

June 2024

# Out Toxicologists and Allies

Special Interest Group of SOT



## President's Message from Jess Plavicki, PhD

Dear Out Toxicologists and Allies (OTA) Members,

Happy Pride Month! As the current President of the OTA Special Interest Group, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our summer PRIDE 2024 newsletter and share with you our recent accomplishments, our current efforts, and our community advocacy within SOT and beyond. First, I would like to start by thanking all of the OTA members and allies who attended our third annual SOT reception in Salt Lake City. The reception was a decided success with ~150 people, both members and allies, in attendance. During the reception, we raised \$700 in donations for the [Project Rainbow](#) and recognized our award recipients. Please join again us in congratulating Drs. Tracie Baker and Roxanne Berube, who received the OTA Mentoring Award and Postdoctoral Achievement Award, respectively. If you know an outstanding individual who has been an important mentor to LGBTQIA2S+ scientists and SOT members alike and/or know of an outstanding postdoc who has shown excellence in scholarship, service, and leadership, please nominate them for a [2025 OTA award!](#)

Looking forward, we recognize that there may be concerns about traveling to Orlando for the 2025 meeting. OTA had representatives present for the SOT's Town Hall with *Visit Orlando*, where we learned that the Florida "bathroom bill" ([Chapter No. 2023-106](#)) applies to public places and is not enforced in Convention Center. We were told that no citations have been given in response to the bill and were assured that people would not have trouble accessing the bathroom in private establishments in Orlando. Please be on the lookout for information from SOT about LGBTQIA2S+ travel concerns as well as support for pregnant individuals who are interested in safely attending SOT in 2025. Please reach out if we can help you navigate any concerns about the Orlando meeting.

Finally, please let us know you are interested in becoming more involved in OTA and/or if you have an issue that you would like OTA to address within the SOT community or beyond. We hope you have time during Pride to celebrate the progress the LGBTQIA2S+ community has made and reflect on how much work is left to be done. We look forward to another productive year working together towards our shared goal of building a more inclusive scientific community that recognizes and celebrates all people.



Sincerely,

Jess Plavicki, PhD  
President, OTA  
Associate Professor  
Brown University  
[plavicki@brown.edu](mailto:plavicki@brown.edu)

# Spring '24 Newsletter

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# SOT 2024 Annual Meeting Recap

This past March, the 63rd SOT Annual Meeting and ToxExpo was held in Salt Lake City, Utah at the Salt Palace Convention Center. We kicked off the meeting with the annual OTA reception on Sunday evening at Laziz Kitchen. The owners of Laziz Kitchen are not only queer, but are in fact one of the couples who successfully challenged Utah's ban on same sex marriage in 2013. It was the perfect place to host our reception.

At the reception, we heard from Jacey Thornton, the Executive Director of Project Rainbow. [Project Rainbow](#) is a wonderful, local Salt Lake City nonprofit that works to loudly and proudly display Pride flags across the state of Utah to create a feeling of safety and acceptance for queer people. We raised \$700 for Project Rainbow at the reception this year!

We wanted to say a special thanks to all of the OTA donors and sponsors who help make the annual reception possible (and the food and drinks free!). We had many donations made by individual OTA members. We are so humbled by your support. Further, the OTA reception has been supported by Gradient and ToxServices for the past 3 years! Having support from both individual OTA members as well as these industry level donors makes this reception. THANK YOU!!!!



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# 2024 OTA Awards

## Postdoctoral Achievement Award:

**Dr. Roxanne Berube**

**Wayne State University**

Dr. Berube possesses the drive, innovation, critical thinking, and desire to support diverse trainees and communities that will support an extremely productive career in both research and service. Congratulations Dr. Berube!



## Mentoring Award:

**Dr. Tracie Baker**

**Associate Professor, Department of  
Environmental and Global Health,  
University of Florida**

Dr. Baker serves OTA as our current Senior Councilor. Her mentees had absolutely wonderful things to say about the role Dr. Baker has played in their career, and OTA is so pleased to honor her for her leadership and mentoring. Dr. Baker has chosen to donate to [The Trevor Project](#), an LGBTQ+ youth suicide prevention organization. Congratulations and thank you Dr. Baker!

# Pride Month Celebration

Happy Pride Month from everyone at OTA! It's the very best month of the year! This Pride Month, we wanted to highlight two very exciting focus issues in *Cell* and *Nature* about sex and gender in science, both as variables in research and as identities that shape our experiences in STEM. The *Cell* issue comes at the heels of *CellPress* journals [officially adopting](#) Sex and Gender Equity in Research ([SAGER](#)) guidelines in January 2023. These collections of articles include essential discussions of how to consider sex and gender in the research enterprise, and would be *excellent* resources to send to interested colleagues and people who want to better understand the role of sex in research. Check 'em out!

