.



### Qi Geng (Archie)

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BS from School of Life Sciences, Peking University  
Scientific interests in Neural Biology, particularly the cellular basis of neuronal function  
Other interests: Running, reading, cooking, watching movies (especially sci-fi), and playing my guitar. Also loves to travel with friends.



### Harisankar Harikumar Sheela

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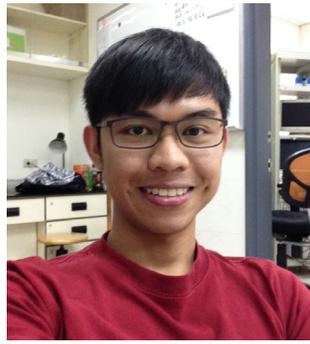
I come from the 'Gods own country' known as Kerala, a coastal state in South India. I have completed my BS and MS in Biological Sciences from IIT Madras, Chennai. I am interested in studying neuronal regeneration. My MS project involved studying the receptor ligand interactions in a cardiac GPCR called APJR. During my leisure time I love playing football, spending time with my family and friends, exploring new places and trying out new cuisines.



### Wayne Hawkins

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I'm from Little Rock, Arkansas. I enjoy bike riding and playing soccer in between injuries and my academic interests mostly involve gene expression regulation with a touch of programming.



### Chia Chun Hor

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I am from Penang, Malaysia. I graduated from National Taiwan University (NTU) with a master's degree in Pharmacology where I studied the stress-induced analgesic effect of oxytocin in the midbrain of mice. And soon after I began to work as a research assistant in the neuropharmacology lab of Pharmacology department for a year. I am interested in deciphering the neurocircuits involved in various behaviors and physiological processes. Outside the lab, I enjoy outdoor activities like camping and hiking, and also engaging in voluntary works.



### Eshna Jash

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I was born and brought up in New Delhi. My 3 years of research experience so far have been in translational biology, and a major motivation for me to choose MCDB was to be able to explore basic science here. I work on in vitro mammalian cell culture systems, where for the past year I have been exploring breast cancer therapeutics specifically for triple negative breast cancer which is extremely aggressive and resistant to most therapies. Before this, I worked on maintenance of neuroplasticity following ischemic stroke (using *in vitro* co-culture).

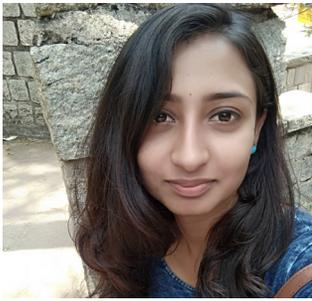
I enjoy reading fiction (especially sci-fi), travelling, and binge eating junk food. I also hate the winters (which for me means anything below 5° C), so Michigan will definitely be an adventure for me!



### Yuchen Lei

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I am Yuchen Lei (you can also call me Irene, my English name) from China. I was born in Harbin, a city in northern China. I finished my undergraduate study at Tsinghua University in Beijing and the research I did during my undergraduate study focuses on microRNA and signaling pathways. From my study, I am really attracted by molecular, cellular and developmental biology and it is what I want to focus on in the future. In my free time, I enjoy traveling, photography, singing, cooking, jogging and reading novels. I am very happy to be a member of MCDB program and join this diverse environment!



### Shree Padma Metur

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I am from Bengaluru, India. I received my undergraduate degree in Biotechnology from R.V College of Engineering in 2017. My thesis was focused on Gcn4p, a transcription factor which responds to amino acid starvation in yeast. After that, as a Junior Research Fellow at inStem, I studied the methionine dependent survival of T regulatory cells during cytokine withdrawal. Broadly, I am interested in the regulation of cell fate. Given a changing environment, I am interested in understanding how these changes are sensed by a cell and how they dictate its fate. In my free time, I enjoy reading books, listening to music and travelling. Also, I'm always on the lookout to try new tea flavours!



### Lijing Wang

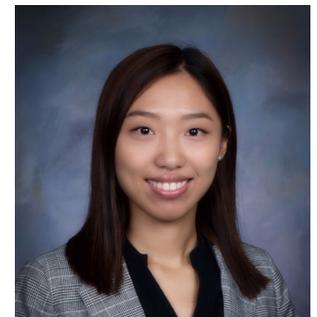
[lijingw@umich.edu](mailto:lijingw@umich.edu)

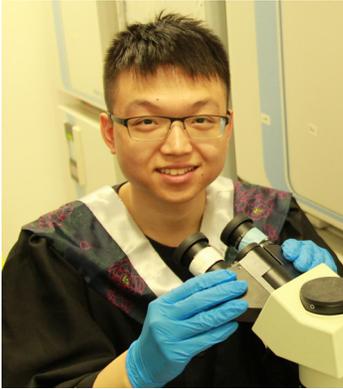
I graduated from University of Michigan last December and I'm interested in neuroscience related topics. In my spare time, I like watching TV shows with my friends.

