

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW DR. AZHAR AHMAD NAMED TO NATIONAL NIH — FUNDED BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH COHORT

Through SUNY Downstate's SPNSOR program, early-career scientists from across the country build mentorship networks, leadership skills, and professional connections in academic medicine and research

El Paso, Texas — Azhar Ahmad, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow at the **University of Texas at El Paso** has been selected as a 2026 fellow in the Structured Professional Networks for Successful Outcomes in Research (SPNSOR) program, a national NIH-funded mentorship and professional development initiative led by SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University.

From January through March 2026, 21 postdoctoral fellows representing 19 institutions across the United States participated in the program, which supports early-career scientists as they navigate careers in academic medicine and biomedical research. Fellows were competitively selected from institutions nationwide.

Led by **W. Marcus Lambert, Ph.D.**, Associate Vice President for Research and Associate Professor at SUNY Downstate, along with the SPNSOR leadership team in the Lambert Lab, including **Alexandra Kuvaeva, M.D., Ph.D.**, Postdoctoral Researcher, and **Amanda Carbajal, Ph.D.**, Public Health Postdoctoral Research Scientist, the program focuses on a critical stage in scientific careers: the first years of postdoctoral training, when mentorship, professional networks, and career guidance can have a lasting impact.

As part of the experience, fellows traveled to SUNY Downstate for an immersive kickoff program and the second annual SPNSOR Mentorship Symposium. Throughout the symposium, fellows engaged with researchers, mentors, and scientific leaders through workshops, panel discussions, networking sessions, and community-building activities designed to help participants navigate the challenges and opportunities of research careers and academic medicine.

The symposium featured keynote speaker **Sherilynn Black, Ph.D.**, neuroscientist and faculty member at Duke University, who spoke about resilience, self-care in science, and navigating today's increasingly competitive research environment.

Participants described the experience as energizing and deeply valuable, particularly the opportunity to connect with peers from across the country facing similar challenges in biomedical research and academic medicine. Fellows reflected on the importance of mentorship, professional community, and creating space to think intentionally about long-term career goals beyond the day-to-day demands of the laboratory.

"SPNSOR is designed to help fellows build strong mentoring networks and gain the tools and support needed to thrive in biomedical research careers," said Lambert. "The program reflects our commitment to creating more connected, supportive, and sustainable pathways within academic science."

Dr. Ahmad joined postdoctoral fellows from institutions including Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Emory University, MD Anderson Cancer Center, University of Pennsylvania,

University of Chicago, University of Pittsburgh, University of California San Diego, UT Southwestern, and others participating in the 2026 cohort.

By bringing together emerging scientists from across the country, SPNSOR continues to strengthen Downstate's growing national role in mentorship, workforce development, and advancing careers in biomedical research and academic medicine.

More information about the SPNSOR program is available at www.mentornetworks.org.

About the Lambert Lab

The Lambert Lab at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University studies workforce diversity, mentorship, and equity in biomedical and health professions training pathways. Led by W. Marcus Lambert, Ph.D., the lab examines how mentorship, representation, and institutional support shape scientific careers and influence health outcomes.

Through research and national training initiatives such as SPNSOR, the Lambert Lab supports early-career scientists while advancing more connected, inclusive, and equitable pathways in biomedical research and academic medicine. The lab is part of Downstate's broader health equity research community and collaborates with the Brooklyn Health Promotion Center.

About SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University

Downstate Health Sciences University is Brooklyn's academic medical center and the only SUNY academic medical center in New York City. It serves as a critical hub for healthcare delivery, medical education, and research for Brooklyn's 2.7 million residents.

University Hospital at Downstate (UHD) delivers high-acuity and community-based care across the borough, supported by more than 800 physicians across 53 specialties and subspecialties. UHD provides high-risk neonatal and infant care, pediatric nephrology, and dialysis services, and established Brooklyn's first kidney transplantation program more than 50 years ago.

Downstate strengthens the healthcare workforce and advances community-based care through its academic programs and clinical training. Its biotechnology initiatives, including the Biotechnology Incubator and BioBAT, drive innovation and economic growth across Brooklyn and New York City.