

## ***PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...***



Leslie Bruce

**W**elcome to the first edition of the *Insider* in 2025 with a fond look back on the great first half of our 2024-25 fiscal year. The details, so beautifully provided by **Ingrid Benirschke-Perkins** and with photos from **Laurie** and **Mike Roeder**, can be found throughout the following pages. Highlights include:

- Celebrating our generosity to Scholars at three of four educational partners during uplifting check presentation ceremonies. You can't imagine how nice it is to be thanked by our partners and Scholars for the contributions **WE ALL MAKE TOGETHER**. They thank *us* for all we do to make these awards possible, and I thank *you*. It's because of our donations and collective effort that we can affect our mission to help change the world.
- Reveling in each other's company at the Fall General Meeting with 24 Scholars thanks to **Joy Kirsch** and her General Meetings team and to **Catie Madani** and the University Relations Liaisons, **Pam Werner**, **Sue Kalish**, **Cindy Wollaeger**, **Caroline Etland** and **Cathie Atkins**.
- Gathering joyfully at our two social events, the Just for Fun Summer Party and the Holiday Party, all thanks to **Rachel Collins**, **Danielle James**, **Lisa Perich**, **Elizabeth Taft** and **Margaret Dudas**.
- Meeting our Scholars at the Scholar Picnic at **Catie Madani's** beautiful home. **Alexa Hudnut** was a hit, talking about her post-PhD investment experiences.
- Accepting SDSU's gratitude at the Night of Philanthropy with SDSU Liaison **Cathie Atkins**, Scholar **Luisjesus Santiago Cruz** and ARCS member/SDSU donor **Robin Luby**.
- Joining with hosts **Marti Panarisi** and **Dottie Georgens** at a lovely luncheon for nine past chapter presidents.
- Catching up with our Scholars and Scholar Alums.

In short, we have been busy! And it has paid off both in terms of camaraderie among our members and in Scholar awards. Thank you!

Leslie K. Bruce, President  
ARCS Foundation, San Diego Chapter



## *Scientist of the Year Announcement* (January 21, 2025)

An international leader in the scientific study of microbes, **Rob Knight**, PhD, has been named the 2025 Scientist of the Year by the Achievement Rewards for College Students (ARCS) Foundation San Diego chapter.

Knight is a professor in the Departments of Pediatrics, Bioengineering, and Computer Science and Engineering at University of California San Diego as well as the Wolfe Family Endowed Chair in Microbiome Research at Rady Children’s Hospital - San Diego. He is also a founding faculty member and professor in the Halıcıoğlu Data Science Institute.



Rob Knight, PhD

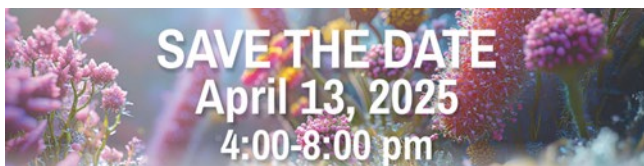
Knight will be honored on April 13 at a special event hosted by the ARCS Foundation.

Known as a pioneer in the study of the roles that microbes play in human health and disease and the functioning of ecosystems, his work has linked microbes to a range of health conditions including obesity and inflammatory bowel disease, has enhanced our understanding of microbes in environments ranging from the oceans to the tundra, and made high-throughput sequencing techniques accessible to thousands of researchers around the world.

“The impact of microbes on human and environmental health is profound, and the San Diego chapter of ARCS is both honored and thrilled to have one of the world’s leading microbiome researchers, Dr. Rob Knight, as our 2025 Scientist of the Year,” said **Leslie Bruce**, president of the ARCS Foundation San Diego Chapter. “Not only has Dr. Knight contributed more than 900 scientific articles in the field, his lab has produced many vital software tools and laboratory techniques that enable the work of other researchers as well. Growing evidence suggests gut microbes also influence the brain, potentially affecting mood, behavior and psychiatric illnesses. By better understanding the microbial world Dr. Knight’s work helps improve both human physical and mental health.”

