



ALBA
NETWORK
a division of FENS



Board of Directors Elections 2024

Candidates



Elizabeth Manning

The University of Newcastle
Australia



Dionna Williams

Emory University
United States



Nara Muraro

IBioBA-CONICET-MPSP
Argentina



**Arish Mudra
Rakshasa-Loots**

The University of Edinburgh
United Kingdom



Sara Xapelli

University of Lisbon
Portugal



Seralynne Vann

Cardiff University
United Kingdom



Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

I wish to join the ALBA Board of Directors because I believe I can contribute with my unique experience as a female neuroscientist working in a small and economically modest country, particularly concerning investment in Brain Sciences.

Currently, leadership positions are predominantly occupied by male scientists. Balancing parenthood with a demanding career has been personally challenging, yet I see it as an opportunity to inspire and support my peers facing similar struggles. My primary objective is to raise awareness and advocate for female neuroscientists in leadership roles. Drawing from my experiences, I aim to amplify our collective voice, bridging the gap to policymakers. Furthermore, I am committed to fostering networking opportunities, facilitating relationship-building, idea exchange, and pursuing professional growth.

Skills and experience

I am the Vice-President of the Portuguese Society for Neuroscience (SPN) and serve as the SPN representative of the ALBA network.

Over the past 15 years, I have actively participated in numerous outreach activities, including Brain Awareness Week school visits, open days, and educational sessions promoting Brain Sciences. I have served as a Mentor for the "Speed-Neurodating workshop" at FENS2022 Forum in Paris, France, as well as for the ALBA Mentoring Circles at FRM2023 in Algarve, Portugal. These events have allowed me to establish a robust network and disseminate knowledge about Brain Sciences to the public, emphasizing its societal and economic significance.

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

I am committed to supporting various initiatives aimed at enhancing the ALBA network and fostering positive change in the field of neuroscience through collective action and collaboration.

Firstly, I aim to strengthen Networking and Mentoring programs. By facilitating connections and mentorship opportunities, we can empower professionals to advance their careers, foster personal growth, share knowledge, and gain access to valuable resources. This initiative will not only enhance individual development but also strengthen the collective expertise within our community.



Position Assistant Professor

Affiliation Faculty of Medicine,
University of Lisbon

Country Portugal

[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

Secondly, I am dedicated to broadening the network's reach and inclusivity. This involves actively seeking to include more underrepresented groups but also increasing the representation of male scientists. By ensuring diverse voices are heard and respected, we can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable environment conducive to innovation and collaboration.

Thirdly, I will advocate for policies and initiatives that align with ALBA's mission and values. Through strategic partnerships and alliances, we can amplify our impact and effect meaningful change in the field of Brain Sciences.

Lastly, I recognize the importance of environmental sustainability and its relevance to our work. I am committed to developing and implementing initiatives that promote sustainability and responsible resource use within the organization.

Nara Muraro

Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

I am new to the Alba Network, but I strongly believe in its potential to drive transformation for underrepresented minorities in science. That's why I am eager to take an active role in its leadership and contribute in any capacity possible.

Why now? Presently, my home country, Argentina, is grappling with severe economic and political turmoil, with science and education bearing the brunt of policies enacted by the current extreme right government. I am reaching out to all of you in an effort to improve the prospects for my region. Argentina possesses a wealth of scientific ideas and valuable human capital for the global scientific community, and I am committed to ensuring that this continues. As we all recognize, it is often the marginalized communities that bear the greatest burden during times of crisis. I am dedicated to utilizing all of my abilities to help improve this dire situation.

Skills and experience

As a professor at the University of Buenos Aires and in various postgraduate courses, I dedicate time within my lectures to discuss how scientific discoveries and their key figures are portrayed, which often entails extensive focus on discoveries primarily made by white men. But, representation matters! So, what is an appropriate way of discussing scientific discoveries? I have approached this challenge by initiating discussions on how we can explore the history of science while considering past and present contextual factors, assessing whether there have been changes, and determining whether further improvements are needed to foster the diversity and equality essential for scientific progress.

This endeavor is not only rooted in the principle of fairness, ensuring that everyone has equitable opportunities in science, but also in the understanding that a more inclusive scientific community leads to enhanced scientific outcomes. We can glean valuable insights from diverse perspectives, a fact supported by empirical evidence. This represents just an example of my efforts to teach science inclusively, incorporating considerations of gender and race.

