

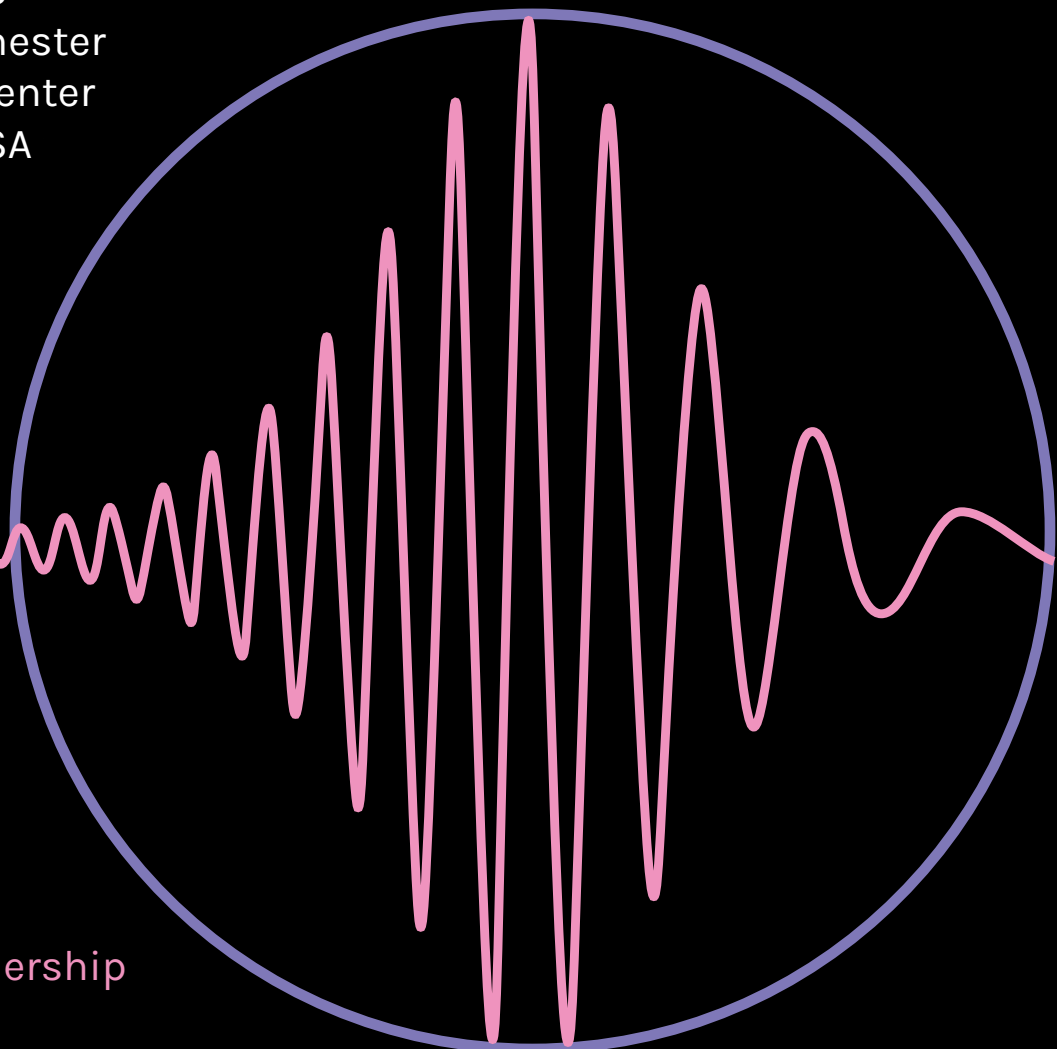
OPTICA
FOUNDATION

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Supercharge your network in optics and photonics.