*Nature*: Link [here](#).

*Cell*: [Volume 187, Issue 6 p1315 - 1566. Pub. Mar 14, 2024](#)

## Queer STEM communities outside SOT

[Out to Innovate](#) (formerly known as National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals) - A professional society and global community that educates and advocates for queer people in STEM through scientific and career programming, mentoring, networking, scholarships, fellowships, and a biennial summit.

[500 Queer Scientists](#) - This visibility campaigns aims to provide community connections so the next generation of people in STEM have LGBTQ+ role models and know they are not alone. This is achieved through individual self-submitted bios and stories intended to boost recognition and awareness.

[Pride in STEM](#) - This charity based out of the UK and Canada runs events aimed at highlighting queer people in science, but also the struggles that queer individuals face in STEM. Their aim is to “queer up science spaces” and to “science up queer spaces”.

[Queer Science Society](#) - Their mission is to raise awareness of the concerns of queer scholars in STEM. Based in San Diego, this organization primarily aims its programming at local postdoctoral scholars, but invites any queer and allied scholars (graduate students, staff researchers, and more) to join.

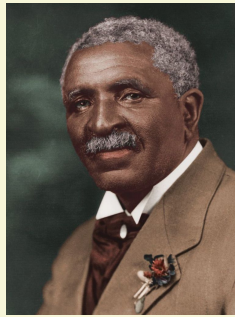
Lastly, we wanted to re-share a **timeline of some of the many notable queer scientists throughout history**. Joanna Woo, PhD Candidate serves as OTA's Graduate Student Representative and they made this timeline for the 2023 SOT OTA poster. **Queer people have always been integral to scientific research and always will be!**

**Francis Bacon**  
1561–1626



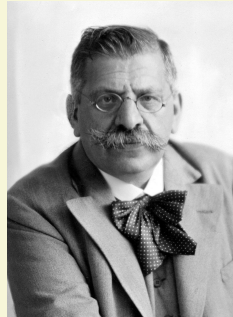
Natural Philosopher  
Father of Empiricism. Identified knowledge to be developed through sensory experience. Openly homosexual throughout his career.

**George Washington Carver**  
1864–1943



Agricultural Scientist  
Championed and researched the use of crop rotation. First Black person to earn a BS degree. Speculated as bisexual by historians.

**Magnus Hirschfeld**  
1868–1935



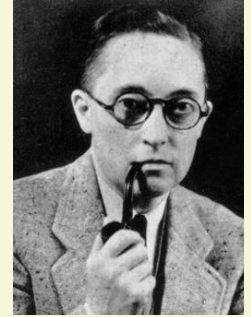
Physician & Sexologist  
Founder of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and the Institute for Sexual Science, providing counselling, sex ed, treatment, and gender affirming surgeries.

**Louise Pearce**  
1885–1959



Pathologist  
Developed treatment for trypanosomiasis epidemic in Africa. Member of Heterodoxy, a feminist club for lesbian and bisexual women.

**Alan Hart**  
1890–1962



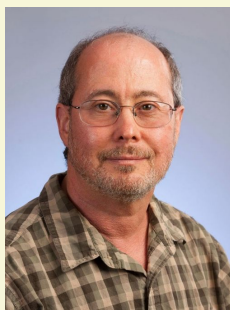
Physician  
Pioneer for using radiography for tuberculosis treatment. One of the first transgender patients to undergo a hysterectomy.

**Rachel Carson**  
1907–1964



Marine Biologist  
Author of *Silent Spring* protesting pesticide use. Historians found letters with Dorothy Freeman proclaiming their love.

**Ben Barres**  
1954–2017



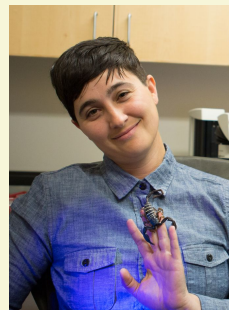
Neurobiologist  
Research focused on neuron-glia cell interactions. The first openly transgender scientist in the National Academy of Sciences.

**John Pham**  
Present



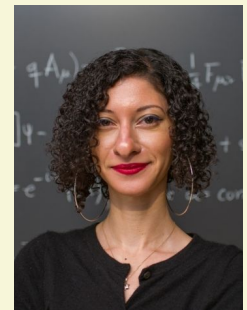
Molecular Biologist  
Editor-in-Chief of *Cell*. Research on mechanisms of RNA splicing. Advocate for diversity in advisory boards. Represents LGBT+ and Asian communities.

**Lauren Esposito**  
Present



Arachnologist  
Assistant curator and chair of Arachnology at the California Academy of Sciences. Co-founder of the 500 Queer Scientists network.

