



October 2025

R.K.M.I. RESEARCH REVIEW

Scholar Spotlight - Dr. Megan Culler Freeman, MD, PhD

Megan Culler Freeman, MD, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. A dedicated physician-scientist with a passion for virology, Dr. Freeman brings both clinical excellence and cutting-edge research to her role.

Dr. Freeman earned her Bachelor of Science from the University of Kentucky before completing her MD and PhD through Vanderbilt University Medical Scientist Training Program. She continued her training in Pittsburgh, completing both her Pediatrics Residency and Infectious Diseases Fellowship through the Pediatrician Scientist Development Program (PedSDP) at UPMC Children's Hospital. Her commitment to education was recognized with awards for clinical teaching during both residency and fellowship.

A southerner charmed by Pittsburgh, Dr. Freeman chose to launch her faculty career and research lab here. As an undergraduate she studied viral fusion proteins, and as a graduate student she studied the cell biology of coronavirus infection (prior to SARS-CoV-2), and throughout her fellowship and faculty work she has focused on enteroviruses.

Her current research centers on RNA viruses with neurotropism, particularly enterovirus D68—the leading cause of acute flaccid myelitis (AFM), a rare but serious polio-like illness in children. Dr. Freeman's lab leverages advanced human tissue models, including organoids, to explore viral pathogenesis and uncover new therapeutic insights. Dr. Freeman welcomes interdisciplinary partnerships. If you're a fellow scientist with a bold idea, she's eager to connect.



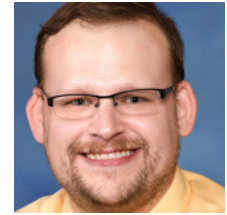
Introducing Our Newest Mellon Scholars



Daniela Brissett, MD



Cody Nesvick, MD



Glenn J. Rapinski, MD, PhD



Takuto Chiba, PhD



Catherine Poholek, MD, PhD



Kelsey Schweiberger, MD, MS



Anna Wang-Erickson, PhD



Aidan W Porter, MD



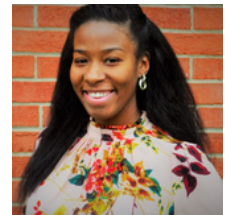
Emir Tas, MD



Kristina Gaietto, MD



Vikram Raghu, MD, MS



Tyia Wilson, PhD



Heather Joseph, DO

**WELCOME RK MELLON
INSTITUTE SCHOLARS!!!**

Celebrating Our Newest Mellon Scholar Alumni!



We're delighted to celebrate the newest graduates of the Mellon Scholar Program! Their advancement from assistant professor to associate professor on the tenure track marks a significant achievement in their academic journey. As they step into the esteemed community of Mellon Scholar alumni, we recognize this moment not as a conclusion, but as the beginning of even greater impact. We look forward to witnessing the remarkable contributions they'll make and the transformative paths they'll carve. Congratulations to each of you!

Thomas Hooven, MD

Marcus Malek, MD, FACS, FAAP

R. Mellon Institute Fall Dinner

OCTOBER 17 | AT 6:00 PM

Over Eden: 177 40th ST., Pittsburgh, PA 15201



**Mellon Scholars and invited guests,
Please RSVP by October 10th**

Click the [link](#) or scan QR code

OACD Leadership Program Funding

The RK Mellon Institute is pleased to provide funding to support Mellon Scholars attending the [2026 Health Sciences Leadership Academy for Early Career Faculty](#). To request support, please email your participation request to RKMIAdmin@upmc.edu.

The [Office of Academic Career Development](#) is dedicated to providing professionals in the schools of the health sciences with the tools, resources, and support they need to achieve their full potential as leaders in biomedical research, education, and clinical practice. The OACD supports graduate and medical students, postdoctoral fellows, residents, clinical fellows, and faculty, potentiating career excellence at all levels.

Application Deadline: November 30, 2025



*For more information or to
apply, scan QR code or click
the link above*

Contact:

Office of Academic Career
Development
M200AA Scaife Hall
3550 Terrace Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

412-648-8486

Fax: 412-648-8121

oacd@pitt.edu

Upcoming Grant Opportunities

RK Mellon Institute for Pediatric Research (RKMI) is accepting applications. ***Application Deadline: October 15th.***

- Pilot Award: \$50,000yr/2yrs
- Trainee Award: \$50,000yr/2yrs

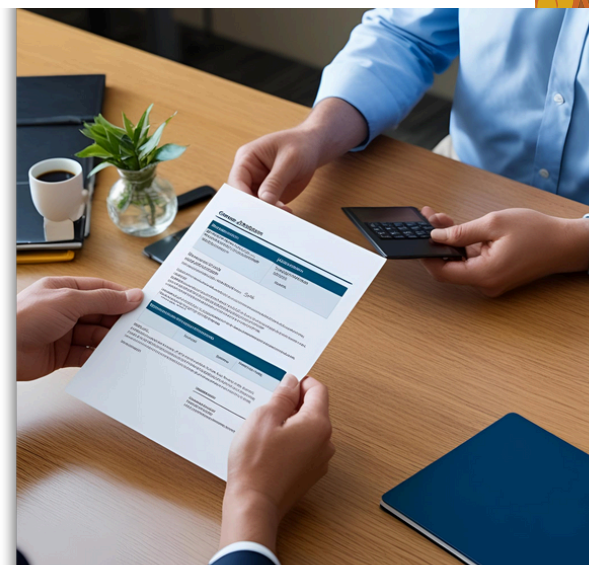
For submissions or questions about award guidelines: RKMIAdmin@upmc.edu



