

College Chemistry Achievement Awards

February 9, 2017

The College Chemistry Achievement Awards are presented annually by the Chemical Society of Washington to the outstanding seniors majoring in chemistry and biochemistry from each of the area colleges and universities. The following students received awards:



Alexander Rhoades, Rohith Rajasekaran, Kelly McKenna, Cassidy Hart, Sarah Burkhard

Absent: Pegah Bakhshi, Savanna Castello, Taylor Brooks Engdahl, Nicolas Omar Francone, Stefanos Ganotakis, Meagan Tomasso

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<p>Pegah Bakhshi Georgetown University Dr. Christian Wolf</p>	<p>Pegah is an outstanding senior chemistry major at Georgetown University. She has been engaged in multiple ways in the sciences at Georgetown and beyond. Pegah has made invaluable contributions to two independent research projects in Dr. Christian Wolf's research group. She has developed a new organocatalytic insertion reaction that occurs with high yields and 100% atom economy. This project was published with Pegah as second author in the Journal of Organic Chemistry which is a prestigious, peer-reviewed international journal. She has also been involved in developing a biomimetic chiroptical sensor and this project will be completed and published before the end of this semester. In addition, Pegah has been serving as the president of the Chemclub, which organizes social events and helps freshmen and sophomores with their studies. Her stellar academic profile has been recognized many times. She was a Howard Hughes Fellow and she received a Lisa J. Raines Research Fellowship for working in Dr. Wolf's laboratory. Through a very competitive selection process, she was awarded a unique opportunity to study at Oxford University during the 2015/16 academic year. After graduation this May, Pegah will attend medical school at Georgetown University.</p>
<p>Sarah Burkhard American University Stefano Costanzi</p>	<p>A senior undergraduate majoring in Chemistry, Ms. Sarah Burkhard is a highly dedicated student with a nearly perfect GPA, and is highly passionate about her studies. She is an inquisitive and hard-working student, modeling the inquiry-based approach to solve complex problems. She has a strong interest in international security and arms control and hopes to use her knowledge to combat chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons proliferation. Sarah has been taking an internship and is currently a research fellow with the Institute for Science and International Security (the good ISIS), a non-profit non-partisan institution dedicated to informing the public about science and policy issues on nuclear programs. Her ability to not only ask questions, but also engage fellow students and use a team approach to solve problems will serve her well. Sarah has been a wonderful member of our department and we are delighted that she is being honored with this award from CSW.</p>
<p>Savanna Castello George Mason University Robert Honeychuck</p>	<p>The recipient of the CSW College Chemistry Achievement Award from George Mason University this year is Savanna Castello. This candidate for the B.S. in Chemistry never met a course she didn't love. In one recent semester, she took P Chem lecture, P Chem lab, Biochemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Physics, earning an "A" or "A+" in each. I join all of the faculty in the department in congratulating her. Well done Savanna!</p>

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Taylor Brooks Engdahl

St. Mary's College of Maryland

Amanda J. Schech

Taylor Engdahl is a senior biochemistry major at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She has a GPA of 3.92, which is the highest GPA amongst all biochemistry majors in the department. She is currently working on her senior research project which examines the role of androgen receptor in the motility of triple negative breast cancer cell lines. This past summer, Taylor was selected to participate in a prestigious summer research fellowship at The Scripps Research Institute in the Department of Chemistry and Cancer Biology, where she studied resistance mechanisms of proteasome inhibitors in cancer cell lines. She will have the opportunity to present her research at the annual American Chemical Society meeting this spring. In addition to her outstanding scholastic and scholarly achievements, Taylor has been an integral member of the chemistry and biochemistry department, serving as a teaching assistant for general chemistry, organic chemistry, and biochemistry labs as well as a departmental tutor. She is also a member of the St. Mary's American Chemical Society Student Affiliates organization. Currently she serves as the president of the St. Mary's College American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology student chapter, where she has worked to organize events such as chemistry week, an annual blood drive, and has served as a judge for the local high school science fair. She plans to pursue her Ph.D. in biomedical research.

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<p>Nicolás Omar Francone The George Washington University Lakeisha McClary</p>	<p>Nicolás Francone graduated with Summa Cum Laude from The George Washington University in December with bachelor's degree in chemistry. In college, he pursued many interests besides his studies and dedicated time and effort working as an EMT, contributing to improving the medical care for underserved populations as well as focusing on basic science.</p> <p>After taking classes with his future mentor, Martín Zysmilich, he was amazed and captured by how paramount chemistry is in everyday life and in other fields of science and committed to a major in chemistry. Throughout his years at The George Washington University, he sought out opportunities to help and motivate Chemistry students in his role as a learning assistant for general and organic chemistry courses.</p> <p>In the summer following his first year, Nicolás joined a translational science laboratory at the National Institutes of Health with the goal of integrating his Chemistry knowledge into Life Sciences. Through researching potential enzyme replacement therapies for genetic disorders affecting patients' levels of Lipoprotein X, an abnormal lipid aggregate, he gained an appreciation for the importance of bench-to-bedside research and the application of biochemistry in medicine. His efforts paid off by earning him co-authorship on a journal article. Nicolás continued advocating for often forgotten and underserved populations by joining a pediatric palliative care research team at Children's National Medical Center and a research team at The George Washington University psychology department addressing causal factors of postpartum depression in Hispanic immigrants. Nicolás's journey and passion for unraveling "Chemistry secrets" in the Life Sciences continues as he enters a career in Medicine this fall.</p>
<p>Stephanos Ganotakis University of the District of Columbia Dr. Isadora Posey</p>	<p>Mr. Stephanos Ganotaki is a senior chemistry major in the Division of Sciences and Mathematics Chemistry Program at University of the District of Columbia. He transferred from Northern Virginia Community College in fall 2014 and quickly impressed his chemistry professors with his scholastic ability. He has continued to perform very well in his courses. He is a member of the Chemistry Club. Upon graduation, he plans to pursue a degree in chemical engineering.</p>