### Yexin Yang

[kathyang@umich.edu](mailto:kathyang@umich.edu)

I am Yexin Yang (Kathy), graduated from U of M. During my study here, I have accomplished an honor's thesis on the topic of lysosomal function in membrane repair in Dr. Haoxing Xu's lab. As a beginner of scientific research, I am holding a strong passion for neuroscience study. For example, I want to know what is the principle of the nervous system dynamically control sensing and behaviors; in molecular level, what are important molecules that could be used as targets for drug treatments. Meanwhile, my mind is always open to new ideas in neuroscience research. I am very happy to be one of you, the big family of MCDB, to seek the answer of truth. Outside of research, I like saving money for traveling. If there is a cat travel with me, it will be awesome!





**Zhihai Zhang**  
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Fudan University, China.  
Although I have only worked on the cell biology related projects before, I'd love to experience different topics. In my spare time, I like playing badminton and watching movies.



**Meiling Zhao**  
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I got my undergraduate and master degree in Zhejiang Sci-Tech University and Zhejiang University, China. During my master study, I was working on cell signaling and found a novel transcription factor and tumor suppressor in the TGF-beta signaling. After graduation, I worked in a lab at University of Michigan, where I was working on the mechanisms of hematopoiesis and leukemogenesis. I like basic biology especially the delicate molecular mechanisms inside the cells.

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## Pathways Master's Students



**Nana Britwum**  
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Double major in Plant Science and Agricultural Science in the School of Integrative Plant Sciences at Cornell University. She completed her undergraduate career with a distinction in research in May of 2018. For her senior honors thesis, Britwum investigated the consequences of intraspecific diversity in defense traits on the performance of an important agricultural pest, *Trichoplusia ni*. Her hometown is the lovely Lawrence, KS where she discovered her passion for sustainable agriculture. Since high school, she has been inspired to one day lead a revolution of sustainable food production that is environmentally sound. At Michigan, she is looking forward to exploring other aspects of biology and learning new lab techniques.



**Tasmine Clement**  
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My name is Tasmine (rhymes with Jasmine) and I am originally from the great city of Brooklyn. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Health Science/Latino Studies from the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN) and recently completed a post-baccalaureate NIH fellowship within the Biochemistry department at Virginia Tech (Blacksburg, VA). I am currently enrolled in the Pathways Master's program.



**Rees Rillema**  
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Rees is a graduate of university of Michigan and is very interested in bioengineered cellular systems and molecular biology of plants.

## Master's Students



**Najia Elkahlah**

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I'm an Ann Arbor native that loves to enjoy its coffee shops and green parks. I am interested in studying the mechanisms that regulate the formation of neural circuits, their functions and the behaviors that they promote.



**Evan Hughes**

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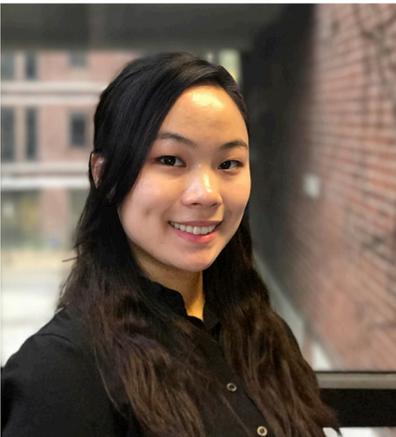
In 2017, I graduated from Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. Since graduating, I've worked as a Research Laboratory Technician in Stanley Watson's laboratory at the University of Michigan Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience Institute. Now, I'm pursuing a Master of Science degree in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology while I continue my work. I'm extremely interested in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices.



**Clint Levi**

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I have a B.S. degree in Biomedical Sciences from Grand Valley State University and will be building on that foundation with a M.S. degree from the University of Michigan. I am looking to explore the research/lab side of the medical field before continuing my pursuit of a career in medicine as a physician. I am especially fascinated by neurodegenerative diseases and have spent most of my lab time researching proteins with a possible link to Alzheimer's disease.



**Sara Ma**

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I completed a Bachelor's degree in biology at the University of Michigan. During my undergrad, I worked in a metabolism lab and studied the molecular pathogenesis of obesity disease states. I will be pursuing my Master's in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology and am interested in further studying the molecular mechanisms of disease progression.



**Steven Orban**

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I'm a biologist at heart fueled by compassion, curiosity, and the desire to always learn more. In my spare time, you can find me hiking in the great outdoors, online looking at the latest fashion trends, or jamming out to hip-hop music.



**Akash Rai**

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I'm a graduate student in the department of molecular, cellular and developmental biology from India. Coupled with a zeal for the life sciences I dabble in a multitude of extra curriculars including dance(jazz), music, sketching and poetry. I can't wait to experience what lies in wait for me at U-M