



Graduate Student of the Month

Sarah Chu – Ph.D. Student at the Texas A&M University

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am a Ph.D. student at Texas A&M University. My research focuses on Harvest Weed Seed Control (HWSC) implementation in cotton and other cropping systems and testing a newer form of HWSC that uses blue light and heat.

What drew you to weed science?

I have always been interested in plants and was first exposed to weed science in my undergraduate degree working for Dr. Don Penner's research lab. I was in charge of growing velvetleaf, common lambsquarters, and green foxtail for the different experiments, which did not like living in the greenhouse, although considered aggressive and competitive in field settings. This contradiction in the weed's biology made me extremely interested and I just had to know more.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

I love the community of WSSA with everyone interested in tackling the issue of weeds with many different perspectives and ideas.

What is your favorite weed and why?

My favorite weed is giant ragweed because the Phoenix phenomenon it can exhibit to glyphosate is very unique and type of biology that triggers so much curiosity.

What is your long-term goal?

My long-term goal is to continue to work on weed science research and assist in creating a more integrated management systems for weeds.



If you know a hardworking graduate student you would like to be featured, nominate them by emailing ngodara@vt.edu.

What Universities did you attend/degrees did you earn?

University of Wisconsin, Madison – B.S. Agronomy and Horticulture, 1996
University of Wisconsin, Madison – M.S. Agronomy (Weed Science), 1998
Montana State University, Bozeman – Ph.D. Land Resources and Env. Sciences (Weed Science), 2002

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy. Started in August 2005, so coming up on 18 years.



What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

The best part is traveling to each of the national and regional weed science society meetings and meeting the members and boards of directors.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

The amazing array of job types that are out there, especially federal jobs.

www.usajobs.gov

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

Be persistent. If you're really interested in the job, call the contact listed for the job and ask questions. That personal interaction will go a long way in helping you stand out from the crowd.

Any final thoughts?

It's not what you know, it's who you know. :-). Have your current boss or supporter reach out to someone they may know at your potential employer.

WSSA GSO Contact Info

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Important Events & Dates

July 25-27

National Weed Science Contest

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Alexander Joseph Lopez – Ph.D. Student at the University of Illinois

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am a Ph.D. student studying weed genomics and molecular biology in Dr. Patrick Tranel's lab at the University of Illinois. My research is focused on understanding the genetic mechanisms controlling sex determination in dioecious amaranths.

What drew you to weed science?

I first developed a general interest in plants as an undergraduate studying drought tolerance in California endemic sunflower with Dr. John Constable. As a master's student with Dr. Katherine Waselkov, I took on a project investigating the population genetics of recent introductions of common waterhemp into California agroecosystems. I was intrigued to learn of the notorious ability of this weed to rapidly evolve herbicide resistances and could appreciate the value of such a system for evaluating fundamental evolutionary processes. After attending the International Weed Genomics Consortium in 2021 and learning all about peoples different weed genomics projects, I was very excited to begin a career in weed science.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

Participating in the annual societal conferences is always a great opportunity to get together, share our work, learn, and network. The weed science contest is also an exciting event to showcase our skills with some friendly competition.

What is your favorite weed and why?

My favorite weed is common waterhemp (*Amaranthus tuberculatus*). The remarkable ability of this weed to rapidly evolve herbicide resistance is very fascinating.

What is your long-term goal?

My long-term goal is to establish a career in the industry as a data scientist applying computational genomic approaches to address weed management issues and contribute my part to a more sustainable future.



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Dr. Matthew Wiggins – Midsouth Regional Business Manager, FMC

What Universities did you attend/degrees did you earn?

B.S. Agriculture, Tennessee Technological University

M.S. Plant Science, University of Tennessee

Ph.D. Weed Science, University of Tennessee

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

I am currently serving as the Regional Business Manager for FMC in the midsouth. I have been in this role for a little over a year now. Prior to that, I was a Technical Service Manager with FMC for 6 years.

**What is the favorite thing about your job so far?**

I really enjoy the diversity of working in agriculture industry. On a given day I could be communicating with academics, business leaders, distributors, retailers, crop consultants, or growers to discuss any array of topics. Variety is truly the 'spice of life' and keeps the industry exciting.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

The best advice I would give to my younger self is to be flexible and to be patient. There are many different amazing opportunities out there that likely do not line up with your preconceived notion of your career or timeliness. However, that doesn't mean that they aren't worth pursuing.

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

Use your network and always reach out to somebody affiliated with the potential employer. Ask questions and really understand the role and what that organization has to offer.

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July 25-27

National Weed Science
Contest, Union City, TN**Follow us on Social Media!**

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Nicholas J Shay – Ph.D. Student at the University of Georgia

What university do you attend and what is your research focus?

I am currently attending the University of Georgia in Tifton, GA under the direction of Dr. Eric Prostko focusing on integrated pest management strategies in peanut, corn, soybean, and grain sorghum. A few of my topics specifically focus on herbicide tolerance in peanut, carryover concerns in grain sorghum, and controlling pink purslane with POST herbicides.

What drew you to weed science?