27 - 29 September 2026

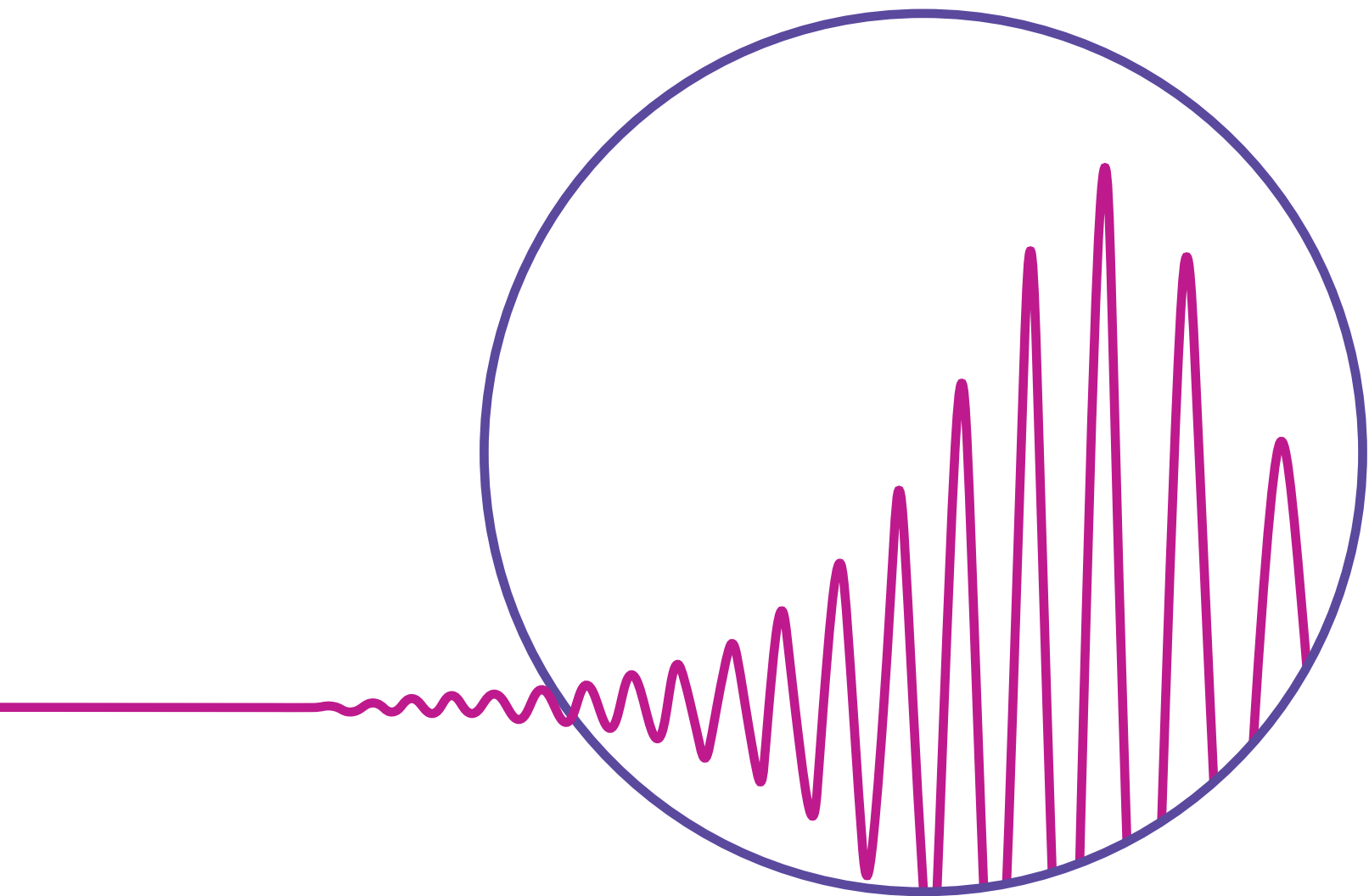
Joseph A. Floreano Rochester
Riverside Convention Center
Rochester, New York, USA



optica.org/StudentLeadership

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Program Agenda

Sunday, 27 September 2026

Rochester Convention Center (Lilac Ballroom North)

Rochester, NY, USA

**All times are in ET*

- 7:15** **Breakfast**, Riverside Court
- 8:30 - 9:00** **Welcome**
Optica Staff **Albert Williams** **Opening Remarks**
Dr. Aisha Bibi **Salience Labs** & **Dr. Sai Kanth Dacha** **Columbia**
University, USA
- 09:00 - 10:45** **Sustainable Networking**
Christina Willis
Virtuous Cycles LLC
- 10:45 - 11:15** **Break** (with Group Photo on stairs across from Member Lounge)
- 11:15 - 12:00** **Keynote 1**
William Cassarly
"Teaching computers to design light: Automation in
illumination engineering and free form optics"
- 12:00 - 13:00** **Lunch** Riverside Court
- 13:15 - 14:00** **Workshop Sessions I** **Optica Ambassadors**

