Ling-Lie Chau Graduate Student Award for Brain Research

Stela Petkova FY 2020-21 Award Recipient

Stela Petkova is a recent PhD graduate of the Neuroscience Graduate Group at the University of California, Davis. She completed her Ph.D. in March 2021 in the lab of Dr. Jill Silverman at the MIND Institute. For her dissertation, she studied prevalence and utility of motor disability as an outcome for therapies for various genetic neurodevelopmental disorders, such as autism. Stela specializes in behavioral neuroscience, using mouse models in various behavioral domains to assess novel genetic and pharmaceutical therapies. She hopes to pursue a career that aligns mouse research with industry interests to bring viable therapies to kids with developmental disabilities. After UC Davis, Stela will head to Sydney, Australia to begin a postdoctoral fellowship in accordance with her career goals.

Impact of Philanthropy

The Ling-Lie Chau Graduate Student Award for Brain Research enabled Stela to attend the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society conference in Puerta Vallerta, Mexico where she presented a research poster, strengthened her network including connecting with her future mentor, and performed various duties as part of her leadership on the society’s Executive Council.
Thank you for your generous donation which allowed me to attend the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society (IBNS) annual meeting. This year's meeting was the Society’s 30th anniversary and also the culmination of my year serving as a Trainee Representative on the Executive Council. Throughout the pandemic, the IBNS community has been a strong support system for my scientific endeavors and career. Being able to attend and witness the outcomes of our continuous work was an immense privilege. I organized several events for trainees: a poster competition, a career networking event, and several trainee support and networking socials. The experience was unparalleled, exposing me to a broader part of the membership and solidified my position as a dedicated young leader within the society.

I presented my first-author poster entitled “Gait analysis across rat and mouse models of Angelman Syndrome” which was well attended and garnered discussion among attendees. This poster is a part of a broader set of experiments in my dissertation and resulted in a publication currently under review. We will incorporate the feedback I received on my poster into the final publication to further strengthen it!

Attending the IBNS annual meeting allowed me the opportunity to reconnect with collaborators that are in far regions and make connections for potential future career paths. Through IBNS, I met several mentors who I spoke with about transitioning from my current position in Dr. Jill Silverman’s lab at UC Davis. I learned about potential mentors’ research in scientific talk formats, engaged with their lab members via posters, and got additional one-on-one time. Through IBNS, I established a postdoctoral position with Dr. Michael Bowen at the University of Sydney in Australia.

After a tough year, IBNS helped renewed and affirmed my love of behavioral neuroscience and this community and allowed me to share the exciting research I have conducted during my graduate work and further expand my horizons. Graduating amidst a pandemic has led to a high level of uncertainty of next steps in my career but the IBNS meeting showed me the wealth of mentors who were eager to hear about my current research and open to my pursuit of research interests in their labs in the future.

Your generosity made this immense career development that occurred in a short span of the meeting possible and for that, I am eternally thankful!

My eternal thanks,
Stela Petkova