



THE COUNCIL'S NEWSLETTER

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Faculty Spotlight: Prof. Khalid Meksem Honored as “Researcher to Know” and Champions Global Agricultural Ties

Southern Illinois University Carbondale — Dr. Khalid Meksem, Professor in the School of Agricultural Sciences, has had an extraordinary year of global leadership, high-impact research, and international diplomacy. From prestigious state recognition to strengthening vital academic bridges between the United States and Morocco, Dr. Meksem continues to exemplify the global reach of SIU's research mission.

A Statewide Honor: “Researcher to Know”

In late 2025, the Illinois Science & Technology Coalition (ISTC) officially named Dr. Meksem to its elite list of Researchers to Know. This annual statewide distinction honors faculty who are driving deep innovation and pushing the boundaries of their fields.

Dr. Meksem was recognized for his groundbreaking work utilizing plant genomics, genetics, and molecular biology to cultivate disease resistance in crops. His laboratory's research directly tackles some of the most pressing challenges of our time: boosting global food security and improving agricultural resilience against a rapidly changing climate.



Prof. Khalid Meksem

Bridging Nations: Fulbright and MACECE Leadership

Dr. Meksem's impact extends far beyond the borders of Illinois. Following his tenure as a Fulbright Senior Scholar at Abdelmalek Essaadi University-Tetouan, he has continued to serve as a vital liaison for U.S.-Moroccan academic collaboration over the past year.

Working in lockstep with the Moroccan-American Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (MACECE) — the body administering Fulbright programs in Morocco — and the American Moroccan Agricultural, Health, and Life Sciences (AMAHLS) network, Dr. Meksem has been instrumental in organizing high-level international conferences. Serving as a session co-chair, he has brought together researchers from both nations to tackle joint initiatives in food security, public health, and cli-

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Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Khalid Meksem Honored as “Researcher to Know” and Champions Global Agricultural Ties - Continued

mate adaptation. His efforts continue to facilitate new student exchanges, joint-supervision doctoral programs, and collaborative research grants.

In tandem with his Fulbright work, Dr. Meksem serves as the U.S. President for the High Council of Moroccan American Scholars and Academics (H-MASA), mentoring Moroccan expatriate scholars and creating institutional alignments between the two countries.

Pioneering AI in Agriculture

Back in the lab, Dr. Meksem’s research team has spent the last year fusing plant biology with cutting-edge artificial intelligence. Over the past few months alone, his team has published several high-impact papers, including:

- **AI-Driven Crop Monitoring:** The co-development of DELTA-SoyStage (December 2025), a lightweight AI architecture used for full-cycle soybean growth monitoring.
- **Explainable Machine Learning:** Utilizing advanced algorithms to predict and dissect complex root and water-use traits in crops to combat drought.
- **Data Mining:** Deploying text-mining methodologies to analyze two decades of soybean genomics literature to accelerate future breeding discoveries.

Through his commitment to his students, his innovative integration of AI in agricultural science, and his ongoing work with the Fulbright office to foster international diplomacy, Dr. Meksem continues to elevate SIU’s profile on the world stage.

Please join us in congratulating Dr. Meksem on a remarkable year of achievements!



Scientist Spotlight: Dr. Abdelhafid Bendahmane on the Forefront of Plant Genomics and Agricultural Innovation

Paris-Saclay, France — Dr. Abdelhafid Bendahmane, Research Director at the French National Institute for Agriculture, Food, and Environment (INRAE) and leader of the FLOCAD (Flower and Carpel Development) team at the Institute of Plant Sciences Paris-Saclay (IPS2), continues to push the boundaries of plant biotechnology. Over the past year, his laboratory has achieved significant milestones in understanding the complex genetic mechanisms that govern crop development, pollination, and environmental resilience.



