TRIANGLE CHAPTER
SOCIETY FOR NEUROSCIENCE

THE TRIANGLE TRANSMITTER

SPRING 2026

Vision and Goals

The purpose of the North Carolina Triangle Chapter of the Society for Neuroscience (Triangle Chapter SfN) is to boost the Society for Neuroscience's (SfN) mission locally by bringing together neuroscientists from around the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill and surrounding areas) to 1) promote training and outreach programs, 2) provide networking events, 3) facilitate the sharing of information across institutions (academic, government and industry), and 4) engage and educate our community about neuroscience research & industry and its impact on society.

Our revived Triangle Chapter Society for Neuroscience has grown tremendously since its rebirth in 2014. Our chapter routinely provides successful networking, training, and educational opportunities, including our growing annual conference, neuroscience trivia nights, and other educational outreach and social/networking opportunities. An important vision for the chapter is to maintain and grow these achievements over the next several years. In addition to the core missions outlined above, we hope in the upcoming years to:

1. Build on our Chapter's solid membership network through the engagement of new scientists, industry professionals, and trainees from all of the universities and industry within the Triangle, with a particular focus on recruiting the industry and undergraduate neuroscience community.
2. Generate opportunities to support our members' professional development and success.
3. Create new chapter-specific diversity initiatives to support the success of all our members.
4. Develop more opportunities for educational outreach to the public and our local and national governments.

SPRING 2026 BOARD MEMBERS

The Triangle SfN Chapter is proud to recognize its 2025-2026 council members! Council members attend monthly chapter meetings, help to organize regional chapter events, and participate on chapter committee boards. These annually elected positions are essential to our chapter's success!

Dr. Kati Healey (Durham-VAMC)
Chapter President

Dr. Santosh Mishra (NCSU)
President-Elect/Chapter Representative

Havilah Ravula (UNC-CH)
Sponsorship Committee

Dr. Shannah Witchey (Inotiv)
Program Chair

Yasin Aksu (NCCU)
Treasurer

Dhruthi Yajaman (UNC-CH)
Communications Chair

Varun Indugula (Duke)
Secretary

Maya Yun (NIEHS)
Outreach Committee Chair

Pari Dhayagude (UNC-CH)
Science Policy Chair

Anaam Amin (UNC-CH)
Membership Chair

Dr. Amir Rezvani (Duke)
Emeritus President and Chapter Co-founder

Council Members: **Dr. Leslie Aksu** (NIEHS), **Dr. Leon Grigorian** (Retired), **Dr. Eric Harris** (Retired Biotech Industry Professional), **Dr. Jesse Cushman** (NIEHS), **Dr. Diego Correia** (NCCU), **Dr. Alexander Gomez-A** (NCCU)

Triangle SfN Membership and Leadership Opportunity

Interested in joining our leadership team? Our Triangle SfN Council meets monthly at the NC Biotechnology Center. Any member is welcome to attend council meetings. We are also specifically recruiting members who would like to become official Council Members and/or join our Chapter Representative and Sponsorship committee teams. If you are interested, please contact our President (Kati Healey kati.healey@duke.edu) or President-Elect (Santosh Mishra skmishra@ncsu.edu).

Summary of the Triangle Society for Neuroscience Spring Meeting 2026

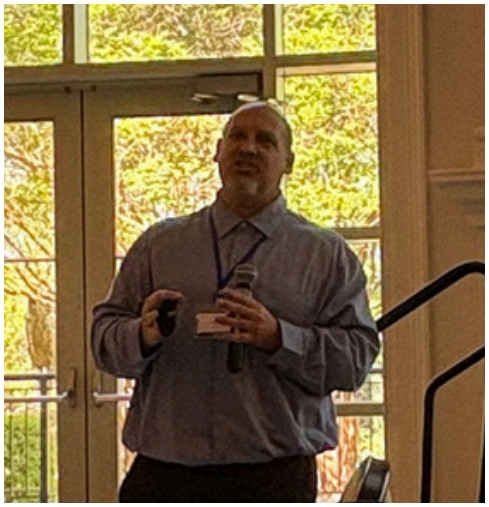
The Triangle Society for Neuroscience held its 11th Annual Spring Conference on April 10, 2026, at the Park Alumni Center in Raleigh. The meeting brought together over 200 attendees from across the Triangle neuroscience community for a day of scientific exchange, professional development, and community building.