Read the full press release here:

<https://today.ucsd.edu/story/rob-knight-named-2025-scientist-of-the-year-by-arcs-san-diego>



**2025** SCIENTIST OF THE YEAR CELEBRATION  
at THE CONRAD in LA JOLLA  
HONORING DR. ROB KNIGHT



## ARCS Holiday Party (December 8, 2024)

More than 50 ARCS members, Scholars, and guests gathered at the San Diego Yacht Club for the annual holiday party on a crisp Sunday afternoon! It was a wonderful way to kick off the holiday season, surrounded by friends and holiday cheer, while enjoying delicious food and drink in the most festive of settings. Kudos to **Lisa Perich** and her team for organizing such a memorable holiday celebration! And our thanks to **Mike Roeder** for capturing the merriment in these photos!



San Diego Yacht Club



Laurie Roeder and Cindy Goodman



Barbara and Robert Starkey



Holly Heaton and Marla Shepard



Steve and Kristin Boyd



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## ARCS Holiday Party (December 8, 2024)...

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Melanie Barker, Wade Johnson, Ingrid Benirschke-Perkins, Hailee Perrett, and Mason Sitar



Elizabeth Taft, Cathie Atkins, Linda Johnson, and Bryce Caputo

## SDSU Check Presentation (December 3, 2024)



The annual ARCS check presentation was held on a beautiful day in early December. SDSU's President **Adela de la Torre** received the ceremonial check in the amount of \$110,000 on behalf of 11 outstanding Scholar awardees, many of whom were able to attend in person.



## *UCSD Check Presentation (November 13, 2024)*

On Nov. 13, 2024, members of the ARCS San Diego chapter presented a check for \$260,000 to support 26 new and returning graduate students, each awarded a \$10,000 unrestricted gift for the 2024-25 academic year. Executive Vice Chancellor **Elizabeth Simmons** accepted the check at an award reception held at the Ida and Cecil Green Faculty Club.

You can read the full UCSD press release here: <https://today.ucsd.edu/story/arcs-foundation-awards-260000-to-uc-san-diego-graduate-students>



## *USD Check Presentation (November 5, 2024)*

ARCS San Diego was honored to present Scholar awards to four outstanding graduate students enrolled in USD's Hahn School of Nursing and Health Science program for the 2024-2025 academic year, two of whom were first-year ARCS Scholars: **Sandy Jellen** and **Kristina Lopez**.



President James T. Harris, III, Caroline Etland, Carolyn Sharp, Leslie Bruce, Dean Jane M. Georges, Sandy Jellen, Kristina Lopez, and Catie Madani





## Fall General Meeting (October 29, 2024)

San Diego Chapter founders **Karen Bowden** and **Pattie Wellborn** were among the 80+ ARCS members, guests and Scholars applauding 24 new ARCS Scholars, who presented an overview of their groundbreaking research at the Fall General Meeting on October 29th at the La Jolla Country Club.

“We have raised almost \$13 million to support ARCS Scholars since our inception,” said Chapter President **Leslie Bruce**.

As a member driven organization, ARCS depends on its board, committee chairs and members to continue its mission of advancing science and technology in the U.S. by providing financial assistance to gifted STEM graduate students who are U.S. citizens.



Elizabeth Becker, Grace Miller, Linda Johnson, Drason Zhang, Helga Moore, and Peggy Hanley



Priscilla Moxley, Thespine Kavoulakis, Carolyn Sharp, and Catherine Li

We heard from **Laurie Roeder** (membership), **Robin Luby** (member giving campaign), **Paulette Roberts** (administration), **Janet Roemer** (finance), **Kristin Boyd** (fund development), **Rachel Collins** (meetings, field trips and social events), **Catie Madani** (university relations), and University Relations liaisons **Pam Werner**, **Sue Kalish**, **Cathie Atkins**, **Caroline Etland**, and **Cindy Wollaeger**.



Alice Brown, Sue Kalish, Pam Werner, and Jonathan Gunn

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## Fall General Meeting (October 29, 2024)...

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Please consider joining a committee so that you can engage more fully in delivering our mission, it's also a great way to meet other members. "I loved the love that came at me at a stressful time in my life," said former Scholar Catie Madani, VP, University Relations.