Building Your Scientific Community: Mentors, Sponsors, Peers, and Networks <u>Room #1</u> Saheer Cheemadan	Developing empathic leadership for science management and collaboration <u>Room #2</u> Lewis Hill	Under pressure: Navigating personalities and team dynamics <u>Room #3</u> Tatjana Pladere
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14:00 - 14:10

Break

14:10- 14:55

Workshop Sessions II **Optica Ambassadors**

**From defense to
dialogue: Translating
your research to any
audience** Room #1
Sai Kanth Dacha

**The art of saying yes
(and when to say no)**
Room #2
Juan Rafael Alvarez

**Speak so people listen:
Presenting with impact
& advocating for
yourself** Room #3
Garima Bawa

14:55 - 15:05

Break

15:05 - 15:50

Workshop Sessions III **Optica Ambassadors**

**Lab to launch:
Evaluating the
commercial potential
of your research** Room #1
Amol Delmade
Mariia Zhuldybina

**Ethical and
efficient uses of AI**
Room #2
Travis Sawyer

**Applying for grants
and scholarships**
Room #3
Aisha Bibi

16:00 - 17:00

Keynote 2
Jacquiline Romero
"Many shapes of light and life"

17:00 - 17:30

Closing Remarks
Sai Kanth Dacha
2026 Optica Ambassador

18:00 - 19:30

Closing Reception (Together with Women's Scholars and AMPLIFY)
Native Eatery and Bar
180 South Clinton Avenue, Rochester

Keynote Speakers



William J Cassarly

Optical Scientist, Keysight Technologies

A life-long learner, innovator, and lecturer in non-imaging optics, optical design, and optical software development, is currently an Optical Scientist at Keysight Technologies. Cassarly earned his BSEE from Bucknell University and his PhD in electrical engineering from the University of Pennsylvania. He launched his career in non-imaging optics at General Electric, moving through roles in its Aerospace, Corporate R&D, and Lighting Divisions. Prior to joining Keysight Technologies, he drove algorithm development for optical software products at Optical Research Associates (ORA), which was acquired by Synopsys.

Throughout his career, Cassarly has been recognized for his efforts to create the field of computer-aided illumination engineering that spans illumination free-form design and illumination optimization. He has shared his passion and expertise for this subject through numerous papers and invited talks, educational courses, intellectual property development, and illumination engineering consulting.

His role as an optics innovator is evidenced in his 50+ US patents and well over 100 publications and conference proceedings, including book chapters in recognized references such as the Handbook of Optics. His notable technical work includes designing the TIROS lens for LED flashlights and providing key contributions to major feature developments in LightTools® and LucidShape®, such as Freeform Designer, Measured BSDF, Backlight Pattern Optimization, and the first industry introduction of a practical and effective optimization environment for illumination systems. His most recent achievements encompass the core stray light features in ImSym, which was the Laser Focus World Platinum Level Winner of the 2025 Annual Innovators Award Program.

He is a Fellow of SPIE, a member of Optica, and a recipient of the David Richardson Medal.



Jacquiline Romero

University of Queensland, Australia

A physicist with a deep passion for optics and a strong commitment to making the field more inclusive through thoughtful leadership and mentorship. Throughout her career, she has been shaped by supportive and empowering mentors, whose influences continue to guide her own approach to leadership today.

She has been mentored by several Optica Fellows, starting in the Philippines where she trained under Caesar Saloma as an undergraduate. She later pursued her PhD with Miles Padgett and Steve Barnett in Scotland, before moving to Australia where she has been mentored by Andrew White and Halina Rubinsztein-Dunlop. In each stage, her mentors shared a defining quality: they actively supported and enabled those around them. Inspired by this example, Jacqui strives to foster the same culture, working to reshape perceptions of optics and broaden participation in physics.

As both an advisor and educator, she is dedicated to supporting undergraduate and graduate students, challenging the notion that physics is an elite discipline only for the gifted. She illustrates her philosophy with a sporting analogy: rather than building a team solely by recruiting already elite players, she believes in welcoming individuals with potential and investing in their development through training and mentorship. This approach, she argues, not only cultivates talent but also brings a wider range of perspectives into the field. “The threshold doesn’t need to be unreasonable,” she says. “You can be a successful researcher with genuine curiosity, work ethic, and training.”