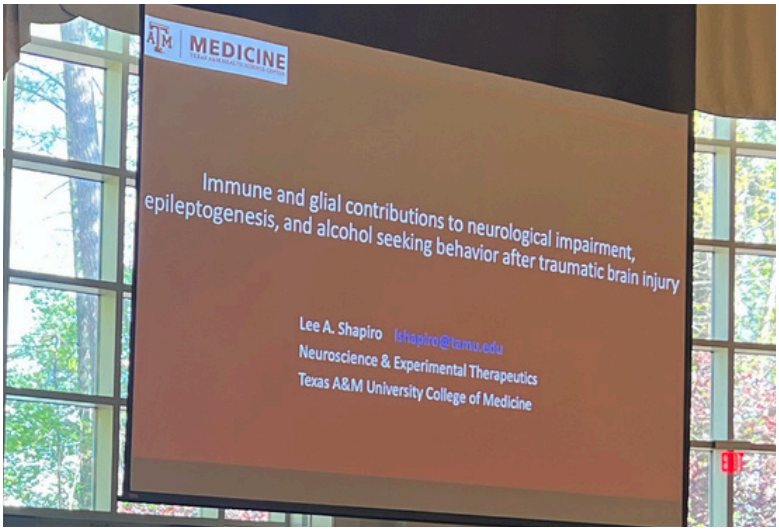
This year's program featured a special keynote address by Dr. Lee Shapiro of Texas A&M University, along with distinguished local speaker presentations from Dr. Thomas Kash of UNC-Chapel Hill, Dr. Julieta Lischinsky of NIEHS, and Dr. Laura Rupprecht of UNC-Chapel Hill.

The conference also showcased around 100 poster presentations from trainees and researchers across the region. Beyond the scientific sessions, attendees participated in a public advocacy workshop and celebrated the launch of TSfN's new Mentor–Mentee Program, an initiative designed to strengthen networking, mentorship, and career development within the Triangle neuroscience community.

Summary of the Keynote

"Immune and Glial Contributions to Neurological Impairment, Epileptogenesis, and Alcohol Seeking Behavior After Traumatic Brain Injury"
Dr. Lee Shapiro, Texas A&M University





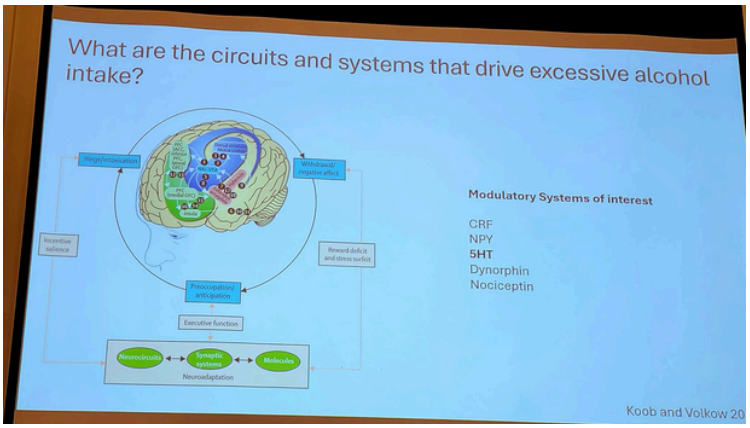
Traumatic brain injury (TBI) affects an estimated 2–3 million people annually in the United States and contributes to substantial long-term morbidity and economic burden. A growing body of evidence suggests that many of these detrimental outcomes stem from persistent neuroinflammation triggered by injury. Neuropathologically, TBI is associated with progressive white-matter degeneration, blood–brain barrier disruption, and sustained activation of glial and immune pathways.

Dr. Shapiro reviewed recent findings using the fluid percussion injury model, highlighting astrocyte and microglial responses in the hippocampus, innate and adaptive immune activation, and emerging therapeutic targets (such as the gut-brain axis) relevant to both TBI and Alzheimer's disease.

Research from Texas A&M demonstrates promising effects of ISO-1, an inhibitor of macrophage migration inhibitory factor (MIF) tautomerase activity. Dr. Shapiro also presented data on IGF-1, a neurotrophic peptide that supports neuronal survival and repair, and CAP (Cyclic Glycine-Proline), a metabolite of IGF-1 that can influence the availability and activity of IGF-1 in the brain, potentially normalizing its function.