In presenting an overview of their research, it was clear that the 24 ARCS Scholars are intelligent, engaged, curious and committed to making the world a better place. Their research focus is diverse and includes drug development (ALS, cancer, pneumonia, and others), stormwater management, better



Barbara Bry, Cindy Goodman, Sandy Jellen, and Ann Hill



Amanda Lee, Janet Roemer, Margaret Dudas, Doris Ellsworth, and Suzanne Dixon



Karen Bowden, Jan Shaw, Carin Cross, Cindy Wollaeger and Greta Treadgold

treatments for veteran post-traumatic stress disorder, and cybersecurity.

A few of the women Scholars commented on how inspiring it was to be in a room of powerful women and to be supported by an organization that was started by women and is run by women.



Teri Harrah, Kathe Albrecht, Chesson Sipling and Martha Dennis

Outside of their research, the Scholars have diverse interests including chess, backpacking, scuba diving, ultimate frisbee, rock-wall climbing, playing the piano and painting.

Our thanks to ARCS Member **Laurie Roeder** for snapping these photos from the event!

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**Fall General Meeting (October 29, 2024)...**

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Morgan Caudle, Barbara Starkey, Spencer Nelson, Barbara Doren, and Kristin Boyd



Nancy Rudolph, Kristina Lopez, Ann Siemens, Danielle James, and Lauren Valdez



Christina Veziris, Yolanda Walther-Meade, and Candace Kohl



Paulette Roberts, Jared Simmons, Tamia Strahan, Nicola Wilkins-Miller, and Joy Kirsch

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## Fall General Meeting (October 29, 2024)...

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Robin Luby, Katherine Izhikevich, Rachel Collins, Hannah Battey, and Kayla Erler



Ariana Sulpizio, Cathie Atkins, and Margaret Leinen



2024-2025 First-Year ARCS Scholars



Catie Madani, VP University Relations

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## SDSU Evening Celebrating Philanthropy (October 21, 2024)

Donors who have reached significant milestones in their giving to San Diego State University (i.e., million-dollar-plus) were honored at the Evening Celebrating Philanthropy in late October. Chapter President **Leslie Bruce** and ARCS liaison to SDSU and SDSU professor **Cathie Atkins** represented ARCS San Diego, joining fellow ARCS member and SDSU donor **Robin Luby** and ARCS

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## ***SDSU Evening Celebrating Philanthropy*** *(October 21, 2024)...* Continued from Page 9

Scholar **Luisjesus Santiago Cruz** who studies cancer biology with the goal of identifying new therapeutic strategies for preventing ovarian cancer recurrence. Luis is in the UCSD/SDSU joint doctoral program in Cell and Molecular Biology. Together they all enjoyed a lovely dinner in the Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union.



Luisjesus Cruz



Cathie Atkins, Robin Luby, and Leslie Bruce

**President de la Torre** noted that SDSU's impact extends well beyond their campus, citing the opening of a new STEM building on the Brawley campus in Imperial Valley and a new, yet-to-be-named SDSU sciences building that will allow the university to continue preparing students with practical, hands-on laboratory skills. Additionally, she spoke of initiatives like SDSU Mission Valley and their Innovation District, through which SDSU plans to strengthen its public-private partnerships and serve as a valuable partner to the business community.

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## ***Scholar Picnic*** *(October 20, 2024)*



What a joy to gather for the annual ARCS Scholar Picnic, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in October, and meet the 2024-2025 ARCS Scholars! Once again, **Catie Madani**, esteemed VP of University Relations, hosted this beloved event in her beautiful home. Members and Scholars were treated to a delicious lunch, including tacos from the traditional taco truck, and the opportunity to mingle with old friends

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*Scholar Picnic (October 20, 2024)...*

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and new! Then **Carl Wiese**, CFA at GROW Funds LLC, offered a few financial tips to the Scholars and opened the floor to questions. ARCS Member (and former ARCS Scholar) **Alexa Hudnut** added a personal perspective to the discussion by relaying some of her own experiences regarding stock options, investing, and saving. By 2 pm, it was time to depart, but not until Catie was heartily thanked for providing such an exquisite setting for the picnic. We look forward to seeing lots more of our Scholars over the course of the coming year!