**Chanda Prescod-Weinstein**  
Present



Cosmologist & Physicist  
Research focused on Dark Matter: Cosmic Probes and Black feminist science studies. Writer of *The Disordered Cosmos*. Activist for Black LGBT+ in STEM

# Traveling to future SOT meetings: A conversation about location

On April 30, 2024 SOT held a Town Hall style meeting with [Visit Orlando](#) to **discuss potential safety concerns** for the location of the 2025 SOT Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida (FL). The topics covered included: open carry (no permit is required for individuals to carry concealed weapons in FL), racial and LGBTQ+ discrimination, and reproductive health care. **An overview of the topics addressed at the Town Hall can be found [here](#) and a recording of the meeting is available on [ToXchange](#).**

However, in an **effort to give individual members a voice** in these ongoing conversations, OTA would like to **gather more specific information about safety concerns** within the SOT community, especially from those that identify as LGBTQIA2S+. Additionally, we would like to **gauge interest for OTA to host a forum to discuss these concerns**. This forum would also serve as a place to begin developing ideas about potential safety measures that OTA may assist in facilitating and coordinating (e.g. compiling a list of on-site resources and safe establishments, connecting individuals for a buddy system when traveling to/from the conference, creating check-in systems, etc.).

**Please complete the short survey linked below by September 1, 2024.** Your answers will be recorded anonymously, but if you have any additional questions, comments, or would like to be further involved in these discussions, please email OTA's Postdoctoral Representative [Dr. Jess Ray](#).



**[OTA Safety Forum Survey \(Re: SOT 2025 in Orlando, FL\)](#)**





## Treasurer's Report:

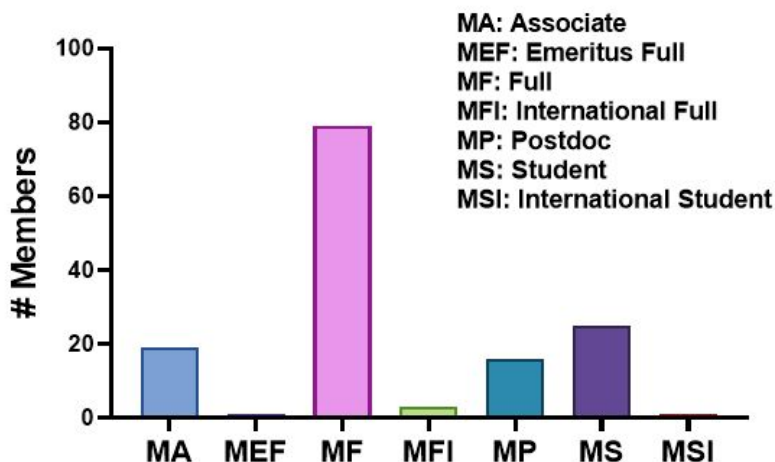
Item	Amount
2023 Balance	\$7,098 (including \$3,300 in donations)
2024 Meeting Expenses	<b>\$5,128</b>
Post 2024 Meeting Balance	\$1,970
2024 Incoming Membership Dues	<b>\$2,370</b>
2024 Current Balance	\$4,340

### **Donate to OTA**

Donations help us to continue to host a fabulous reception to unite LGBTQ+ toxicologists and allies at SOT each year. Additionally, donations help OTA to recognize exceptional scientific research and mentorship via our awards. You can easily **donate directly to OTA** by check or credit card by filling out this [form](#). Donations are tax deductible. Thank you for your support!

## OTA continues to grow with 158 current members!

**# Membership Type in 2024  
(n=144 Members)**



### **Keep In Touch: Send Your News to OTA Leadership for Distribution**

Were you or your lab recently highlighted or recognized? Want to share information of interest with fellow OTA members? We want to highlight news and updates from our membership in the OTA website's [News and Media](#) section.

Please send your updates to [OutToxicologistsAndAllies@gmail.com](mailto:OutToxicologistsAndAllies@gmail.com)!



## New OTA Officer Spotlight:



### **Sarah Lacher, PhD (Vice President-Elect) University of Minnesota Medical School**

As a founding member of OTA, Dr. Sarah Lacher's goals have always been rooted in trying to create a space within the SOT for queer toxicologists.

At the University of Minnesota Medical School, Dr. Lacher serves multiple ways to advance DEI-related initiatives. First, she is an elected member of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council which is a governance committee. Second, Dr. Lacher serves as chair of the DEI committee for her department (the Biomedical Sciences Department). Finally, she is a regular volunteer for STEM-outreach activities that are held for secondary students and the public in the community, many of which belong to rural and Native American communities.

Exposure-related diseases are rooted in disruptions to transcription factor biology. Dr. Lacher's primary focus as a toxicologist is dissecting the transcriptional mechanisms of stress responsive gene expression. Dr. Lacher's research is important to her, because while these evolutionarily conserved transcription factors are inarguably central to disease and environmental health science, we really know relatively little about the basic biology of these gene regulatory networks. Dr. Lacher aims to dissect the who, what, when, where, why, and to what degree are these genes expressed, and how does this all distill to exposure related disease phenotypes.