Dr. A. Bendahmane

Advancing Precision in Plant Breeding and Pollinator Health

Dr. Bendahmane's recent research efforts have been deeply focused on the intersection of plant morphology and pollinator dynamics. His work with the NectarGland project—an ambitious initiative supported by the European Research Council (ERC)—has provided new insights into how plant structure and chemistry can be optimized to improve crop attractiveness to bees. By applying advanced techniques in molecular genetics, 3D-imaging, and precision phenotyping, his team is unraveling how modern cultivation practices may have unintentionally altered the traits that pollinators rely on, providing a roadmap for restoring these vital interactions.

His team's work remains anchored in his long-standing expertise in cucurbit genomics. By deciphering the genetic basis of sex determination in crops like melons, cucumbers, and watermelons, Dr. Bendahmane is developing tools that help breeders create more productive, climate-resilient varieties, a critical step for global food security.

Championing Innovation: TILLING, CRISPR, and Genomic Engineering

Dr. Bendahmane continues to be a vocal advocate for the application of high-throughput genomic tools to accelerate variety development. As a Guest Editor and thought leader in the field, he has spent the last year fostering scientific dialogue on the use of TILLING and CRISPR technologies. His efforts focus on creating “varieties of tomorrow” by saturating plant genomes with useful mutations, thereby accelerating the discovery of beneficial traits such as salt stress tolerance, osmotic stress resistance, and improved nutritional profiles.

Recent Academic Contributions

Throughout 2026, Dr. Bendahmane's collaborative research has resulted in impactful findings, including:

- **Transcriptomic Regulation:** Advancing the understanding of epitranscriptomic regulation in crop domestication, specifically how specific regulatory codes sculpt growth and stress responses in major food crops.
- **Genomic Resource Development:** Contributing to the assembly of reference genomes for complex plant species, which remain essential for current and future breeding programs.

Dr. Bendahmane continues to host and mentor a diverse, international group of researchers. His commitment to “audacious science”—blending fundamental genomics with real-world, high-stakes agricultural problems—continues to inspire the next generation of scientists working in the IPS2 ecosystem. Through his leadership at the nexus of genetics, biotechnology, and agricultural ecology, Dr. Bendahmane continues to demonstrate how fundamental research can be translated into practical solutions for a changing world.

Please join us in celebrating Dr. Bendahmane's ongoing commitment to scientific excellence and his transformative work in plant genetics!

Faculty Spotlight: Prof. My Abdelmajid Kassem Championing Global Research, Editorial Leadership, and Academic Alliances

Fayetteville State University — Dr. My Abdelmajid Kassem, Professor and Chair of the Department of Biological and Forensic Sciences, has achieved a milestone period of academic leadership, international collaboration, and high-impact publishing since the start of 2026. Through his groundbreaking research in agricultural biotechnology, deep dedication to student mentorship, and influential global leadership roles, Dr. Kassem continues to heavily impact the international scientific landscape.



Prof. My A. Kassem

Editorial Leadership & Expansion at Atlas Publishing

A major highlight of Dr. Kassem's recent work includes his extensive leadership as a founder, Editor-in-Chief, and primary contact with Atlas Publishing, LLC. Serving as the Editor-in-Chief for the Atlas Journal of Biology, he drives rigorous peer-reviewed scholarship across the life sciences.

Furthermore, Dr. Kassem is spearheading the launch and co-editing of the newly established **Journal of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Bioinformatics (JAIMLB) [ISSN 3068-5036]**. This international, open-access journal marks a crucial 2026 expansion, serving as a cutting-edge cross-disciplinary hub connecting computational intelligence directly to biological, medical, agricultural, and forensic sciences. Dr. Kassem's vision for the journal has also drawn top global experts to the team, including long-time collaborator Dr. Khalid Meksem of Southern Illinois University, who serves on the JAIMLB Editorial Board.

