Excellence in Graduate Polymer Research Symposium – 2026

Organizers: Jeffrey Self (Arizona State University), Christine Coltrain (Eastman Kodak Company – retired), Christopher Ellison (University of Minnesota), Ross Behling (3M), and Katherine Heifferon (Eastman Kodak Company)

The recognition symposium **"Excellence in Graduate Polymer Research"** was held at the ACS National Meeting on March 22-26, 2026, in Atlanta, GA. This symposium is meant to provide recognition to outstanding graduate students engaged in polymer research. POLY has honored outstanding polymer graduate students with this annual symposium for over 20 years. The symposium consists entirely of presentations by students.

Congratulations to the 2026 Excellence Symposium cohort!

Alexander Bushnell
Georgia Institute of Technology

Alison Jean Shapiro
University of Delaware

Anagha Savit
Georgia Institute of Technology

Baiqiang Huang
University of Virginia

Carla Steppan
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Carmen Byerly Dunn
University of Southern Mississippi

Coby Santos Collins
University of South Carolina

David Kennedy
University of Colorado Boulder

Elvis Enebeli
University of Houston

Faith Kern
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Ferdinando De Luca Bossa
Carnegie Mellon University

Hoang Phuc Pham
University of Colorado Boulder

Jaehoon Jang
Florida State University

Joshua David Marquez
University of Florida

Junho Moon
Texas A&M University

Kihyeon Ahn
Virginia Tech

Marcel Roy Domalanta
North Dakota State University

Matteo Palesati
Georgia Institute of Technology

Megan Driscoll
Cornell University

Miguel Betanocourt-Ponce
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Natalie Neal
Texas A&M University

Pranav Krishnan
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Rebecca Anne Mikofsky
University of Colorado Boulder

Saber Alyoubi
Clark Atlanta University

Samuel Owoso
Louisiana State University

Srutashini Das
Texas A&M University

Subeen Kim
Northwestern University

Sydney Towell
University of North Carolina Chapel Hill

Tinting Cao
Westlake University

Vivek Garg
Iowa State University

Xiao Luo
Rutgers University-Newark

Yen-Wen Huang
Northwestern University

Yun Wei
Northwestern University

Zahra Sekhavat Pour
The University of Alabama

Zhongren Jiao
Yale University

The symposium is publicized broadly via POLY media channels and listserv. The organizers request departments nominate one outstanding graduate student to present their research at Spring ACS national conferences. Nominations and submissions are processed starting in August. A description of the application process and contact information can be found at: **https://polyacs.org/excellence-in-graduate-polymer-research-symposium/**

Oral Presenters			
Name	**School**	**Department**	**Presentation Title**
Alison Jean Shapiro	University of Delaware	Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Eng.	Enhancing crosslinked polyethylene circularity: Recycling via catalytic deconstruction and redesigning crosslink chemistry
Baiqiang Huang	University of Virginia	Materials Science and Engineering	Additive manufacturing of molecular architecture encoded stretchable polyethylene glycol hydrogels and elastomers
Carla Steppan	University of Massachusetts Amherst	Polymer Science and Engineering	Synthetic strategies for polymer amphiphiles: Merging zwitterions with hydrophobic moieties
Carmen Byerly Dunn	University of Southern Mississippi	School of Polymer Science and Engineering	Additive-free compatibilization of mixed-molecular weight polyolefins
Hoang Phuc Pham	University of Colorado Boulder	Chemistry	Electrochemical strategies for sustainable polyester depolymerization
Joshua David Marquez	University of Florida	Chemistry	Ultrahigh-molecular-weight polystyrenics with tunable entanglement molecular weights as latently curable and dimensionally stable monoliths
Junho Moon	Texas A&M University	Materials Science and Engineering	Stimuli-responsive, Programmable Shape Morphing Materials via Stereochemical Control and Microgel Assembly
Kihyeon Ahn	Virginia Tech	Macromolecular Science and Engineering	Fabrication of Sustainable Bioplastic Multilayers by Spray-Coating of Aqueous PHA Suspensions
Marcel Roy Domalanta	North Dakota State University	Coatings and Polymeric Materials	Enhancing the Adhesive and Barrier Properties of Fluoropolymer Coatings using Soybean-Derived Additives
Matteo Palesati	Georgia Institute of Technology	Materials Science and Engineering	Flash photo-thermal treatment (FPT): Localized light to heat conversion to recycle multi-layer plastic
Megan Driscoll	Cornell University	Chemistry and Chemical Biology	Radical Deamination of Primary Amines for Initiation of Controlled Polymerization
Miguel Betanocourt-Ponce	University of Wiscons-Madison	Materials Science and Engineering	One-pot synthesis of narrow dispersity polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) macroinitiators
Pranav Krishnan	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Materials Science and Engineering	Dual-catalyst preparation of stable resins with encapsulated microparticles for frontally polymerized thermoset 3D printing
Rebecca Anne Mikofsky	University of Colorado Boulder	Materials Science and Engineering	Influence of biopolymer structure and charge on guar gum-stabilized earthen construction materials
Srutashini Das	Texas A&M University	Chemistry	From polyurethanes to polysulfamates: SuFEx-enabled macroisosteres for sustainable materials
Subeen Kim	Northwestern University	Department of Chemistry	Reprocessing Thermoset Polyurethanes Using Carbamate Exchange – Leveraging Residual Catalysts and Blending with Thermoplastic Polyurethanes
Sydney Towell	University of North Carolina Chapel Hill	Chemistry	Deconstruction of rubber via C–H amination and aza-Cope rearrangement
Vivek Garg	Iowa State University	Chemical and Biological Engineering	Biomass to Toughness: Scalable Core Shell Strategy for End of Life Compostable PLA Blends
Yen-Wen Huang	Northwestern University	Materials Science and Engineering	Propylene Based Covalent Adaptable Networks Synthesized by Resonance Stabilized, Radical Based Reactive Processing with Excellent Elevated Temperature Creep Resistance
Yun Wei	Northeastern University	Chemistry and Chemical Biology	Polymer-Conjugated DNA for Immune Remodeling and Tumor Clearance via Dual Activation of cGAS and TLR9
Zahra Sekhavat Pour	The University of Alabama	Chemical and Biological Engineering	Novel Synthetic Method to Imidazole (Meth)acrylate Monomers for pH-Responsive and Ionic Liquid-Functional Polymers
Zhongren Jiao	Yale University	Department of Chemical & Environmental Engineering	Non-covalent Rigid Microporous Polymer Nanofilms for Precise Hydrocarbon Separation