My passion for weed science was a recent discovery, although, many of the fundamental concepts were instilled in me as a child growing up in rural western New York. My grandfather displayed an uncommon approach to land stewardship for its time by partnering with USDA NRCS. His goal was to reintroduce native prairies on a 19th-century abandoned cattle farm in Allegany County, NY.

What is your favorite thing about the WSSA or your regional society?

There are many things that I enjoy about WSSA and the Southern region. Networking with others ranks near the top. I appreciate learning about people and their personal journey. Everyone has their unique story, and in a world where it is easy to point out our differences, it is encouraging to witness how our pathways have converged as we find commonality in our pursuit of weed science. I find that it is a good thing to be different, and that our differences in life and in research help us to gain new perspective.

What is your favorite weed and why?

My favorite weed is *Sporobolus indicus* (smutgrass). There is nothing particular about this weed that I am fond of, however, this weed was the starting point of my journey down the pathway of weed science.

What is your long-term goal?

My long-term goal is serving the agricultural community in whatever capacity that may be as I am certain that it will change throughout my career and contributing to the advancement of weed science and agronomic production while simultaneously enhancing livelihoods. I pray that my expertise and efforts are positioned to bring positive change.



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WSSA Alumni Spotlight

Dr. Matthew T Elmore – Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Rutgers University

What Universities did you attend/degrees did you earn?

B.S. in Turfgrass Science, Penn State University

M.S. in Turfgrass Weed Science, University of Tennessee

Ph.D. in Turfgrass Weed Science, University of Tennessee

What is your current job title and how long have you been with your current employer?

Associate Professor and Extension Specialist in Weed Science, Rutgers University for 6 years

What is the favorite thing about your job so far?

The freedom to focus my research and extension program on what I think is most important to stakeholders.

What is something you wished you knew as a student that you know now?

Graduate school would be the last time I get to spend most of my day hands-on with the research and scientific writing. So even work in graduate school can be tedious at times, and you are looking forward to a better salary post-graduation, enjoy the time out in the field or in the lab being able to dive deep on a small number of projects!

What is the biggest piece of advice you'd give students searching for a job?

Your first job probably won't be your last, so don't worry if a job description isn't exactly what you dreamed. Taking a job that isn't perfect but will get you in position for a more ideal job in the future is better than waiting for a job that may never come. Don't be afraid to move somewhere across the country or internationally for your first job. You will get a new experience that will be valuable throughout your career.

Any final thoughts?

There are many different forms of intelligence beyond 'book smarts'. You will get to work with people who have different strengths or forms of intelligence (even if they all have graduate degrees in the same discipline!). I find that people who appreciate what others have to offer do the most impactful work and have success in their careers. I also enjoy working with these people the most.



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National Weed Contest, Union City, TN

Participants: 153 graduate students from 27 universities in US and Canada participated this year

- **National Graduate Winner** - University of Arkansas (Team: Jared Smith, Tristen Avent, Pamela Carvalho-Moore, Samuel Noe)
 - **1st place graduate individual:** Jared Smith
 - **1st place weed ID:** Jared Smith
 - **1st place unknown herbicide:** Alex Mueth, Jared Smith, Tristen Avent
 - **1st place written problem:** Tristen Avent
 - **1st place problem solving:** Marcelo Zimmer
 - **1st place team calibration:** Mississippi State University (Team: Kayla Broster, Antonio Tavares, Jake Patterson, Amy Wilber)
- **National Undergraduate Winner** - University of Guelph (Team: Noelle Adams, Stephanie Fletcher, Curtis Vanrooy, Joe Rastapkevicius)
- **Regional Society Graduate Winners** -
- **Southern Weed Science Society**
 - **First place team:** University of Arkansas Team A (Team: Jared Smith, Tristen Avent, Pamela Carvalho-Moore, Samuel Noe)
 - **Second place team:** University of Arkansas Team B (Team: Maria Carolina Souza, Tanner King, Cole Woolard, Juan Velasques)
 - **Third place team:** Mississippi State University (Team: Kayla Broster, Antonio Tavares, Jake Patterson, Amy Wilber)
- **North Central Weed Science Society**
 - **First place team:** Purdue University Team A (Team: Alex Mueth, Marcelo Zimmer, Claudia Bland, Lucas Maia)
 - **Second place team:** University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Team: Travis Wilke, Isabel Werle, Pavle Pavlovic, Alexander Lopez)
 - **Third place team:** University of Minnesota (Team: Navjot Singh, Eric Yu, Datta Chiruvelli, Mark Timper)
- **Northeastern Weed Science Society**
 - **First place team:** Virginia Tech Team A (Team: Navdeep Godara, Eli Russell, John Peppers, Daewon Koo)
 - **Second place team:** Virginia Team B (Team: Cynthia Sias, Caleb Henderson, Elisabeth Kitchin, Wyatt Stutzman)
 - **Third place team:** North Carolina State University (Team: Jacob Forehand, Jackson Alsdorf, Colton Blankenship)
- **Western Society of Weed Science**
 - **First place team:** University of Nebraska (Team: Vipin Kumar, Mandeep Singh, Thiago Vitti)
 - **Second place team:** Kansas State University Team A (Team: Sarah Frye, Issac Barnhart, Alec Adam)
 - **Third place team:** Kansas State University Team B (Team: Sachin Dhanda, Ethan Denson, Rishabh Singh)

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