Dr. Lacher's life outside of the laboratory is primarily focused on her family. She and her wife have two teenagers that are blossoming into adults right before her eyes. They live in Duluth, Minnesota, which is located on the shore of the (literally) biggest lake in the world-her sweet water sea, Lake Superior. Thus lake/beach and hiking focused activities take up a lot of her time for recreation. She loves to garden and loves music. Jenny Lewis has stolen her ear-real estate for at least 6 years, before that the main occupant was Bob Marley. Dr. Lacher plays the tuba for a local wind orchestra which has a slightly different musical repertoire than her personal favorite artists. Classical music wise - she is all about the requiems.

### **Cody Schmidlin, PhD (Secretary/Treasurer) AbbVie**



Dr. Cody Schmidlin (he/him) is our new Secretary/Treasurer. Dr. Schmidlin is a Senior Scientist, Toxicology at AbbVie. Previously, Dr. Schmidlin earned his PhD in Cancer Biology from the University of Arizona, and then subsequently completed a postdoctoral fellowship in investigative toxicology at Eli Lilly and Company. Dr. Schmidlin served as the inaugural Graduate Student Representative for the Out Toxicologists and Allies and was awarded the Postdoctoral Fellow Achievement Award by OTA in 2023. Currently, Dr. Schmidlin serves as the lead of the Culture Team within his department which is focused on promoting Equity, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion through education and events. His goal for OTA is to heighten awareness about global LGBTQIA+ issues, specifically in scientific settings, by providing and promoting educational resources/seminars and increasing OTA membership. In his spare time, he teaches color guard and enjoys exploring Chicagoland with his partner.

## Officer Spotlight:



### Thivanka Muthumalag, PhD (Junior Councilor) Purdue University

Dr. Thivanka Muthumalage is an assistant professor of toxicology at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. His research focuses on the effects of tobacco and vaping products on lung disease mechanisms. He is a member of the diversity task force in the School of Health Sciences at Purdue University. By serving as the Junior Councilor for the OTA, he hopes to contribute to building an accepting and safe environment for toxicologists. Dr. Muthumalage is also an active member of the Society for Research in Nicotine and Tobacco and the American Thoracic Society.



### Jess Ray, PhD (Postdoctoral Representative) Ohio State University

Dr. Jess Ray (they/she) is our new Postdoctoral Representative. Dr. Ray received their PhD in Toxicology from the University of Montana in 2021. They are currently a postdoc at The Ohio State University where they study the mechanisms by which ozone triggers airway hyper-responsiveness in asthma. This research is important to Dr. Ray since environmental triggers of asthma are often invisible; they often go unrecognized while society disregards disease symptoms as attributable to some sort of perceived moral shortcoming (laziness, etc.). This stigma hinders diagnoses and treatment.

It is not widely known that asthma still causes ~1,300 deaths every day and that the burden of asthma in the United States falls disproportionately on Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous peoples. These groups have the highest asthma rates, deaths, and hospitalizations. Furthermore, the highest ozone levels are found in non-white communities (across all income levels) due to historical redlining practices resulting in closer proximity to ozone-generating sources of pollution. So, even though their research is basic in nature, Dr. Ray hopes it will ultimately contribute to improving health disparities for disadvantaged populations.

As a queer and disabled scientist who has faced abuse, addiction, and mental illness throughout their life, Dr. Ray is passionate about creating true community spaces in science, where people feel seen and valued for exactly who they are. Dr. Ray believes that this is only possible by increasing intersectionality, accessibility, and accountability in scientific communities. Their goal is for OTA to be an impactful resource for marginalized researchers, queer or otherwise, by creating a community in which members know their voice matters and that if they ask for support of any kind, they will receive it.

Apart from loving the creative aspect of the giant puzzle that is scientific research, Dr. Ray enjoys feeding the baby opossum who lives in their backyard and wandering through the woods with her wife and two dogs.



## Closing Remarks:

If you are looking to **join OTA**, when renewing your membership, add the Out Toxicologists and Allies Special Interest Group to your membership. We welcome you!

**Consider donating to OTA!** (see Treasurer's report for details)



**Stay healthy and safe!**

### **The OTA Executive Board**

Jess Plavicki, President

Meg Whittaker, Vice President

Sarah Lacher, Vice President-Elect

Troy A. Roepke, Past President

Cody Schmidlin, Secretary-Treasurer

Tracie Baker, Senior Councilor

Thivanka Muthumalage, Junior Councilor

Jess Ray, Postdoctoral Representative

Joanna Woo, Graduate Representative