Mock Study Section Grant Review Process

Mellon Scholars are encouraged to submit their complete grant applications (understandably perhaps in a very rough draft form) to administration via [email](#) roughly two months in advance of the appropriate funding deadline, along with a list of 3-5 potential Pitt reviewers. Reviewers may meet for discussions. The scholar will be provided with the written critiques from each reviewer and a summary of the discussion between the reviewers if one occurs. The scholar will be blinded to the identity of their reviewers. Discussion summaries and critiques will be returned to the scholar prior to the grant's agency due date, so that the scholar can incorporate any changes in response to these critiques.

Submission Email Address: RKMIAdmin@UPMC.edu



Core Funds

Core funds in the amount of \$2000 are available annually to Mellon Scholars that are not R01 funded.

To receive funds, submit a paragraph request via email to Dr. George Gittes at Gittesgk@upmc.edu explaining the planned use of the money.





Follow the link above or use the QR code for more information on the comprehensive services offered by PCRS.

Regulatory Services

As an RKMI Scholar, you will have shared access to a dedicated regulatory coordinator from the [Pediatric Clinical Research Services](#) (PCRS) group to assist with your regulatory needs.

Regulatory Services Available:

- Institutional Review Board (PittPRO) submissions
- IACUC submissions
- Organization and maintenance of regulatory files
- ClinicalTrials.gov support
- Industry-sponsored study submissions and management

To access these services, please reach out to our PCRS regulatory coordinator:

Valerie Miller ✉ millerv4@upmc.edu | ☎ 412-692-7336

"Leading my first clinical trial has been a complex undertaking, so I am especially grateful for the added regulatory support of CRSS through the Mellon Scholar Program. Their expertise has provided me with peace of mind, and their quick responses and practical guidance have been invaluable. Special shout out to Valerie, Vibha, and Liz for their support!" - Dr. Jessica Jarvis, PhD, MT-BC

Summer Research Internship Program (SRIP)

We are excited to announce that we will fund the SRIP students for a second year in the program, should you choose to invite them back to your lab for another summer. If you mentored a student and would like to invite them back for another year, please let us know and we will connect them with the application portal.

Mentors serve as role models, collaborators, and coaches, helping interns develop research skills, navigate challenges, and build confidence. Through active engagement, feedback, and shared inquiry, mentors play a pivotal role in shaping the interns' academic and professional growth while contributing to a culture of curiosity, rigor, and inclusion.



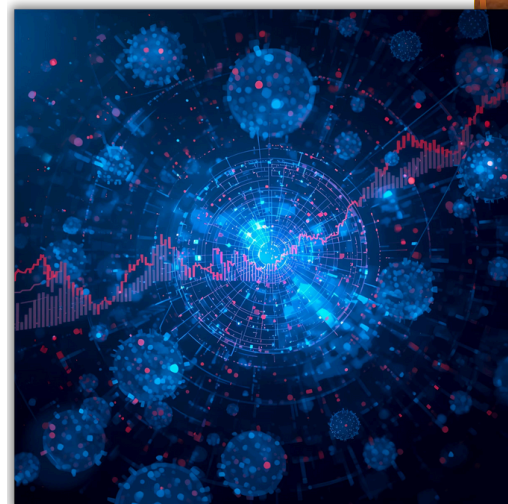
Biostatistics Support

Faculty in the Department of Pediatrics now have access to dedicated Biostatistics support! Whether you're designing a study, analyzing complex data, or preparing a manuscript, we have experts here to guide you through every step of the research process. From methodology to interpretation, we're committed to helping you turn data into meaningful insights that advance child health. Reach out today to elevate your research!

Qiong Wu, PhD – Qiongwu@pitt.edu

Rangos Office Hours:

Thursdays 9:30am – 1:30pm | Room 6109



Upcoming Speakers at Rangos

Mellon Seminar Series: 3PM-4PM

Reception to follow seminar

Mellon Seminar Watch Party at CHOB

10/15/25 – Erica Braverman, MD & Anthony Cillo, PhD

11/19/25 – Jessica Daley, MD & Jenny Ruiz, MD, MSCE

12/17/25 – Anita Saraf, MD, PhD & Yijen Wu, PhD

Rangos Research Seminar Series: 12PM-1PM

10/07/25 – Andrea Knight, MD

10/14/25 – Santhosh Girirajan, MBBS, PhD

10/21/25 – Robert Lafyatis, MD

11/04/25 – Jay Kolls, MD

11/11/25 – Emily Johnston, MD

11/18/25 – Joel Hirschhorn, MD, PhD

12/02/25 – Christian Schlieker, PhD

12/09/25 – Kristin Ray, MD

Pediatric Grand Rounds: 8AM-9AM

10/09/25 – Rich Antonelli, MD, MS, FAAP

10/16/25 – Hey Chong, MD, PhD, FAAAAI

10/23/25 – Paul Offit, MD

10/30/25 – Elizabeth Sinclair, MD



Share Your Feedback!
RKMIAdmin@upmc.edu



www.chp.edu/research/rkmfi