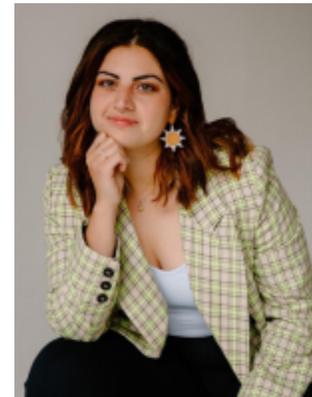


Introducing Our 2026 Diversity Fellows

We are excited to announce our 2026 Diversity Fellows! Since 2021, our [Diversity Fellowship Program](#) has supported underrepresented individuals in neurorehabilitation by providing meeting travel support and complimentary registration for three consecutive years. These three year fellowships are designed to provide opportunities for Diversity Fellows to develop meaningful, sustained relationships within ASNR and make the most of their experience at our Annual Meetings. From a competitive pool of applicants, we selected four new Diversity Fellows this year. Three of our 2026 Fellows have agreed to participate in media features, and we are delighted to introduce each of them below.

Layla Abdullatif, PhD

Dr. Layla Abdullatif is currently an Advanced Fellow in Geriatrics at the Atlanta Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center. Through her master's degree training at the University of Florida and her PhD dissertation research at Georgia Tech, Dr. Abdullatif has developed a strong research program focused on motor skill development and how gaze patterns and action observation influence motor performance in individuals with and without stroke. In her dissertation research, she identified important differences in gaze behavior during motor tasks of varying difficulty, helping to advance our understanding of how observation-based rehabilitation approaches can be tailored to improve recovery. She also independently designed and executed a novel experimental paradigm to examine the role of task difficulty in action observation interventions. Dr. Abdullatif has already established an impressive record of scholarship, including securing competitive research funding (Georgia Tech Presidential Fellowship and research grants from the Emory University Voice Center and the Lewis Foundation), publishing a first-author publication in *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair*, giving multiple national conference presentations, and developing additional first-author manuscripts which are currently in preparation.



In addition to her scientific accomplishments, Dr. Abdullatif is recognized for her leadership, mentorship, and commitment to inclusion in research and training. She has taken on a major role in mentoring undergraduate researchers, including students in the NSF-funded Research Experiences for Undergraduates program in Human Neuroscience at Georgia Tech, and her guidance has helped inspire several trainees to pursue PhD programs. Her mentorship extends beyond the lab into the community through her roles as a personal trainer, youth soccer coach, and elite athlete. Her technical expertise spans motion tracking, eye tracking, electromyography, and electroencephalography, and she is known for combining scientific rigor with thoughtful attention to accessibility, representation, and inclusion. In this next stage of her career, Dr. Abdullatif is expanding her work to study Veterans with Parkinson's disease and cognitive decline, with a particular focus on underrepresented populations, women, and Black Veterans. Her research, mentorship, and service reflect a deep commitment to improving rehabilitation outcomes and broadening participation in neurorehabilitation science.

Desmond Asante

Desmond is a physical therapist from Ghana and a PhD candidate in Kinesiology at the University of Minnesota whose work is at the intersection of neurorehabilitation, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Drawing on years of clinical experience in diverse and under-resourced settings, he is focused on improving upper limb rehabilitation for stroke survivors, particularly by developing more precise and accessible ways to assess bilateral arm coordination. His research addresses an important gap in stroke care, as many survivors struggle to use both arms during daily activities. However, current clinical assessments often rely solely on subjective observation, making it difficult to identify specific deficits, provide targeted treatments, and monitor progress in recovery. To help solve this problem, Desmond has used robotic and computer vision-based tools to quantify unilateral and bilateral arm movements during both reaching and functional tasks. His research has provided preliminary data on the feasibility of both high-tech robotic assessments and lower-cost single-camera approaches. While robotics systems provide precise assessment measures, they can hinder movement and are not practical or accessible in many clinical settings. Desmond's work on single-camera approaches reflects his commitment to creating tools that are scientifically rigorous while also able to be implemented in resource-limited settings around the world.



Desmond has distinguished himself through both academic achievement and leadership. Since beginning his PhD, he has rapidly developed new technical expertise in robotics, computer vision, machine learning, and MATLAB-based analysis, while contributing meaningfully to collaborative stroke rehabilitation research. He has published as both a first author and co-author, earned support from the University of Minnesota Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and was selected for the University's highly competitive Interdisciplinary Doctoral Fellowship. He also received the award for Best Graduate Student Poster at the School of Kinesiology Research Day. Beyond research, Desmond has made a strong impact as a teaching assistant and mentor, earning praise for his ability to explain complex concepts clearly, lead collaboratively, and support students from diverse backgrounds. His combination of clinical insight, scientific rigor, and dedication to equitable innovation positions him as an emerging leader in neurorehabilitation with the potential to make lasting contributions locally and globally.

Ignacio Novoa-Cornejo, MSc

Ignacio Novoa-Cornejo is a PhD candidate in Rehabilitation Sciences at SUNY Buffalo whose research examines vestibular circuits and their role in motor control. The goal of his research is to develop novel, targeted rehabilitation strategies to improve movement in people with various neurological conditions, including spasticity after stroke. His work examines how vestibular signals influence spinal reflexes and muscle activation patterns in the upper limbs, which is an important extension of prior work that has focused on the trunk and lower limbs. Through innovative, non-invasive approaches such as vestibular



evoked myogenic potentials and galvanic vestibular stimulation, Ignacio has shown that vestibular projections also play a key role in upper limb muscles and modulate spinal excitability in both the upper and lower extremities. These findings have important implications for rehabilitation in stroke, Parkinson's disease, vestibular disorders, and other movement-related conditions, and they reflect his broader aim of translating new mechanistic knowledge into evidence-based interventions using vestibular stimulation to improve motor performance, functional independence, and quality of life.

Ignacio has built an impressive record of scholarship, leadership, and service throughout his training. He has received several honors, including the Best Student of the National School award, the Felix Infausto Scholarship, and the J. Warren Perry Scholar's Award. In addition, he has already published one paper as first author and one as co-author. His research training has included work as a Visiting Research Scholar at Emory University, where he contributed to studies of spinal reflex modulation using tools such as EMG, isokinetic muscle testing, MATLAB, and R. Further, he has actively engaged in the broader neuroscience and neurorehabilitation communities through conference presentations and workshops, including ASNR and the Society for Neuroscience. In addition to his scientific accomplishments, Ignacio is recognized as a thoughtful collaborator, an emerging independent investigator, and a committed leader who serves as president of the Latin American Student Association at SUNY Buffalo. Ignacio brings scientific rigor and a unique perspective, grounded in lived experience, to his work, and this combination positions him well for continued contributions to inclusive and clinically-meaningful neurorehabilitation research.

We hope you'll join us in Long Beach for our [2026 Annual Meeting](#), and while you're there, make sure to take a moment to introduce yourself and congratulate this year's Diversity Fellows!