



**Graduate Student  
Working Group (GSWG)  
Leadership Team  
Elections: 2025-2026**



**Carly George**  
North Dakota State University



**Rafael Marmo**  
University of Arkansas



**Jaswinder Kaur**  
North Carolina State University



**Subash Thapa**  
South Dakota State University



**Muhammad Usman**  
University of Agriculture,  
Faisalabad



**Mandeep Singh**  
South Dakota State University



**Muni Khyathi Madduru**  
University of Georgia



**Ashmita Upadhyay**  
University of Georgia



**Niranjan Pokhrel**  
University of Nebraska- Lincoln



**Conner Johnson**  
KAUST




**Emanuel Ferrari do Nascimento**  
University of Arkansas



**Zubairia Tasawar**  
University of Agriculture,  
Faisalabad

## Candidate Information

Position	Candidates
Secretary	Carly George, Rafael Marmo, Jaswinder Kaur, Subash Thapa, Muhammad Usman
Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator (X2)	Muni Khyathi Madduru, Conner Johnson, Ashmita Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Niranjana Pokhrel, Zubairia Tasawar, Carly George, Emanuel Ferrari do Nascimento, Muhammad Usman
	<p><b><u>Carly George</u></b></p> <p>North Dakota State University; Plant Science; MS (First year)</p> <p><b><u>Position(s):</u></b> Secretary</p> <p><b><u>Bio:</u></b> I am currently finishing my first year as a Master's student in Plant Sciences at North Dakota State University, where I study under Dr. Juan Osorno, the dry bean breeder here at NDSU. My research focuses on developing genomic prediction tools to improve the nutritional quality of dry beans. This project allows me to contribute to the development of a more sustainable production of dry beans and possibly providing a healthier dry edible bean. I plan to continue on to a Ph.D. in plant breeding, giving me many years ahead to grow with and contribute to the NAPB and its causes.</p> <p>During my undergraduate studies at NDSU, I earned my Bachelors of Science in Biotechnology and Crop &amp; Weed Science and was honored to be named a Top 10 Senior in the College of Agriculture. I bring that same energy and drive to graduate school, where I currently serve as President of the NDSU Plant Sciences Graduate Student Association and as a member of the Plant Sciences department social committee. I also volunteer as an alumni advisor for the Epsilon Omicron chapter of Tri Delta here at NDSU.</p> <p>I dedicate myself to organizations that allow me to give back and make an impact on the community around me, especially when I know what kind of impact that community has had on me. As students, we are heavily impacted by the communities and organizations that we engage with. I see my involvement as an opportunity to help the GSWG create a more impactful and supportive experience within our organization for graduate students. Supporting the success of other students is one of the most meaningful impacts a student-led group like this one can make, and I would be excited to be able to bring that approach to the NAPB GSWG.</p>



**Rafael Marmo**

University of Arkansas; Plant Breeding and Genetics MS. (Second year)

**Position(s):** Secretary

**Bio:** Hi, my name is Rafael Marmo, a second-year M.S. student in Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences department at the University of Arkansas, in Dr. Caio Canella Vieira's program. Since coming to the United States in 2023, I have become a NAPB enthusiast. Dr. Vieira informed me about NAPB and how being a Borlaug Scholar had a profoundly positive impact on his graduate student journey. Since then, I have read more about our fascinating projects, and I remain just as excited about the potential our community has to impact the lives of many people around the world. During 2024, I was committed to the NAPB-GSWG as "Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator". This was a fascinating experience, as I had the opportunity to connect with many people and learn about their backgrounds and how plant breeding has transformed their lives.

I currently serve as President of the Crop, Soil, and Environmental Sciences Graduate Student Club at the University of Arkansas, and we have built a great team to fully explore the potential of working together to impact graduate students within and across our institution. These roles have sharpened my ability to work across multi-institutional teams, and keep projects on schedule—skills that align directly with the Secretary position.

I am committed to the NAPB-GSWG, and I truly believe that, by working together as a team, we, as graduate students, can build projects that go beyond traditional graduate groups to make a real impact on people's lives worldwide.




**Jaswinder Kaur**

North Carolina State University; Crop Science; Ph.D. (Second year)

**Position(s):** Secretary

**Bio:** As a second-year Ph.D. student in Crop Science at North Carolina State University, working on St. Augustinegrass breeding and genetics, I bring to the NAPB Graduate Student Working Group the perspective of someone passionate about both niche crop research and fostering a truly inclusive community. My focus on turfgrass, a crop that is often overlooked in national plant breeding conversations, has taught me how important it is to make space for all voices and research topics. I know