Summary of the Local Speakers

"Probing the Brain Circuitry of Alcohol Use Disorder"
Dr. Thomas Kash, UNC-Chapel Hill



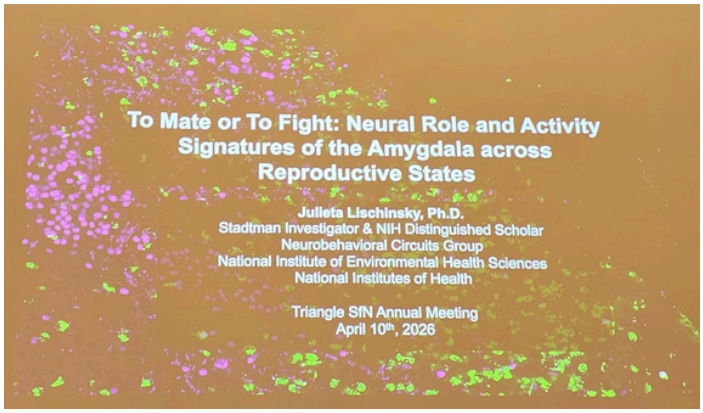
The impact of alcohol on public health remains one of the most pressing societal challenges. In the United States, approximately 140,000 deaths each year are attributable to alcohol-related causes, and roughly 10% of adolescents meet criteria for alcohol use disorder, often progressing to chronic patterns. Alcohol misuse contributes to a wide range of neuropsychiatric conditions and is a major driver of brain-circuit dysfunction.

Dr. Kash's laboratory investigates the effects of alcohol on serotonin-system dysregulation in mice and nonhuman primates, with a particular focus on how altered serotonin signaling affects cortical function. Although serotonin plays a well-established role in regulating alcohol intake and craving across species, the field still lacks a detailed understanding of serotonin dynamics and sex-specific differences. Both alcohol exposure and withdrawal exert robust effects on the serotonin system. The orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), a region critical for decision-making and behavioral flexibility, shows disrupted regulation of flexible behavior following chronic alcohol use. It has also been demonstrated that reward and aversion bidirectionally modulate serotonin inputs to the OFC via 5-HT1A receptors. Dr. Kash investigated and reported findings on how the deletion of this 5-HT1A receptor in the OFC on the alcohol-consumption behavior in males and females.

Summary of the Local Speakers

"To Mate or To Fight: Neural Role and Activity Signatures of the Amygdala Across Reproductive States"

Dr. Julieta Lischinsky, NIH/NIEHS

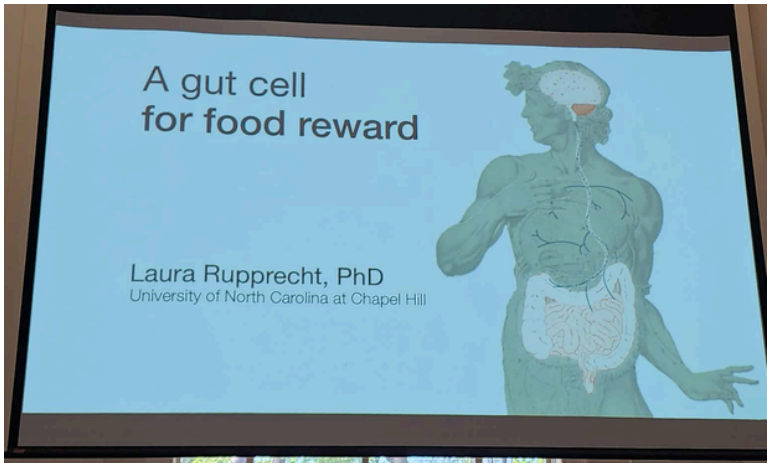


The Social Behavior Network—including the medial amygdala, lateral septum, posterior bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, periaqueductal gray, medial preoptic area, and anterior and ventromedial hypothalamus—coordinates innate social behaviors in rodents. The medial amygdala, an evolutionarily conserved structure, plays a central role in processing social cues and generating context-appropriate behavioral responses.

Foxp2^{+} neurons represent a developmentally defined inhibitory subpopulation known to regulate both social and non-social innate behaviors. This study examined innate behaviors such as mating, aggression, and paternal care in male and female mice by recording in vivo activity of Foxp2^{+} neurons in the medial amygdala using optical fiber photometry.

Summary of the Local Speakers

"Deciphering visceral instincts"
Dr. Laura Rupprecht, UNC-Chapel Hill



The talk focused on the gut-to-brain mechanisms that drive the strong behavioral preference for caloric sugars over non-caloric sweeteners in mice. Sucralose—the primary sweetener in Splenda—is produced by substituting three hydroxyl groups on sucrose with chlorine atoms, making it roughly 600 times sweeter while providing virtually no calories and no measurable effects on blood glucose or insulin.