As a mother of three, Jacqui’s own path into physics reflects a unique and balanced perspective. When asked about the challenges of pursuing an academic career while raising a family, she charmingly responds that she has not faced such a troublesome path. She had her first child during her PhD, which she feels was the perfect time. There weren’t as many outside pressures, like administrative work or grant writing, that she had to navigate with her other children. With her supportive advisors, she was able to return to her work on her own terms. One challenge she does acknowledge was getting the funding to do a PhD. She found that to be the pivotal moment for her career, and once that was secure, she’s been able to find success.

Her research has focused on single photons, particularly in using the shape of photons as qudits (the higher-dimensional version of the qubit). During her Master’s degree, she shaped laser beams for microscopy and microfabrication. She identified that the technology could be used to measure the spatial modes of light at the single photon level, and joined the Optics Group at the University of Glasgow for her PhD research. She shares, “That was a contribution that I’m very proud of because I think, at one point, we were the only group using a spatial light modulator on single photons. Now, it’s standard.” Today, her work centers on advancing photonic technologies, including the development of devices that integrate the many components on an optical table onto a single chip. Using photonic inverse design, her team is exploring new ways to enable scalable quantum applications with potential impacts beyond quantum science, and Jacqui is eager to keep exploring. She continues to find great joy in delving deeply into the literature and building a thorough understanding of emerging topics, despite the busy work schedule.

Her interest in science and mathematics began early in life, and her introduction to optics has proved transformative. She was captivated by its tangible and visceral presence; she could point to almost anything and find a connection to optics. As she began considering a career in science, she had to convince her father, who didn’t fully grasp the range of opportunities available to her. Jacqui recalls telling her father, “If I do my best and I’m really good, how can people not notice me?” While she now reflects on that naïve statement with humility, she acknowledges the truth it contains: excellence matters but your dedication and working environment will shape your journey. Ultimately, Jacqui defines success not only through achievement but through alignment. “My hope for everyone doing optics or physics,” she says, “is to be in a place where their personal values are aligned with their work. At the end of the day, success is alignment in values.”

Speakers



Dr. Juan Rafael Alvarez
Telecom Paris, France



Dr. Garima Bawa
CREOL, the College of
Optics and Photonics at
the University of Central
Florida, Orlando, USA



Dr. Aisha Bibi
Saliency Labs Ltd, UK



Dr. Saheer Cheemadan
M.A.M.O. College
Manassery, India



Dr. Sai Kanth Dacha
Columbia University, USA



Dr. Amol Delmade
Pilot Photonics, Ireland





Dr. Lewis Hill

Max Planck Institute
for the Science of Light,
Germany



Dr. Tatjana Pladere

University of Latvia, Latvia



Dr. Travis Sawyer

University of Arizona, USA



Dr. Christina Willis

Infleqtion, USA



Dr. Mariia Zhuldybina

École de Technologie
Supérieure, Canada



Attendees



Adigun, Deborah Amos
University of Eastern Finland



Adithya Suresh, Gokul
Rashtreya Vidyalaya College of Engineering



Ahuja, Jagriti
Indian Institute of Technology Delhi



Aka, Aynur Cemre
Universita degli Studi di Padova



Akhtar, Nuha
University of California Berkeley



Appleton, Edward
University of St Andrews



Aquino Sanchez, Daniel Aron
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL JORGE BASADRE GROHMANN



Araújo, Luisa
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais



Ashok, Vineetha
Boston University



Atobatele, Olayinka
Jagiellonian University, Krakow



Avetisyan, Arman
Russian-Armenian University



Bartelsen, Emma
Vanderbilt University





Bartenev, Alexander
University of Puerto Rico
Mayaguez



Belanger, Craig
University of Massachusetts
Dartmouth



Biondi Vaccariello, Andrés Miguel
University of Southampton



Blount, Tom
University of Southampton



Brenner, Max
University of Witwatersrand



Cambronero Jiménez, Isabel de los Ángeles
Universidad de Costa Rica



Carvajal, Daniela Ximena Ortiz
Universidad de Pamplona



Chanda, Sumedha
Tyndall National Institute



Chen, Yung-Jen
National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University



