



Student Event Speakers

Dr. Rob Laport

Dr. Robert Laport is a plant evolutionary ecologist combining field, lab, greenhouse, and molecular approaches to study the biodiversity consequences of whole genome duplication--polyploidy--in *Larrea tridentata*, an important desert shrub of the southwestern US and northern Mexico. He earned his PhD at the University of Rochester in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology before moving to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as a Program of Excellence Post-doctoral Fellow in Population Biology. He is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Colorado-Boulder and will begin as an Assistant Professor at Rhodes College, a selective liberal arts college in Memphis, TN, in the Fall. Starting as a graduate student and through his time as a post-doc, he has mentored independent undergraduate research and served as the instructor of record for courses in Ecology and Evolution.

Jason T. Cantley

Currently at San Francisco State University, Jason T. Cantley is an Assistant Professor of Plant Evolution in the Biology Department. He is researching biodiversity and evolution on the Pacific centered genus *Coprosma* (Rubiaceae), Australian taxa of *Solanum* sect. *Leptostemonum*, and conservation genetics of rare plants in the California Floristic Province. Generally, Cantley is interested in the evolutionary factors influencing historical biogeography and future distributions of plants as the climate changes.

Allison Miller

Allison is a Professor in the Department of Biology at Saint Louis University and a Research Associate at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Her research program focuses on evolutionary processes in contemporary and emerging perennial crops and their wild relatives. Ongoing work in her group includes grapevines, perennial, herbaceous legumes, and various fruit and nut trees. By understanding evolutionary processes in crop species and their ancestors, she hopes to contribute to the conservation of crop genetic resources, crop improvement, and sustainable agriculture. Originally from the Chicago area, Allison became interested in plants through trips to nearby prairie patches and summer vacations in northern Wisconsin. She holds a BS degree in Botany from Miami University and an MS degree in Botany from Colorado State University. She earned a PhD in Ecology, Evolution, and Population Biology from Washington University in St. Louis in a joint program with the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Ya Yang

Dr. Ya Yang grew up in Beijing, China, where she graduated from Peking University with an undergraduate degree in Biology. She did her Ph.D. at University of Michigan working on systematics of *Euphorbia* subgenus *Chamaesyce* (Euphorbiaceae) with Dr. Paul Berry. Following that she stayed on in Michigan to work with Dr. Stephen Smith on phylogenomics of Caryophyllales. She became an assistant professor at University of Minnesota in 2016. Currently research in the Yang Lab focuses on plant systematics, phylogenomics, and evolution in groups such as the Caryophyllales and beyond. The Elevator Speech: Crafting an Effective Pitch that Highlights your Research and Illustrates the Broader Impacts

Amanda Grusz

Dr. Amanda Grusz is an Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she also serves as Director of the Olga Lakela Herbarium (DUL). Prior to joining the faculty at UMN Duluth, Grusz earned her PhD in Biology at Duke University (2014) and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Smithsonian NMNH. Her research leverages morphological, molecular, and cytogenetic tools to study organismal evolution. Amanda's passions span floristic and nomenclatural studies through to phylogenetics and evolutionary genomics, with a general focus on patterns and processes that drive diversification in seed-free vascular plants.

Susan Pell

Follow Your Plant (or other!) Passion

Susan Pell, Ph.D. is a botanist, science educator, and public garden administrator with interests in improving science communication, increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in STEM, exploring the intersection of art and science, and building strong teams in museum and public garden settings. She holds a B.S. in biology from St. Andrews University in North Carolina, and a Ph.D. in plant biology from Louisiana State University. Dr. Pell is the Deputy Executive Director of the United States Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C. and has held positions at the New York Botanical Garden and Brooklyn Botanic Garden. She also served as a AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow at the National Science Foundation. Her research specialty is molecular systematics of the cashew (*Anacardiaceae*) family and she is dedicated to showing people the coolness of plants everyday.