Meanwhile, enjoy these photos provided by ARCS Members **Laurie Roeder** and **Ingrid Benirschke-Perkins!**



Kathe Albrecht, Cathie Atkins, and Carolyn Sharp



Cindy Goodman and Leslie Bruce



Sandy Jellen, Wilfredo Gonzalez Rivera, and Carolina Ramirez Moreno



Melanie Barker and Wade Johnson



Elizabeth Becker and friend, and Alexa Hudnut



Cindy Wollaeger, Natalie Quach, and Lilith Vasquez



Carl Wiese



Oliver Erece, Sandy Jellen, Caroline Etland, and Kristina Lopez



## *ARCS San Diego Presidents' Luncheon* (October 17, 2024)

**Holly Heaton**, Past President of our chapter, filed this report for the *Insider*: Nine former ARCS Presidents gathered in mid-October in the "Oval" Dining Room at La Costa Glen.

**Marti Panarisi** and **Dottie Georgens**, residents there, hosted the group to a lovely luncheon. We spent two hours filled with laughter, some tears, memories, and fun stories from the past. Everyone enjoyed the time together and we all realized what a special group we have, not only in our Mission in support of Scholars, but also in the long-term friendships and fellowship we enjoy in ARCS. Our hearts go out to Barbara and Becki, for the loss of their beloved husbands. We were fortunate to have two of our Founders with us: **Karen Bowden** and **Barbara McColl**; **Pattie Wellborn** was busy with another of her roles with the Salvation Army Women of Dedication event. Other luminaries included Marti, Dottie, and **Becki Etes**, Emeritus members, and **Toni Nickell**, Honorary Emeritus member. **Candace Kohl**, **Kathe Albrecht** and **Holly Heaton** also attended. We heard stories about fun and fabulous field trips and National meetings, including when Barbara was National President from 1990-1992, and two unforgettable trips to Washington DC,

and a ride on a Boeing aircraft in Seattle. Kathe gave us a preview of the National meeting which will be here in San Diego in early February 2025. She and her team have a great weekend planned. We shared stories of our private lives (we think we have some soap operas waiting to be written!), updates on ARCS business and interesting information from Toni about former ARCS Scholars. We look forward to this event next year as we all appreciate what a special chapter and organization we have!



Front row: Becki Etes, Karen Bowden, and Marti Panarisi; Middle row: Toni Nickell, Barbara McColl, Dottie Georgens, and Candace Kohl; Back row: Holly Heaton and Kathe Albrecht





## Updates from ARCS Scholars & Scholar Alumni



**Amanda Lee (2024-2025 ARCS Scholar at SDSU/UCSD)** shared the exciting news that her paper entitled “Evaluating the Benefit of Multi-phase CT and Clinical Data for Deep Learning-based COPD Staging,” was accepted for publication in *Radiology: Cardiothoracic Imaging*, a specialty journal published by the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA).



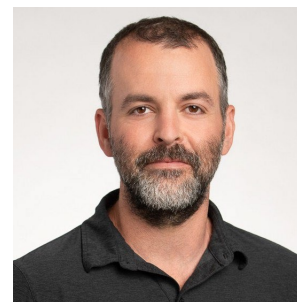
**Adrian Rivera (2021-2024 ARCS Scholar at SDSU)** won a “Best Poster” award at SDSU’s College of Engineering newly rebranded Graduate Research Symposium held on November 8 at the Conrad Prebys Aztec Student Union. Adrian’s poster was entitled, “Effect of Manufacturing Imperfections in Sandwich Composites with Aluminum Honeycomb in Multi-Axial Loading.”

To read the complete story about SDSU’s Graduate Research Symposium click here: [https://www.sdsu.edu/news/2024/11/masters-students-shine-at-engineering?utm\\_source=salesforce&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.sdsu.edu/news/2024/11/masters-students-shine-at-engineering?utm_source=salesforce&utm_medium=email)

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## Scholar Alumni – Where Are They Now?

