

# INSAR Student & Trainee Committee (STC) Newsletter



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# Welcome Letter from the Chair

Dear fellow students and trainees all across the world,

I hope this finds you well and eager to reconnect for the INSAR 2026 Annual Meeting in Prague this April! Perhaps now more than ever, we are so encouraged to reconvene with this global group of researchers dedicated to disseminating rigorous science and supporting the needs and priorities of the autistic community. We on the STC have been busy planning and we're excited to share more about our upcoming initiatives in this edition of the STC Newsletter.

With this year marking INSAR's 25th Anniversary, we have partnered with the Board and other INSAR committees to collaborate on a brand new preconference event, The INSAR Mentoring Preconference on Science Communication. This will be a larger event than usual with attendees ranging from student and trainees to early career researchers. We hope to see you there on Wednesday to learn more about mentorship and connect with fellow INSAR members across training trajectories!

Additionally, the STC looks forward to continuing our other annual events including the Meet the Experts event, Student and Trainee Networking event, and of course our booth. Be sure to stop by for a fidget, motivational sticker, and a chat with the STC! Truly, getting to see fellow students and trainees in person across our events is always such a highlight of the year. However, we know that travel can be a significant variable for many due to cost, time, and health. For this reason, we hope that our virtual initiatives can also keep us connected through the STC Newsletter and our INSAR Institute webinar series, which we're excited to resume this summer.

This year's INSAR Institute will be a collaborative cross-committee effort in partnership with INSAR's Autism Research Journal. We're excited to put forward a series focused on authorship, peer review, and ethical use of AI in the publication process. We encourage you to keep an eye out for updates on the INSAR website, social media platforms, and email blasts about the upcoming Institute speaker line up.

Of course, we would not be able to provide these recurring events without the support of the INSAR Board, the time and energy of the faculty experts who participate, and the attendance and feedback of our fellow student and trainee members. If you have ever attended an STC event or read an STC Newsletter, thank you! Your engagement in these initiatives is truly what keeps them going. If you plan to attend some of our events this year, we ask that you take a moment to complete the feedback surveys provided. This feedback is the first thing our committee reviews when planning for the following year's initiatives, and our primary goal is always to align our content and structure with the voiced priorities of students and trainees.

On that note, I would like to give a ginormous shout out to all the STC members who develop and deliver these initiatives each year! It is such a privilege to work alongside this group of motivated, determined, and curious autism researchers who are also passionate about community connection. This year, we have been fortunate to bring on 10 new members who have shared such valuable new perspectives and really hit the ground running in their support of committee initiatives. If you would like to learn more about joining the STC, we strongly encourage you to stop by the booth and keep an eye out for our call for applications!

If you do find yourself in Prague in April 2026, please come say hello at our events! Every single one of us can remember our first INSAR, our first time looking around such a huge space and wondering where to go or who to talk to. It can be a simultaneously amazing and overwhelming experience, and we'd love to be a familiar face in the crowd. We look forward to hearing from you and seeing you soon!

**Michal Cook, PhD**

INSAR Student and Trainee Committee Chair

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# Student & Trainee Committee Members



Michal Cook, PhD (Chair)  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
University of Washington  
Seattle Children's Hospital  
Seattle, Washington, USA



Sapir Soker-Elimalaih, PhD (Co-chair)  
Postdoctoral Scholar  
University of Southern  
California  
Los Angeles, California, USA



Emily Spackman, PhD (Treasurer)  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California, USA



Marshae D. Franklin (Secretary)  
PhD Candidate  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, California, USA



Meredith Pecukonis, PhD (Past  
Chair)  
Assistant Professor  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts, USA



Josh Chou  
PhD Student  
University of Massachusetts  
Boston  
Boston, Massachusetts, USA



Emily Coombs  
PhD Student  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



Talia Liu  
PhD Candidate  
Boston University  
Boston, Massachusetts, USA



Erin Matsuba, PhD  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Boston Children's Hospital  
Harvard Medical School  
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