Pioneering Soybean Genomics and Applied Science

Back in the laboratory, Dr. Kassem continues to lead prolific research initiatives at the Fayetteville State University Plant Genomics and Bioinformatics Lab, publishing highly diverse peer-reviewed studies over the 2026 period:

- **Advanced Neural Networks:** Contributing pioneering work to geospatial and machine learning applications, such as co-authoring a geospatial hotspot detection and data analysis framework applied right here in North Carolina.
- **Environmental & Tissue Genomics:** Advancing vital agricultural sustainability metrics through comparative analyses of growth, stress tolerance, and multi-layered transcriptomic programming across various soybean (*Glycine max*) recombinant inbred lines to secure global food systems.
- **Applied Ecological Research:** Guiding diverse biological inquiry, including newly published collaborative studies on the morphometric and ecological traits of venomous snakes across the United States.

Leading Global Networks & Training Next-Gen Scientists

Beyond his editorial work and intensive bench science, Dr. Kassem continues to be a driving force for international scholarly diplomacy. As the U.S. President and long-standing leader within The High Council of Moroccan American Scholars and Academics (H-MASA), he plays an active role in aligning North American institutions with Moroccan competencies. By organizing the workshop at the **International Plant & Animal Genome (PAG) Conference** and co-organizing the **American Moroccan Agricultural, Health, and Life Sciences (AMAHLS)**, Dr. Kassem helps guide international joint-doctoral supervision, faculty exchanges, and critical mentorship programs for expatriate researchers. At FSU, his ongoing integration of computational data curation, advanced network analysis, and structural biology ensures that his students graduate equipped with the precise skills needed to solve real-world agricultural and forensic puzzles.

Please join us in celebrating Dr. Kassem's exceptional scientific discoveries, editorial vision, and global leadership over the past semester!

Drs. Kassem and Knizia Launch International Special Issue on Crop Genome Evolution and Phylogenomics

Raleigh, NC — Dr. Moulay Abdelmajid Kassem, Professor of Biology and Bioinformatics at Fayetteville State University, and **Dr. Dounya Knizia**, Postdoctoral Researcher in Plant Genetics and Genomics at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, are serving as Guest Editors for a new international Special Issue in the journal **Agronomy** (MDPI) entitled “**Advances in Crops Genome Evolution and Phylogenomics.**”



Prof. My A. Kassem

The Special Issue brings together researchers from around the world to highlight recent advances in crop genomics, genome assembly, comparative genomics, and phylogenomics. As global agriculture faces increasing challenges from climate change, population growth, emerging pests, and environmental stress, understanding the genetic architecture and evolutionary history of crop species has become more important than ever for developing resilient and sustainable agricultural systems.

The collection seeks innovative research that explores how crop genomes have evolved through domestication and natural selection, including studies on gene duplication, polyploidization, structural variation, transposable elements, horizontal gene transfer, and adaptive mutations. The editors also welcome contributions describing advances in genome assembly technologies, including long-read sequencing, Hi-C scaffolding, graph-based assemblies, pangenomics, and artificial intelligence-assisted assembly approaches that are transforming the quality and completeness of crop genome assemblies.

Another major focus of the Special Issue is phylogenomics—the use of whole-genome data to reconstruct evolutionary relationships among crop species and their wild relatives. Contributions employing comparative genomics, whole-genome alignments, gene tree–species tree reconciliation, and machine learning approaches for species delimitation and trait discovery are particularly encouraged. These studies provide valuable insights into hybridization, introgression, speciation, and the evolutionary origins of agriculturally important traits.

“This Special Issue provides an opportunity to bring together researchers working at the forefront of crop genomics and evolutionary biology,” said Dr. Kassem. “Rapid advances in sequencing technologies, computational genomics, and phylogenomic methods are transforming our understanding of crop evolution and accelerating the development of improved crop varieties. We hope this collection will serve as a valuable resource for scientists, breeders, and students working to build more resilient agricultural systems.” Dr. Knizia added that integrating genome evolution with modern computational approaches offers unprecedented opportunities to identify beneficial genetic variation and translate genomic discoveries into practical breeding applications.

The editors invite original research articles, review papers, and perspectives that introduce novel methodologies, datasets, and applications in crop genome evolution, phylogenomics, comparative genomics, and genomics-assisted breeding. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among geneticists, evolutionary biologists, plant breeders, and computational scientists, the Special Issue aims to advance our understanding of crop diversity and contribute to the development of sustainable agriculture worldwide.