Cordero Segovia, Sheila
UANL



Dawanse, Sita
Tulane University



De, Ishani
Indian Institute of Technology
Roorkee





Dharmasiri, Ajithamithra
Texas A&M University



Durán-Salvador, Blanca
Universidad de Salamanca



Eadie, Emily
Concordia University



Emam, Tanzimul
Franklin W Olin College of Engineering



Estrada Cárdenas, Jesús Giovanni
XLIM UMR CNRS



Eyito, Oritse-Tsegbemi
algonquin



Fazlic, Aida
Brno University of Technology
CEITEC



Fomenko, Heorhii
Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National Univ



Gaboyan, Alla
National Polytechnic University of Armenia



Garcia, Santana
Ohio State University



Gasca, Adriana
Universidad de Guanajuato



Gorsí, Minali
Tata Institute of Fundamental Research





Hameed, Suhana
Karlsruher Institut für Technologie



Hashmi, Muhammad Shehzore
Montana State University - Bozeman



Hayrapetyan, Meri
Yerevan State University



Jager, Isobel
University of Bristol



Jahannia, Belal
University of Florida



Jangid, Manish
Malaviya National Inst of Tech Jaipur



Jaworski, Jakub
Wroclaw University of Science and Technology



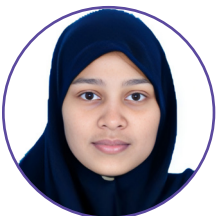
K C, Padam
Ohio University



Kasza, Bartosz
Uniwersytet Warszawski



Khanom, Fatima
Aston University



Koraliyadan, Sajna



Kumari, Neha
Netaji Subhas University of Technology





Kuttner, Tristan
ETH Zurich



Lenoir, Théophile
University



Limongi, Leonardo
Universita degli Studi di Trento



Liu, Xuecheng
Shanghai University



Luis Vasquez Zamora, Jaime
Universidade Federal do ABC



Mahfuz, Mohammad Al
Florida Institute of Technology



Margaryan, Meri
Institute for Physical Research-
Armenia



Mariani, Chiara Maria
University College Dublin



Mehra, Sarita
Indian Inst of Technology (BHU)
Varanasi



Mejia, Naomi
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Chihuahua



Mini Ashok, Meenakshi
Deutsches Elektronen-
Synchrotron



Mringie, Dorothy
University of Southern Queensland





Mutlu, Feray
Middle East Technical University



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Negrin, Christian
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Ortiz-Santana, Paula
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Metropolitano



Pang, Zihao
Tel Aviv University



Paul, Kashish
Graphic Era University



**Perales-Hernandez, Josue
Alejandro**
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Pinto, Vinícius
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**Pradipta, Muhammad Fajar
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Tech



Rafi MH, Rameesa
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Rajkumari, Valentina
Tyndall National Institute

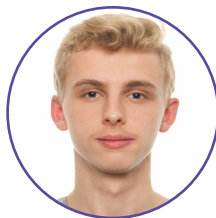


Ravikumar, Nidhi
Anna University





Rouges Forcada, María
UNT



Rudak, Jakub
Uniwersytet Jagiellonski



Salgado do Nascimento, Carolina
University of São Paulo



Santos Oliveira, Klivan
Universidade Federal de Sergipe



Sastre San José, Claudia
Universidad de Valladolid



Serrano, Emilia
Centro de Investigaciones Opticas



Serrano, Miguel
Universidad Industrial de Santander



Shivalingam, Shreesh
Anna University



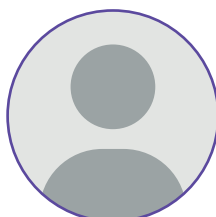
Silva, Luiz
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Silva, Paula
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Singh, Utkarsh
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Singhal, Ayush
Jaypee Institute of Information Tech



Tassara, Francisco
Leloir Institute Foundation



Tripathi, Nishchal
University of Maryland at College Park



Vieira de Oliveira, Gabriel
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina



Vithanage, Denuwan
Wesleyan University



Volpato, Maria Carolina
UNICAMP



Wei, Jin
Sydney astrophotonic instrument Lab



Wijesiri, Shyamalie
University of Eastern Finland



Ye, Hong
Tsinghua University



Yu, Guangfeng
University of Massachusetts Lowell



Zhang, Jiawei
Princeton University



Zurschmitten, Joaquín Gabriel
Instituto Balseiro



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Optica may take any disciplinary action it deems appropriate if, after thorough investigation, it finds a violation occurred.

For complete policy information visit optica.org/events/code_of_conduct/.

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- Use the online portal optica.org/incidentreport
- Email codeofconduct@optica.org