	<p>firsthand how much innovation and inspiration can come from sharing ideas across different fields, and I would love to help the GSWG reflect that diversity.</p> <p>If selected as Secretary, I will prioritize clear communication and efficient organization while ensuring every student feels welcome to share their work. My experience with diverse peers has shown me the value of connecting students from different backgrounds and creating interactive learning opportunities. I would highlight the achievements of students in all systems, including underrepresented areas like turfgrass. While the Secretary's role is often seen as organizational, I see it as a unique platform to champion inclusion and celebrate our community's strengths through intentional communication.</p> <p>For me, this role is about more than logistics; it is about helping to build a community where graduate students, no matter their research focus, feel seen, valued, and empowered to take the lead. By promoting collaboration, transparency, and open communication, I hope to help GSWG grow into an even more inclusive and innovative space. I am excited about the possibility of contributing to a group where amplifying diverse voices shapes not only our meetings, but the future direction of NAPB itself.</p>
	<p><b><u>Subash Thapa</u></b>  South Dakota State University; Department of Agronomy, Horticulture and Plant Science; Ph.D. (Third year)</p> <p><b><u>Position(s):</u></b> Secretary</p> <p><b><u>Bio:</u></b> Joining the NAPB Graduate Student Working Group (GSWG) Leadership Team would allow me to contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of graduate student engagement. I envision expanding interdisciplinary collaboration opportunities, promoting diversity through inclusive programming, and enhancing communication skill-building across the student community. My goal is to help make GSWG a more dynamic, resourceful, and representative platform for all aspiring plant breeders. I am excited to contribute energy, vision, and action to ensure that graduate students not only thrive in their academic paths but also lead with purpose in the plant breeding community.</p>



**Muhammad Usman**

University of Agriculture, Faisalabad; Plant Breeding & Genetics; MS (Second year)

**Position(s):** Secretary, Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** A M.Sc. (Hons.) student in Plant Breeding and Genetics, and B.Sc. (Hons) in Agriculture (CGPA: 3.68/4.0). My research spans herbicide resistance, precision agriculture, and molecular breeding, with three peer-reviewed publications. As Event Coordinator for the Pakistan Society of Plant Breeders and Geneticists, I organized national conferences and industry collaborations. I aim to leverage NAPB GSWG to empower students through skill-building workshops and amplify their research visibility. My vision is to strengthen ties between graduate programs and agricultural industries to address global food security challenges.



**Mandeep Singh**

South Dakota State University; Department of Agronomy, Horticulture, and Plant Science: Ph.D. (Second year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** I am Mandeep Singh, a dedicated Ph.D. student in Plant Breeding at South Dakota State University, with a strong interest in advancing agricultural sustainability and genetic diversity through innovative breeding strategies. My academic journey is rooted in the belief that resilient, efficient, and diverse crops are key to addressing global food security challenges. As an aspiring member of the NAPB Graduate Student Working Group (GSWG) leadership team, I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to the future direction of the organization. My involvement in the NAPB GSWG would focus on fostering a supportive environment for graduate students, one where knowledge sharing, mentorship, and innovation are actively encouraged.



**Muni Khyathi Madduru**

University of Georgia; Plant Breeding, Genetics and Genomics; Ph.D. (Second year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** I am a Ph.D. student in Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Genomics at the University of Georgia, where my research focuses on improving micronutrient efficiency in pecan through a combination of classical breeding and UAV-based remote sensing. My academic interests lie at the intersection of data science and field-based plant breeding, and I am passionate about using genetics to solve real-world agricultural problems.

Beyond research, I actively contribute to student leadership and outreach. As the current Social Media Chair for the Graduate Student Association of the Institute of plant breeding, genetics and genomics at University of Georgia, I lead both digital and in-person initiatives that promote student engagement, highlight achievements, and build community across programs. These roles have helped me develop clear communication, effective coordination, and science outreach skills that I'm eager to contribute to the NAPB Graduate Student Working Group's efforts to engage and represent students.

As a Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator, I see an opportunity to help shape the future direction of the GSWG by building a consistent, inclusive, and student-driven communications strategy. I hope to create a structured system for highlighting graduate students across disciplines and institutions, especially those whose stories are less frequently heard. By doing so, we can help students feel more visible, valued, and connected to the larger NAPB community.

Over time, I believe this role can evolve into a central student engagement tool within GSWG, fostering stronger connections across programs and campuses, encouraging collaboration, and reinforcing a culture of shared learning and support. I'm excited to contribute toward making the GSWG more accessible, representative, and engaging for graduate students across the country.



**Ashmita Upadhyay**

University of Georgia; Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Genomics; Ph.D. (First year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** I am a first year PhD student at the Institute of Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Genomics at the University of Georgia. I completed my master's being in a Fernandes Lab at the Centre for Agricultural data analytics, University for Arkansas. I did my bachelor's in agriculture at the Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Currently, I have been working in computational genomics and phenomics of peanut and blueberry at the Hudson Alpha Institute for Biotechnology. Being in other leadership position in the past, I have been a good team player and organizer which has benefited the organisation I was in and the level of impact we created through the organisation and the team. Similarly, here, at GSWG too my involvement as a graduate student highlight coordinator will enhance the exposure, enhancement, and professional development of graduate student which will shapes the future directions of NAPB GSWG. I see myself working on several new ideas to promote the work of graduate student, and side by side communication between students through GSWG, so that we can work towards grad student benefit. Also, I have been a member of NAPB since I was in united states, actively participating in annual meetings so this will also benefit GSWG to organise and plan for a physical events during annual meeting.