Dr. Dounya Knizia

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The Council's Members Published Articles (January - July 2026)

Drs. Abdelhafid Bendahmane & Adnane Boualem's Groups:

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Dr. Khalid Meksem's Group:

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Dr. My Abdelmajid Kassem's Group:

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- Lawrence CL and **MA Kassem**. Salt Stress in Soybean: A Comparative Study of Growth and Root Traits in Several Essex × Forrest and Hartwig × Flyer Recombinant Inbred Lines. *Atlas Journal of Biology*, June 7, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.5147/ajb.269>.
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Dr. Mohamed Boutjdir's Group:

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The Council's Members Published Articles (January - July 2026)

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Dr. Abdeslem El Idrissi's Group:

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Dr. Naoufal Lakhssassi's Group:

Chhapekar SS, Devkar V, Khan AW, Ye H, Singh S, **Lakhssassi N**, Vuong TD, Meksem K, Nguyen HT, Patil GB. Identification of Novel Genetic Resources for Broad-Based Soybean Cyst Nematode Resistance Independent of Conventional Loci. *Mol Plant Microbe Interact*. 2026 Mar;39(2):227-232. doi: 10.1094/MPMI-06-25-0069-FI.

Dr. Abdelhi Dihazi's Group:

Noureddine Idali, **Abdelhi Dihazi**, Mohammed Lahcini, Tariq Butt, Abdellatif El Meziane. Unlocking the Bio-control Potential of Indigenous Soil Fungi: High-Performing Strains of *Beauveria bassiana* and *Metarhizium robertsii* Against the Tomato Leafminer *Tuta absoluta*. *J Fungi (Basel)*. 2026 Jun 21;12(6):452. doi: 10.3390/jof12060452.

**Congratulations Council Members!
Keep Up The Good Work!**



The Council's Members

Conference Presentations (January - June 2026)

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Bouchmiaa F.Z., Lamhamdi M., Mouaouia I., **Chakhchar A.**, Dhassi K. (2026). Fractionnement chromatographique de l'extrait acétate d'éthyle de *Crataegus oxyacantha* et évaluation de son effet inhibiteur sur la corrosion de l'acier au carbone. 3ème édition du Colloque des Jeunes Chercheurs de la Nouvelle Génération, 21 avril 2026, Marrakech, Maroc.

Abou El Koussine F., **Chakhchar A.** (2026). Chitosane et agriculture durable : vers des applications innovantes pour l'amélioration des performances culturales. 3ème édition du Colloque des Jeunes Chercheurs de la Nouvelle Génération, 21 avril 2026, Marrakech, Maroc.

Makloul A., **Chakhchar A.** (2026). Synthèse des avancées récentes dans le développement de bio-fertilisants intelligents et agroécologiques pour les cultures stratégiques. 3ème édition du Colloque des Jeunes Chercheurs de la Nouvelle Génération, 21 avril 2026, Marrakech, Maroc.

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Ez-Zouhari S., Lamtaai H., Oualcadi Y., **Chakhchar A.** (2026). Développement et caractérisation d'un biofilm à base de mucilage de graines (*Plantago ovata*, *Lepidium sativum* et *Ocimum basilicum*) pour des applications en emballage alimentaire. 3ème édition du Colloque des Jeunes Chercheurs de la Nouvelle Génération, 21 avril 2026, Marrakech, Maroc.

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Albarati N and **MA Kassem.** Decoding Seed Identity: Transcriptome-Wide Insights into Tissue-Specific Gene Expression in Soybean. FSU Research Symposium, April 10, 2026, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC 28301. Poster.

Adu-Gyamfi D and **MA Kassem.** Comparative Transcriptomics of Seed vs. Vegetative Tissues in Soybean Using 1,000 Gene Dataset. FSU Research Symposium, April 10, 2026, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC 28301. Poster.