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# Student & Trainee Committee Members



**Derica Su**  
PhD Student  
Rowan University  
Glassboro, New Jersey,  
USA



**Divya Swaminathan**  
PhD Candidate  
National Institute of Mental Health  
and Neurosciences  
Bangalore, India



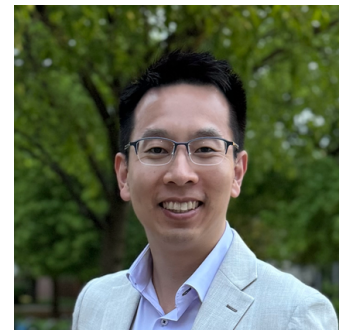
**Miray Başçavuş**  
Psychiatry Resident  
Erenköy Mental Health and  
Neurological Diseases Hospital  
Istanbul, Turkey



**Aanchal Chopra**  
PhD Candidate  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Mumbai, India  
La Trobe University  
Melbourne, Australia



**Rachel Rivera**  
PhD Candidate  
University of Rochester  
Rochester, New York, USA



**Wei Siong Neo, PhD**  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Psychology Seattle Children's  
Research Institute  
Seattle, Washington, USA



**Mojtaba (Moji) Norozi**  
PhD Candidate  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, South Carolina, USA



**Melissa Susko**  
PhD Candidate  
Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada



**Jennifer Macko**  
PhD Candidate  
North Carolina State University  
Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

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# Student & Trainee Committee Members



Gabriel Blanco Gomez  
PhD Candidate  
McGill University  
Montreal, Québec, Canada



Stephen Gallegos  
Graduate Student  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona, USA



Stephen Kabenge  
PhD Candidate  
Stellenbosch University  
Stellenbosch, Western Cape,  
South Africa

## Welcome to our new STC members!

The Student and Trainee Committee is pleased to welcome our newest members. These individuals bring a wealth of expertise and a shared commitment to supporting the INSAR trainee community. We look forward to their contributions and the fresh perspectives they will bring to our upcoming initiatives.

Miray Başçavuş  
Erenköy Mental Health Hospital

Jennifer Macko  
North Carolina State University

Gabriel Blanco Gomez  
McGill University

Wei Siong Neo  
Seattle Children's Research Institute

Aanchal Chopra  
Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
La Trobe University

Mojtaba (Moji) Norozi  
University of South Carolina

Stephen Gallegos  
Arizona State University

Rachel Rivera  
University of Rochester

Stephen Kabenge  
Stellenbosch University

Melissa Susko  
Queen's University



Guest Speaker:  
**CJ Volpe**, Director of Communications for the Autism Science Foundation



# New to INSAR 2026: Mentoring Preconference Workshop

## What is the Mentoring Preconference Workshop?

- An event organized in collaboration with INSAR Board and several committees (Student and Trainee, Autistic Researchers, Early Career, and Cultural Diversity Committees)
- **CJ Volpe**, Director of Communications for the Autism Science Foundation (ASF), will serve as guest speaker
- Learn about the basics of elevator pitches, tailoring communication to different target audiences, responses to media requests, and how to answer tough questions
- Event will involve a larger didactic presentation (lecture format) and smaller breakout sessions to facilitate discussion
- Autism researchers of all training levels are encouraged to attend

## What topics will be covered?

- Messaging Development: Crafting an Effective Elevator Pitch
  - Why messaging matters in autism research
  - Understanding and segmenting your audience (families, autism research community, general public, media, etc.)
  - How to communicate clearly, accurately, and in a way that resonates
- Message Dissemination & Communication Channels
  - Strategies for answering tough questions
  - Navigating media engagement
  - Social media best practices
  - Working effectively with press officers and communications departments

DETAILS
<b>Wednesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026</b> <b>1 pm - 3 pm</b> <b>Prague Congress Centre</b>

**REGISTER NOW TO  
SECURE YOUR SPOT:  
[LINK](#)**



**top row, left to right:**  
 Meng-Chuan Lai,  
 Monique Botha,  
 Shoba Meera,  
 Michael Lombardo



**bottom row, left to right:**  
**right:**  
 Jamie Pearson,  
 Hilde Geurts,  
 Jan Buitelaar,  
 Eva Loth

# INSAR 2026 Meet-the-Experts (MTE) Event

## What is MTE?

- A relatively informal roundtable discussion event with eight autism research experts across the globe
- Topics include training and career path, lab research, and offer advice on how to build a successful career
- Students and trainees across all levels are invited to attend
- Currently, all RSVP seats have been filled. However, remaining open seats may be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis the day of!