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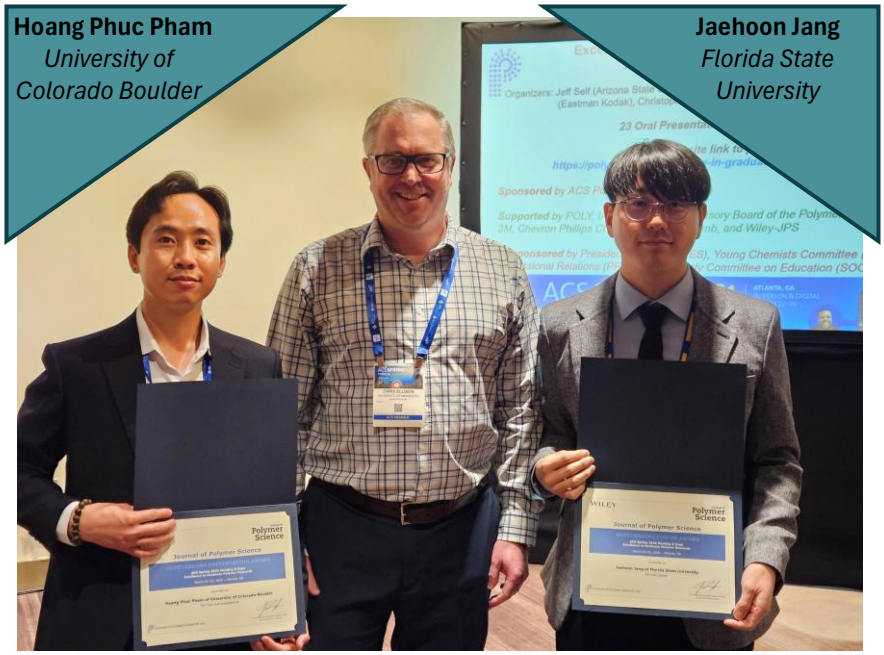
Poster Presenters			
Name	**School**	**Department**	**Presentation Title**
Alexander Bushnell	Georgia Institute of Technology	School of Chemistry and Biochemistry	Solid-state quantum coherence from a high-spin donor-acceptor conjugated polymer
Anagha Savit	Georgia Institute of Technology	Computation Science and Engineering	PolyBART: A chemical linguist for polymer property prediction and generative design
Coby Santos Collins	University of South Carolina	Chemistry and Biochemistry	Equilibrium and Kinetically Controlled Mixtures of Polymers and Nanoparticles
David Kennedy	University of Colorado Boulder	Chemical Engineering	Elucidating the role of mesogenic structure in the thermomechanical response of liquid crystalline elastomers
Elvis Enebeli	University of Houston	Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering	Understanding and Tuning the Degradation Pathway of a Vanillin-Derived Spiro-Linear Polyacetal
Faith Kern	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Chemistry	Investigating pendant mechanophore activation in glassy polymers under compressive deformation
Ferdinando De Luca Bossa	Carnegie Mellon University	Chemistry	Hydrogen Atom Transfer to Trigger Depolymerization and Upcycling
Jaehoon Jang	Florida State University	Chemistry and Biochemistry	Structure-Property Comparisons of Polypentenamer- and Polynorbornene-based Bottlebrushes with Increasing Side Chain Length.
Natalie Neal	Texas A&M University	Artie McFerrin Department of Chemical Engineering	Layer-by-layer Ti3C2Tz MXene/polyelectrolyte heterostructures with structural color for optical filtering and humidity sensing
Saber Alyoubi	Clark Atlanta University	Chemistry	Poly(4-methoxystyrene)-block-poly(2-vinylfuran) Copolymers: Sustainable block copolymers by Living Anionic Polymerization (LAP)
Samuel Owoso	Lousiana State University	Chemistry	From random polymers to protective HP folds: Precursors of prebiotic catalysts in the molecular origins of life
Tingting Cao	Westlake University	School of Engineering	Controlled synthesis of telechelic polypeptides through ROP of N-Carboxyanhydride via phosphate kinetic modulator
Xiao Luo	Rutgers University-Newark	Chemistry	Norbornene-based organoboron polymers with stimuli-responsive characteristics



Recipients of outstanding nominations were recognized by the Journal of Polymer Science/Wiley at the ACS meeting