Williams D and **MA Kassem.** Identifying Seed-Specific Transcriptional Programs in Soybean Through Analysis of 1,000 Differentially Expressed Genes. FSU Research Symposium, April 10, 2026, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC 28301. Poster.

Henson A and **MA Kassem.** Differential Expression Analysis: Identifying Tissue-Enriched Genes in Soybean. FSU Research Symposium, April 10, 2026, Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC 28301. Poster.

Kassem MA. PathoPredictor: A Machine Learning Approach to Classifying Pathogenic Missense Variants in the Human Genome. PAG 33, January 9-14, 2026, San Diego, CA. Oral Presentation.

Locklear R, S Wright, F Kiplimo, Z Skinner, **MA Kassem**, E de Mejia, B Fallen, G Jiang, and J Yuan. Transcriptomic Analysis of Candidate Genes Involved in Lunasin Biosynthesis and Regulation in Edamame. PAG 33, January 9-14, 2026, San Diego, CA. Poster.

Congratulations Council Members!
Keep Up The Good Work!t



From Morocco to North Carolina: Fulbright Scholar Advances AI Research in Health Sciences at Fayetteville State University

Fayetteville, NC — International collaboration continues to strengthen research and innovation at Fayetteville State University (FSU) through the Fulbright Program. During the 2025–2026 academic year, Ms. Karima Bahmane, a Ph.D. student from Ibn Zohr University in Agadir, Morocco, joined FSU as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, where she spent a year conducting interdisciplinary research at the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and health sciences. The Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program enables accomplished international researchers to pursue advanced research at U.S. institutions while fostering academic exchange and mutual understanding.

Working under the mentorship of Dr. Bhattacharya, a Professor of Computer Science, Ms. Bahmane participated in cutting-edge research exploring how artificial intelligence and machine learning can be applied to solve complex problems in the biomedical and health sciences. Her work involved computational data analysis, predictive modeling, and modern bioinformatics approaches that are increasingly transforming healthcare research. She also worked with Dr. My Abdelmajid Kassem, Professor of Biology and Bioinformatics.

Throughout her stay at Fayetteville State University, Ms. Bahmane gained extensive hands-on experience using Python programming, machine learning algorithms, and data science methodologies to analyze biological and medical datasets. She also collaborated with faculty and students, participated in research discussions, and experienced the highly collaborative environment that characterizes scientific research in the United States.

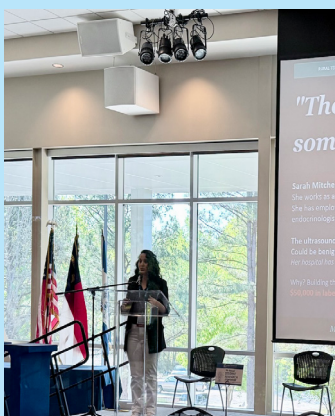
“Karima demonstrated exceptional dedication, curiosity, and professionalism throughout her Fulbright experience,” said Dr. Kassem. “Her willingness to learn new computational methods and apply them to real-world health challenges made her a valuable member of our research team. We are confident that the knowledge and experience she gained at Fayetteville State University will contribute significantly to her future career as a researcher and educator.”

Beyond the laboratory, Ms. Bahmane embraced the cultural exchange that lies at the heart of the Fulbright Program. Living and studying in the United States allowed her to experience American academic culture, develop lasting professional relationships, and share Moroccan culture with the FSU community. Such exchanges strengthen partnerships between American and Moroccan universities while preparing the next generation of globally engaged scientists.

Fayetteville State University has earned national recognition for its commitment to international education and has repeatedly been recognized as a Fulbright HBCU Institutional Leader, reflecting its strong support for international scholars and global research collaborations.

As Ms. Bahmane returns to Morocco and continues her doctoral studies at Ibn Zohr University, she carries with her new scientific skills, international collaborations, and valuable experiences that will undoubtedly enrich both her research and future students. Her journey exemplifies the power of international academic partnerships to advance scientific discovery while building bridges between nations.