## Who will be at the 2026 MTE Event?

- Meng-Chuan Lai, MD, PhD
  - University of Toronto
- Monique Botha, PhD
  - Durham University
- Shoba S Meera, PhD
  - National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences
- Michael Lombardo, PhD
  - Italian Institute of Technology
- Jamie Pearson, PhD
  - North Carolina State University
- Hilde Geurts, PhD
  - University of Amsterdam
- Jan Buitelaar, PhD
  - Radboud University
- Eva Loth, PhD
  - King's College London

## DETAILS

**Thursday, April 23rd, 2026**  
**12:30 - 1:45 PM local time**  
**Prague Congress Centre**

**RSVP SEATS ARE FULL!**  
**OPEN SEATS MAY BE**  
**AVAILABLE AT THE DOOR**  
**(FIRST-COME, FIRST-SERVE)**



# 2026 Annual Meeting Student and Trainee Networking Event

The STC networking event provides an opportunity for students and trainees to make new connections with each other in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere after conference hours. Attendees are invited to meet others and enjoy food, activities, and engaging conversations throughout the evening.



## DETAILS

**Thursday, April 23rd, 2026**

**7:00-10:00 PM local time**

**Terminal Karlin**

Sokolovská 55

186 00

Prague 8

(20 mins via transit; 1 hour walk from Prague Congress Centre)

**REGISTER NOW TO  
SECURE YOUR SPOT:**

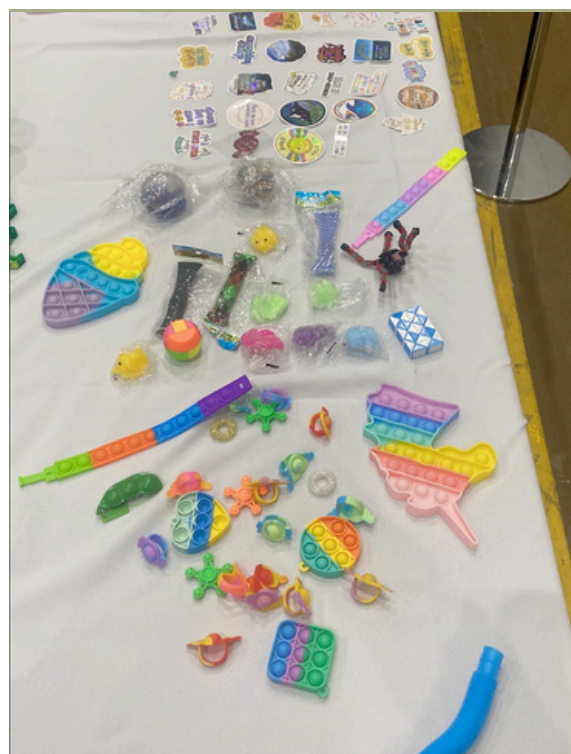
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# 2026 Annual Meeting Student and Trainee Booth

The student and trainee booth serves as a central hub for students and trainees to access information about conference events and resources relevant to early-career researchers. Committee members staff the booth throughout the meeting, providing attendees with a great opportunity to meet the team and ask questions in person.

We encourage all students and trainees to stop by the booth during exhibition hours to learn more about STC initiatives and connect with our members. We look forward to seeing you there!