**Niranjana Pokhrel**

University of Nebraska- Lincoln; Complex Biosystems ( Plant Breeding and Quantitative Genetics); Ph.D. (First year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** Niranjana Pokhrel is a first-year Ph.D. student in Complex Biosystems department at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL). His research aims to improve nitrogen-use efficiency in maize by integrating quantitative genetics, high-throughput phenotyping, and machine learning. He builds deep-learning pipelines to extract complex root phenotypes from RGB images and applies association studies and genomic selection to identify genomic regions that drive these traits. Niranjana currently represents graduate students in UNL's College of Agricultural and Natural Resources, meeting with college deans to advocate for graduate student needs. He holds diverse leadership and communication skills by working as coordinator for youth lead climate action organization in undergrad and serving as president of Pi Alpha Xi during master's and other leadership positions as well. Niranjana brings passion for plant



	<p>breeding and genetics along with diverse leadership and communication experience to NAPB GSWG. He aims to increase the outreach and impact of NAPB to more plant-breeding students across the United States and internationally.</p>
	<p><b><u>Conner Johnson</u></b></p> <p>KAUST; Plant Breeding and Genetics; Ph.D. (Second year)</p> <p><b><u>Position(s):</u></b> Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator</p> <p><b><u>Bio:</u></b> I would like to facilitate NAPB connections and opportunities across countries. Our student membership is made up of a large portion of international students who have come to the US. I would like to connect international and American NAPB students with opportunities to learn from and work in international agricultural issues, and to make connections that will help them do this long-term.</p> <p>I am an American, but I moved abroad for my PhD to pursue developments in dryland agriculture to support the places left behind in the Green Revolution. I work to improve sesame, a crop that is valued globally, but which is often grown by smallholder farmers in hot and dry climates. My research and the unique community I live and work in have brought me in close contact with farmers, scientists, breeders, and social/government leaders all working toward a more sustainable, poverty-free world. I have so loved this experience and these people I've come to know, and I want to help facilitate cross-cultural connections to give other students a taste of this, as I believe we need many bridge people across our world's cultures to lead humanity to overcome hunger, violence, poverty and climate change.</p>



**Emanuel Ferrari do Nascimento**

University of Arkansas; Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences-Plant Breeding and Genetics: MS. (First year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** My name is Emanuel Ferrari do Nascimento. I earned a bachelor's degree in Agronomy from the Federal University of Viçosa (Brazil), where I gained comprehensive experience in Plant Breeding and Genetics. During my undergraduate program, I worked for four years as an undergraduate research assistant, contributing to various projects in plant breeding. I also had the opportunity to be an undergraduate visiting scholar at the University of Missouri, where I worked with soybean breeding for a year and a half. Currently, I am pursuing a master's degree at the University of Arkansas, with a focus on soybean breeding. My academic journey has deepened my passion for plant breeding and strengthened my ability to work collaboratively in interdisciplinary environments. I am truly excited about the opportunity to contribute to the NAPB Graduate Student Working Group (GSWG) Leadership Team as a Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator. I believe that my strong communication skills and research experience can help promote student engagement, showcase student achievements, encourage collaboration among peers and facilitate connections between students, faculty, and professionals from both academia and industry. I would be glad to help organize impactful events and create spaces where ideas and experiences can be exchanged. I see this role as a valuable opportunity to grow with the group and support its mission of building a stronger community for the future plant breeders.



**Zubairia Tasawar**

University of Agriculture, Faisalabad; Plant Breeding & Genetics; MS (First year)

**Position(s):** Graduate Student Highlight Coordinator

**Bio:** As a recent B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture graduate specializing in Plant Breeding and Genetics (CGPA: 3.5/4.0), I bring fresh perspectives from my academic research and leadership roles. My work at Ayub Agricultural Research Institute involved molecular biology techniques and field trials, while my position as Joint Secretary of the Pakistan Society of Plant Breeders and Geneticists developed my skills in science communication and event coordination. Though not currently enrolled in graduate studies, I remain actively engaged in agricultural research and am passionate about supporting student development. I

	envision contributing to NAPB GSWG by creating platforms that connect early-career researchers with industry opportunities and highlight innovative student work globally.
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## 2025-2026 GSWG Leadership Team Role Descriptions

### **Executive Committee**

Secretary: Meeting minutes; monthly update bulletin; assist Chair and Vice-Chair with webinars, research competition, etc. (Two-year commitment with Executive Committee)

### **Advocacy and Communications**

Graduate Student Highlight Coordinators (x2): share responsibilities for creating two graduate student highlights per month; attend monthly meetings.