Dr. Kassem conducted the following interview with Ms. Karima Bahmane hoping that her insights can benefit future Fulbright Scholars:



Dr. Kassem — What motivated you to apply for the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program?

Karima — I applied for the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program because I wanted to expand my research expertise in artificial intelligence for medical imaging while collaborating with internationally recognized researchers. Fulbright offered a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, access advanced research resources, and contribute to scientific innovation in a multicultural academic environment. I was also motivated by the opportunity to strengthen academic cooperation between Morocco and the United States.

Dr. Kassem — Why did you choose Fayetteville State University and this research project?

Karima — I chose Fayetteville State University because of its strong commitment to research, innovation, and international collaboration. The research project aligned perfectly with my PhD work on AI-based medical image analysis. Working with experts in machine learning and bioinformatics allowed me to deepen my knowledge and explore new applications of AI in healthcare.

Dr. Kassem — What were your primary research objectives when you arrived in the United States?

Karima — My primary objectives were to improve AI models for medical image analysis, explore advanced deep learning techniques for disease diagnosis, and gain experience with bioinfor-



Karima At the FIFA World Cup 2026. Game: Morocco vs. Haiti (4-2), June 24, 2026, Atlanta Stadium (Mercedes-Benz Stadium), Atlanta, GA, USA.

From Morocco to North Carolina: Fulbright Scholar Advances AI Research in Health Sciences at Fayetteville State University (Continued)



matics approaches. I also aimed to develop collaborative research projects, publish scientific papers, and acquire new skills that I could transfer to my students and colleagues in Morocco.

Dr. Kassem — What new AI, machine learning, or bioinformatics skills did you acquire during your stay?

Karima — During my stay, I strengthened my expertise in deep learning, medical image segmentation, transfer learning, explainable AI, and model optimization techniques. I also gained practical experience working with large biomedical datasets, advanced bioinformatics tools, and interdisciplinary research methods that combine AI with healthcare applications.



Dr. Kassem — What aspect of American academic culture surprised you the most?

Karima — I was impressed by the highly collaborative nature of American academic culture. Faculty members, researchers, and students actively share ideas and encourage interdisciplinary teamwork. I also appreciated the openness of discussions, where students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge ideas respectfully, and contribute to research projects from an early stage.

Dr. Kassem — What was the biggest challenge you faced while adapting to life in the United States, and how did you overcome it?

Karima — One of the biggest challenges was balancing research responsibilities with adapting to a new culture and environment. As an international scholar and a mother, managing different responsibilities required flexibility and strong organization. I overcame these challenges by building a supportive network, staying focused on my goals, and embracing new experiences with a positive attitude.

Dr. Kassem — How did working with Dr. Bhattacharya and Dr. Kassem influence your research and professional development?

Karima — Working with Dr. Bhattacharya and Dr. Kassem significantly enhanced my research and professional growth. Their mentorship helped me strengthen my scientific methodology, improve my critical thinking skills, and approach research problems from new perspectives. They encouraged innovation, collaboration, and scientific rigor, which will continue to influence my future work.

Dr. Kassem — What advice would you give future Moroccan Fulbright scholars before they arrive in the United States?

Karima — I would encourage them to arrive with an open mind, be proactive in building professional relationships, and take advantage of every learning opportunity. They should not hesitate to ask questions, participate in conferences and workshops, and engage with people from different cultures. Fulbright is not only an academic experience but also a personal and cultural journey.

Dr. Kassem — How has this experience changed your future career goals?

Karima — This experience strengthened my commitment to pursuing impactful research in artificial intelligence for healthcare. It has inspired me to expand international collaborations, develop

From Morocco to North Carolina: Fulbright Scholar Advances AI Research in Health Sciences at Fayetteville State University (Continued)



innovative AI solutions for medical diagnosis, and contribute to building stronger research partnerships between Moroccan and international institutions. I also hope to mentor future students interested in AI and health technologies.

Dr. Kassem — What opportunities for collaboration between Ibn Zohr University and Fayetteville State University do you envision after your return to Morocco?