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<p>Cassidy Hart American University Matthew Hartings</p>	<p>Cassidy Hart is an excellent student, maintaining a nearly perfect GPA, and has been very active and productive in research. She has already earned second author on a published article and will be first author on two more articles highlighting the stellar work she has performed in Dr. Harting's lab. Her focus and attention to detail have allowed her to take on a much wider berth than her undergraduate peers. Truly, her ability and dedication make her more comparable to motivated graduate students. Cassidy equally excels in classrooms and frequently receives excellent reviews from the faculty members who have had her in class. She is naturally inquisitive and focused. She is one of those students who we, as faculty, will point towards as being one of our department's success stories. Cassidy plans to enter an MD/PhD program upon graduation. There is no doubt that she will go on to do great things. She has been an outstanding member of our department and we are delighted that she is being honored with this award from CSW.</p>
<p>Kelly McKenna Georgetown University Dr. Jennifer Swift</p>	<p>Kelly is a senior Biochemistry major at Georgetown University. Originally from South Windsor, CT, she has a distinguished record both inside and outside the classroom. She has been engaged in undergraduate research in Dr. Jennifer Swift's lab for the past 2.5 years. Her research, which will culminate in an Honors Thesis, has examined the effects of doping and/or cocrystallization on the physical properties of several small molecule hydrates. Outside of lab, she has been active in volunteer work and also served as president of the 500 member Georgetown Pre-Med Society. After graduation this May, Kelly plans to attend medical school and is currently deciding between several admissions offers.</p>

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<p>Rohith Rajasekaran University of Maryland, College Park Prof. Dorothy Beckett</p>	<p>Rohith Rajasekaran is an outstanding undergraduate laboratory researcher. In January of 2016 he asked to do research for credit in my laboratory. At the time we were starting a project on bacterial TypeVI secretion proteins and I thought that the purification and characterization of the proteins in this system would be ideal for him. Since last January he and I have purified several proteins and performed biochemical and biophysical characterization of the pure proteins. He has consistently enthusiastically picked up new techniques and worked long hours. In fact, he constantly wants to take on new challenges and has become adept at cell culture, a broad range of biochemical techniques and is now picking up biophysical techniques including isothermal titration calorimetry and analytical ultracentrifugation. It is likely that we will publish a paper describing the results of his work in the next few months. In addition to becoming skilled in laboratory techniques, Rohith has learned to read the literature. He has presented group meetings on papers from the literature as well as on his own research and has a good command of both. In this regard, he functions on the level of a 2nd year Ph.D. student. Rohith is developing into a highly accomplished research scientist and I expect even greater things from him in the future.</p>
<p>Alexander Rhoades St. Mary's College of Maryland Dr. Kelly Y. Neiles</p>	<p>The St. Mary's College of Maryland Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry recognizes Alexander Rhoades for his service to the department as well as his excellent academics. As an English/Chemistry double major Alex consistently performed in the top of his classes and through his research in Chemical Education has seamlessly blended the two disciplines. Throughout his years at SMCM Alex has been an invaluable peer mentor and teaching assistant in both the Chemistry and Physics departments. His experiences as a teaching assistant and research in student learning will serve him well in the coming years as he first works as an English teacher in Japan and finally in his ultimate goal of pursuing a graduate degree in Chemical Education.</p>

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Meagan Tomasso

The Catholic University of America

Dr. Gregory Miller

The winner of the College Chemistry Achievement Award for 2017 from the Catholic University of America is Meagan Tomasso. Meagan will graduate with a BS in Biochemistry from the Catholic University of America in May 2017. She has excelled in her coursework, earning a 3.69 gpa. She is a member of the University Honors Program and has been on the dean's list most of her semesters at CUA. During the summer after her sophomore year she worked in a research group in the Vitreous State Laboratory examining the leaching behaviors of rhenium from glasses for a study on the storage of low level radioactive waste in a variety of glass formulations. More recently she has worked in the biochemistry laboratory of Dr. Miller in the Chemistry Department of CUA, studying interactions between PPIP5K and the Exocyst complex. She is the president of the Chemistry Club and has worked on organizing fundraisers, service projects and social activities with other majors in the chemistry department.

At home during her vacations, Meagan has been an active volunteer in the food pantry of her church. During the school year she works as a tutor in a variety of disciplines for other CUA students.

She is currently applying to Ph.D. programs for Fall 2017.