The study centered on neuropod cells, a specialized subtype of enteroendocrine cells located in the intestinal mucosa. These sensory epithelial cells detect nutrients within the gut lumen and transmit signals to the brain via the vagus nerve on millisecond timescales. Unlike caloric sugars, sucralose is not metabolized and therefore does not trigger glucose release.

Building on recent findings from the Bohórquez lab at Duke University, which identified a subpopulation of neuropod cells capable of distinguishing caloric sugars from non-caloric sweeteners, this work used a flexible fiber-optic device for in vivo optogenetic inhibition of neuropod cells.

Data Blitz Winners 2026

Data Blitz winners are selected by Triangle SfN Council following review of submitted abstracts. The winners present their research at the spring meeting and receive a $500 award.

Data Blitz Graduate Student
Ethan Hedrick, NCCU

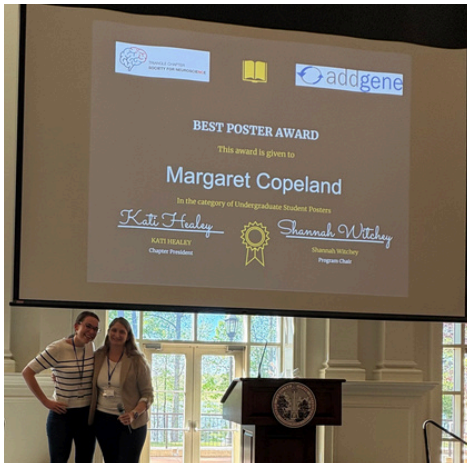
"Adolescent Intermittent Ethanol Increases Astrocyte Activation in a Sex-Dependent Manner Whereas Gabapentin Attenuates it in the CA3 of Male Rats"

Data Blitz Postdoctoral Fellow
Alexander Pomeroy, UNC

"Assessment of Brain Health During Prolonged Sitting Using Cerebrovascular Outcomes from the Switch Trial"

Best Poster Awards 2026

Best Poster awards are based on poster presentation scores provided by volunteer judges. Awardees are given travel awards.

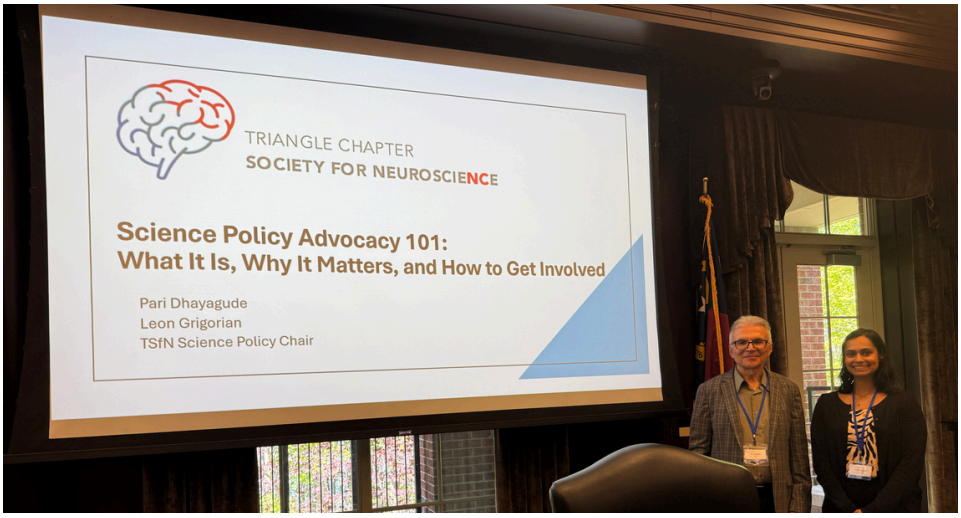


Margaret Copeland
Best Undergraduate Poster Award

Elissavet Chartampila
Best Graduate Poster Award

Dr. Basak Kandemir
Best Postdoctoral Poster Award

Science Policy and Advocacy at TSfN 2026



Thank you to everyone who joined our science policy workshop at the 2026 Triangle SfN Annual Conference. We discussed how federal research funding shapes neuroscience discovery, workforce development, and innovation across North Carolina.
Missed the session? Advocacy resources, including email templates, representative contact information, and guidance for communicating with elected officials, are available here.

Protect Science Funding

The FY2027 federal budget proposal includes significant reductions to key research agencies, including proposed cuts of over 50% to the National Science Foundation (NSF), alongside reductions to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Additional proposed changes could also impact how federal science agencies support research and training.