Karima — I envision joint research projects in artificial intelligence, bioinformatics, and health-care technologies. There are also opportunities for faculty exchanges, student mobility programs, co-supervision of graduate students, collaborative publications, and virtual workshops that promote knowledge sharing between both institutions.

Dr. Kassem — If you could summarize your Fulbright experience in one sentence, what would it be?

Karima — The Fulbright experience has been a transformative journey that expanded my research capabilities, broadened my global perspective, and created lasting academic and cultural connections.

Dr. Kassem — What message would you like to share with Moroccan students who dream of conducting research abroad?

Karima — Believe in your abilities and never underestimate the value of your ideas. Opportunities like Fulbright are accessible to those who work hard, stay persistent, and pursue excellence. Research abroad is not only about acquiring knowledge; it is also about building bridges between cultures, creating collaborations, and bringing valuable expertise back to your country.

**Congratulations Karima!
Keep Up The Good Work!**



Journal of
*Genome Biotechnology
and Genetics*



Article

PathoPredictor: A Machine Learning Framework for Predicting Pathogenic Missense Variants in the Human Genome

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Announcement: Fulbright Scholar Opportunities at Fayetteville State University for Moroccan PhD Students

Raleigh, NC — We are pleased to announce two exciting Fulbright Visiting Scholar opportunities for Moroccan PhD students for the 2027–2028 academic year (one-year visit). These prestigious Fulbright awards will allow successful candidates to conduct advanced research at FSU while working closely with distinguished faculty members.

1. Genomics, Bioinformatics, and Data Science

Host Professor: Prof. My Abdelmajid Kassem

Department: Biological and Forensic Sciences

Focus Area: Genomics, Bioinformatics, and Data Science

The selected scholar will join Prof. Kassem's **Data Science & Bioinformatics Research Group** and engage in cutting-edge projects in genomics, bioinformatics, and Data Science fields.

2. Molecular Biology, Human Genetics, and Forensic Science

Host Professor: Prof. Khalid Lodhi

Department: Biological and Forensic Sciences

Focus Area: Molecular Biology, Human Genetics, and Forensic Science

The selected scholar will work with Prof. Lodhi on advanced forensic science research, including forensic biology, DNA analysis, or other specialized areas within the field.

Eligibility

- Moroccan citizens currently enrolled as PhD students in a recognized university in Morocco
- Strong scientific writings, data analysis and interpretation skills
- Proficiency in English (oral and written)
- Commitment to return to Morocco upon completion of the Fulbright visit

Benefits

- Full Fulbright funding (stipend, airfare, health insurance, etc.)
- Access to state-of-the-art laboratories and research facilities at Fayetteville State University
- Opportunity to collaborate with leading U.S. faculty and researchers
- Cultural and academic enrichment in a welcoming university community

Moroccan PhD students interested in these opportunities are strongly encouraged to apply through the official Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program for Morocco (<https://macece.ma/>).

For more information about the research focus and potential projects, please contact:

- Genomics and Bioinformatics: Prof. Abdelmajid Kassem – mkassem@uncfsu.edu
- Forensic Science: Prof. Khalid Lodhi – klodhi@uncfsu.edu

We look forward to welcoming talented Moroccan scholars to Fayetteville State University!

Apply Here!



The Council's New Members!



Raleigh, NC — The Council is delighted to welcome our newest members, whose diverse expertise and professional accomplishments further strengthen our growing network of scholars, scientists, and professionals.

1. Karima Bahmane is an electrical engineer, entrepreneur, and AI researcher whose work focuses on the intersection of artificial intelligence, healthcare, and sustainable technologies. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Artificial Intelligence at Ibn Zohr University, where she is developing deep learning models for the real-time analysis of thyroid ultrasound images to improve medical diagnosis. As the co-founder of RK Energies, Karima is committed to advancing renewable energy solutions and strengthening climate resilience in underserved communities. A TechWomen Fellow, Fulbright Finalist, and AI Movement AWITAI Ambassador, she is a passionate advocate for ethical AI, Education 4.0, entrepreneurship, and expanding opportunities for women and youth in STEM.