## DETAILS

**Location: Exhibition Area**  
**Availability: Thursday, April 23rd**  
**and Friday, April 24th**



# Attending the 2026 Annual Meeting in Prague?

To help you plan your stay, we have compiled information on the official INSAR hotel block and additional resources for securing affordable accommodations in Prague.

## STC Featured Pick: Panorama Hotel Prague

The Panorama Hotel Prague offers a modern and comfortable stay just steps from public transportation and within easy reach of the Prague Congress Centre.

INSAR Special Rate:  
175.00 EUR (Single Occupancy)  
+10.00 EUR for Double Occupancy

Perks:  
Complimentary breakfast and public transportation passes for registered meeting participants who book within the INSAR hotel block.

## ADDITIONAL INSAR OFFICIAL HOTELS

### **Grand Hotel Prague Towers**

**Rate:** 210.00 EUR (Single/Double)  
**Distance to PCC:** Approximately 2-minute walk

### **Hilton Prague Old Town**

**Rate:** 257.32 EUR / 6210 CZK (Single)  
+16.57 EUR / 400 CZK for an additional person  
**Distance to PCC:** Old Town – 2 train stops

### **Holiday Inn Prague**

**Rate:** 212.00 EUR (Single/Double)  
**Distance to PCC:** Next door

*\*Exact EUR rates will vary based on market fluctuations*

### **Links to all hotels:**

[https://www.autism-insar.org/mpage/Travel\\_Information](https://www.autism-insar.org/mpage/Travel_Information)

### **Need a roommate?**

Details on the optional, attendee-led room-sharing program and the interest form can be found at <https://forms.gle/FrSk7GwP6AUQ5cWx9>

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# Navigating Prague: Logistics & Local Tips

## **A Note on the 2026 Schedule**

Please be aware that this year's program makes significantly greater use of Wednesday, April 22nd (Day 1). Optional sessions and trainee-focused content are expected to begin at 9:00 AM local time. We strongly recommend reviewing the meeting schedule before finalizing travel plans to ensure you do not miss Day 1 activities.

## **The Venue & Transit**

The Prague Congress Centre (PCC) is centrally located and directly accessible via the Vyšehrad Metro Station (Line C).

Metro Access: Line C (Red Line) connects the venue to the Main Railway Station and the city center in under 10 minutes.

Pro Tip: If you book your stay at the Panorama Hotel Prague through the INSAR block, complimentary public transportation passes are included with your registration!

## **Official Travel Resources**

For detailed guidance on connectivity, safety, and currency, visit the Official INSAR Travel Information Page at [https://www.autism-insar.org/mpage/Travel\\_Information](https://www.autism-insar.org/mpage/Travel_Information)

## **DINING, SHOPPING, AND LOCAL ACTIVITIES NEAR THE PANORAMA HOTEL**

### **Arkady Pankrác Shopping Center**



A large shopping and dining complex connected to the metro station, featuring casual restaurants, cafés, grocery options, and retail stores

### **Vyšehrad Historic Fortress and Park**



A scenic historic landmark overlooking the Vltava River, ideal for walking, sightseeing, and experiencing Prague's history



# This Summer: INSAR Institute on Academic Publishing and Peer Review Process

## What is the INSAR Institute?

- A cross-committee collaboration between INSAR (Student and Trainee Committee, Early Career Committee, Autistic Researchers Committee, Cultural Diversity Committee) and Autism Research
- Goal is to provide training around publication and the peer review process, with cross-cutting interest across research areas.
- We want to promote better understanding of the academic publication process, improve author and peer reviewer skills, and promote the opportunity for networking and shared support around publication.
- Autism researchers at all levels are welcome to join!

## What topics will be covered?

The Institute will include 4 free webinars across the month of July including:

- **Session 1:** Intro to Academic Publishing
- **Session 2:** Author's Workshop
- **Session 3:** Peer Review Workshop
- **Session 4:** AI in Academic Publishing

Dates and times TBD

## WEBINAR DETAILS

**Four webinars in July 2026**  
**Register via Zoom**

**STAY TUNED FOR  
REGISTRATION INFO  
COMING SOON!**