These shifts will have wide-ranging effects on scientific discovery, trainee support, and the broader research ecosystem, including here in North Carolina.
Sources: doi.org/10.1038/d41586-026-01105-7, doi.org/10.1038/d41586-026-01361-7

Take Action!!!

We encourage members to take 2 minutes to contact Congress using the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) NeuroAdvocates action tool, which automatically identifies your representatives using your ZIP code and generates a pre-filled email template ready to be sent through the same platform.
Society for Neuroscience - Email Your Representatives
Even brief outreach helps communicate the importance of sustained federal investment in scientific research and training.

TSfN Mentor-Mentee Program

Triangle Society for Neuroscience launched a new initiative this year: the Mentor–Mentee Program, designed to build stronger connections across the Triangle neuroscience community and create opportunities for meaningful, synergistic networking. Through this program, mentees can receive guidance as they develop their careers, while mentors have the opportunity to give back by supporting the next generation of neuroscientists.

For more information about the program and links to sign up, visit the Triangle SfN website and explore the Mentor–Mentee Program tab.

Thank you to our 2026 Sponsors!

Triangle Society for Neuroscience sincerely thanks our sponsors for their generous support. The contributions make our annual conference and community initiatives possible. We are grateful for your partnership in helping TSfN foster scientific exchange across the Triangle neuroscience community.

2025 Anniversary Party

On November 6, 2025, Triangle Society for Neuroscience hosted its Anniversary Party at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center. The evening brought together members of the Triangle neuroscience community to celebrate another successful year of connection, collaboration, and scientific engagement. Attendees reflected on highlights from the Spring Meeting, recognized key accomplishments from the past year, and welcomed new members into the chapter.

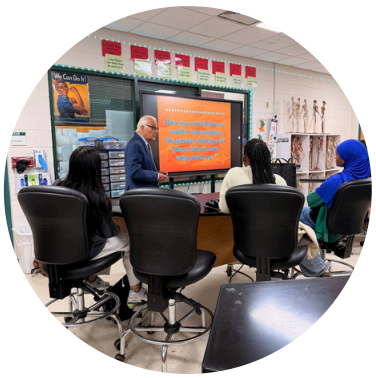
With great food, lively conversation, and strong community spirit, the event served as a meaningful reminder of the growing network that TSfN continues to foster across the Triangle.

We look forward to hosting our next Anniversary Party in Fall 2026, and we encourage members to stay tuned for more details.

Outreach Events

It has been an incredibly fun-filled and impactful season for community outreach this year! In late February, we kicked off our efforts by bringing the wonders of the brain to the public at **Brain Awareness Night**, hosted at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh. Our interactive booth featured several hands-on activities, including the Human SpikerBox, which allowed visitors to visualize and listen to the electrical signals produced by their own bodies. We also challenged perceptions with the Thermal Grill Illusion, demonstrating how the brain can be tricked into feeling a burning sensation simply by touching harmless warm and cool surfaces simultaneously. However, the absolute hit of the night was "The Claw." Participants learned to harness their own electricity, using muscle signals to control a robotic claw to stack cups and pick up objects. Throughout the evening, we handed out 3D-printed brains with legs and our fan-favorite “braintopuses.”

Our momentum continued at the annual **UNC Science Expo,** which was the day after our annual conference. Here, we brought back The Claw to amaze a new crowd. We also introduced two sensory experiments to explore the neuroscience of taste: "miracle berries" that temporarily make sour foods taste deliciously sweet, and PTC strips to help attendees discover if they have the genetics of a "supertaster."



Beyond public festivals, we are also deeply committed to empowering local students. Recently, our neuroscientists, Dr. Amir Rezvani and Dr. Santosh Mishra, partnered with East Chapel Hill High School to speak with students about the neurobiology behind addiction, itch, and pain. We are planning to expand this initiative to several additional schools next year, so **please reach out if your school or community organization is interested in hosting our scientists.**

Of course, none of these outreach events would be possible without the dedication of our incredible volunteers. A massive thank you to Leslie Aksu and Yasin Aksu for their help at Brain Awareness Night, as well as Varun Indugula, Diego Correia, Alexander Gomez-A, and Pari Dhayagude for keeping UNC Science Expo running smoothly. We look forward to sharing more brain-bending fun with our community, so be sure to keep an eye out for our upcoming events next season!
-Maya Yun, NIEHS

Thank you for reading!

Thank you for reading the Triangle Transmitter and for being part of Triangle SfN.
This community exists because of members like you, and we are grateful for the many ways you continue to show up, contribute, and connect.
We look forward to building on this momentum together in the years ahead.

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https://www.trianglesfnchapter.org