**Gabriel Simon, PhD (2007-2008, Scripps Research)** joined Vividion Therapeutics in 2017 to lead the Proteomics Platform group. Vividion is a clinical stage biopharmaceutical company that uses novel discovery technologies to unlock high-value, traditionally undruggable targets with precision therapeutics for devastating cancers and immune disorders. Vividion is a wholly owned and independently operating subsidiary of Bayer AG, with a new research and development (R&D) center and corporate headquarters in San Diego.



Dr. Simon’s role at Vividion involves a dual focus on building and scaling a cutting-edge chemical proteomics screening group, as well as the creation and oversight of a unique and enabling proteo-informatic database called the Data Portal. The proteomics platform group supports nearly all stages of Vividion’s drug discovery efforts and works closely with the early discovery group to identify and prioritize opportunities for development.

Dr. Simon has spent the majority of his scientific career developing proteomics methodologies and novel informatic tools to derive maximum insight from them. Prior to joining Vividion, Dr. Simon was an early employee at Abide Therapeutics where he developed gel- and mass-



## *Scholar Alumni – Where Are They Now?...*

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spectrometry-based screening workflows for the discovery and characterization of covalent serine hydrolase inhibitors that are currently undergoing clinical exploration.

Dr. Simon was a graduate student with Vividion's co-founder Ben Cravatt at Scripps Research and performed postdoctoral research with Jeff Gordon at Washington University in St. Louis. He is an author or co-author of more than 30 scientific publications and three issued patents.

**Deron Herr, PhD (2004, SDSU/UCSD)** has been a Research Associate Professor at Sanford Burnham Prebys since April 2023, following a tenure as Senior Director of Biology at Ligature Therapeutics from July 2021 to March 2023. Dr. Herr previously held academic roles, including Associate Professor and Chief of Biochemistry at American University of Health Sciences, and served as Research Assistant Professor and Assistant Professor at the National University of Singapore.



Extensive experience also includes a position as Assistant Research Professor at San Diego State University, co-founding Expression Drug Designs to lead the development of drug candidates targeting lipid signaling systems, and a research associate role at Scripps Research, where studies focused on bioactive signaling lipids and pharmacodynamic research. Dr. Herr obtained a PhD in Cell and Molecular Biology through the SDSU/UCSD joint doctoral program, and a BS in Biology from Truman State University. He is happy to be back in San Diego, not only for the fantastic science, but also so he can go trail running and snowboarding again.

**Tari Gilbert, MSN, FNP-BC (2004-2006, USD)** is a board-certified family nurse practitioner (FNP-BC) whose clinical focus is caring for people living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS. She joined the Owen Clinic's\* staff in 2013, following more than 12 years of clinical HIV research, with focus on primary HIV infection, co-infection with HIV and hepatitis, and treatment adherence. Ms. Gilbert has expertise in providing gender-affirming care to transgender and nonbinary patients.



Known for her love of clinical work and dedication to teaching and patient advocacy, Ms. Gilbert brings more than 20 years of HIV experience to her work as a family nurse practitioner. In both her personal life and professional practice, she embraces an intersectional and collaborative worldview. Through this, she works with patients' strengths and seeks to build a community of healing.

Ms. Gilbert earned both her master's degree and bachelor's degree in nursing at University of San Diego, where she graduated with honors. She is certified by the American Nurses

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## ***Scholar Alumni – Where Are They Now?...***

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Credentialing Center and maintains her certification through education, both learning and teaching, mentoring NP students and with publications.

Outside of work, Ms. Gilbert loves spending time with her family, gardening, reading and hiking.

\* The Owen Clinic, established in 1982, is the largest, most comprehensive primary care center in San Diego for individuals living with HIV.

### ***ARCS Calendar of Events***

#### **JANUARY 2025**

- Tuesday, January 21 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)
- Tuesday, January 28 – Member General Meeting  
(La Jolla Country Club)

#### **FEBRUARY**

- Saturday, February 1 – National Board Forum (via Zoom)
- Saturday, February 8 – National Board Meeting  
(Hosted by ARCS San Diego at UCSD)
- Tuesday, February 18 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)

#### **MARCH**

- Tuesday, March 18 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)

#### **APRIL**

- Sunday, April 13 – Scientist of the Year Celebration  
(The Conrad Performing Arts Center)
- Tuesday, April 15 – Board Meeting (via Zoom)