2. Zakariah Kassem is an aspiring data scientist currently pursuing a Master of Science in Data Science at Eastern University after earning a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (Marketing) from North Carolina Central University, where he graduated with honors. His academic interests combine data analytics, machine learning, business strategy, and marketing, reflecting a passion for using data-driven approaches to solve real-world problems. In addition to his academic pursuits, Zakariah has gained valuable professional experience in customer service and operations while working with Amazon and Lowe's Home Improvement. He is also an emerging researcher, co-authoring publications in machine learning, geospatial analytics, and agricultural sciences, demonstrating his growing commitment to interdisciplinary research and innovation.



Welcome to All Our New Members!

Journal of AI, ML, and Bioinformatics 2026, pp. 55–62
<https://doi.org/10.5147/jaimlb.270>

Published in the United States of America
<https://www.atlas-publishing.org>

Spatial Patterns, Hotspot Detection, and Crash Severity Prediction in Raleigh, North Carolina: A Geospatial and Machine Learning Approach

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The Council's New Members! - Continued

3. Soumaya El Assri is a PhD candidate at the Higher School of Technology of Laayoune, Ibn Zohr University, Morocco, conducting her doctoral research at INRA, Morocco. Her research focuses on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and the development of sustainable strategies for pest control. Her broader research interests include botanical pesticides, plant pathology, entomology, pollinator management, and sustainable agriculture. Soumaya holds a Master's degree in Plantation Management from Universiti Putra Malaysia. She serves as a reviewer for the Atlas Journal of Biology and is committed to advancing high-quality research in agronomy, plant protection, and environmental sciences. Her work aims to promote environmentally sustainable approaches to crop protection and contribute to the development of resilient agricultural systems.



4. Salahddine Chafiki is a PhD candidate at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), Ben Guerir, Morocco, conducting his doctoral research at the Regional Center of Agricultural Research of Agadir, part of the National Institute of Agricultural Research (INRA), Morocco. His research focuses on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and sustainable crop protection, with particular emphasis on the development of biopesticides and other environmentally friendly alternatives to synthetic pesticides. His interests also include plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR), microbial biocontrol of plant diseases, and the use of natural enemies for insect pest management. Chafiki has authored 17 scientific publications and collaborates extensively with researchers from INRA, UM6P, Ibn Zohr University, and other national and international institutions. His expertise encompasses plant pathology, biological control, plant protection, crop protection, rhizosphere microbiology, and the development of sustainable strategies for agricultural disease and pest management, contributing to the advancement of environmentally resilient agriculture.



Article

Rhizospheric Bacteria from Argan and Raspberry Enhance Tomato Resistance to *Fusarium oxysporum*

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5. Khaoula El Assri is a Ph.D. student at Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), Morocco, where she is pursuing advanced research in her field of study. Passionate about scientific discovery and innovation, she is committed to developing research that addresses emerging challenges through interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative partnerships. The Council is pleased to welcome Khaoula as one of its newest members and looks forward to her active engagement in our scientific community and her future contributions to research, education, and international collaboration.

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- Conservation Genetics, Biodiversity Loss, and Ecosystem Health

Journal of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Bioinformatics (JAIMLB)

- Machine Learning Applications in Precision Agriculture and Smart Farming
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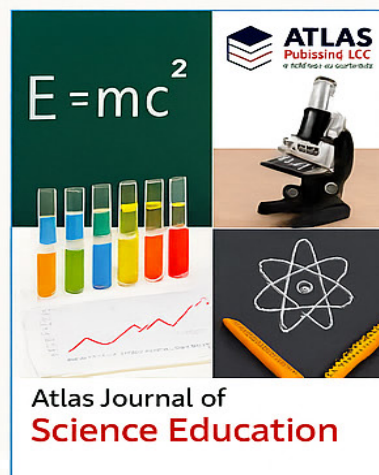
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