Beyond the classroom, my leadership skills shine through diverse initiatives. I actively organize 'Frontiers in Biosciences' workshops with the Max Planck Society of Germany, facilitating international scientific collaboration. Moreover, I contribute to the Scientific Policy Committee of the Argentine Society of Neuroscience, engaging in discussions and debates with policymakers to influence science-related decisions. Additionally, I leverage my experience in science communication, gained through active participation in outreach activities, to encourage greater participation of girls in science.



Position Group Leader / Professor
Affiliation Neuroscience
IBioBA-CONICET-MPSP
Country Argentina
[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

If chosen for the Alba Network Board, I will make myself available to continue pursuing the institution's mission goals and to further implement ongoing initiatives such as mentoring programs, awards, and the promotion of achievements by underrepresented scientists.

Additionally, I believe it is crucial to introduce novel initiatives that empower minorities in exploiting emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence. Initiating discussions on how we can ethically and effectively utilize these new technologies is paramount.

Ultimately, I believe the Alba Network has significant potential to make a positive impact in Latin America as a whole. I am committed to identifying the specific needs of Latin American scientists and tailoring mentoring programs to address the unique challenges faced by this region.

Dionna Williams

Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

The opportunity to contribute to increasing diversity of the global neuroscience committee, and the work I've seen ALBA perform, is deeply humbling.

As someone from multiple marginalized identities, it's reassuring to see a community so invested in supporting the many ways in which different groups of people lack access and resources in their scientific journeys. I would be a privilege to help contribute to these efforts.

Skills and experience

I have served as the Chair of the Diversity and Equity subcommittee for the Professional Development Committee for the Society of Neuroscience. I've also participated in national service to increase diversity through collaboration with the Simons Foundation.

Further, I've served as conference organizer for two blood-brain barrier related conferences and played an integral role in securing R13 funding (including serving as PI for the Gordon Conference award) by revamping the previous diversity statements, which resulted in an unprecedented number of attendees and presenters from underrepresented backgrounds. Through these efforts, I was able to also help provide funding to these trainees who otherwise may have lacked financial resources to attend the conference.



Position Associate Professor
Affiliation Pharmacology and
Chemical Biology, Emory
University
Country United States
[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

I would like to create and participate in efforts pertaining to LGBTQIA+, disability, racial/ethnic minority, low-income, first generation identities by participating in mentoring activities and creating new programming/webinars.

Seralynne Vann

Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

I am passionate about equity and inclusion. This comes from my own lived experiences of discrimination and exclusion but also a general desire to make the world a better and fairer place. While I have been involved in EDI initiatives for many years, these have typically been locally, within my Institution, or nationally, within the UK.

As a wheelchair user and due to my caring responsibilities, I am unable to benefit from attending conferences and so have been limited in the extent to which I have been able to get involved with international societies. Being part of the ALBA Board of Directors would give me that opportunity to contribute to those global initiatives that are needed to increase access and inclusion and embed better practice more widely. It would also expand my outlook by being able to interact and share ideas with others from other countries who have had different experiences within brain sciences.

Skills and experience

I am a first-generation neuroscientist with disabilities and neurodiversity and have been the sole female PI in our labs during most of my career. These experiences combined with part-time working and caring responsibility have been challenges in pursuing my career. I want to improve the situation for those coming through the system facing similar challenges.

I have extensive experience working to initiate and implement strategies to improve EDI in STEM. I am the incoming EDI-Lead in my School and have been involved in several projects with the Royal Society (UK) including their Parent, Carers, Scientist campaign.

Since 2019 I have been a member of the Royal Society Diversity Committee and a Member of the Disability Sub-Committee. Within this role, I helped commission and consulted on a major report on Disability in STEM. I contributed to the APPG on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM's roundtable on 'How does UK Government advance and inhibit equity and inclusive cultures within the STEM workforce' in 2021. I am currently involved in a Royal Society project on Assistive Technology and we have just commissioned a project to identify best practise to support STEM-based disabled academics in the UK. My grandmother was Jamaican, and while I benefit from white privilege, it is a matter of personal importance that I contribute to making brain sciences more inclusive for all and eliminating racism throughout academia. Within my role at the Royal Society, I have been involved in developing initiatives to better support Black scientists in STEM careers.



Position Professor

Affiliation School of Psychology,
Cardiff University

Country United Kingdom

[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

I want to support and develop initiatives that enable currently under-represented scientists to thrive and feel supported. Part of this involves improving the culture of brain sciences and highlighting the importance of inclusive and collaborative work and adjusting the metrics people are traditionally judged by. I also want to highlight some of the many hidden workloads that disabled and neurodivergent scientists face, from complex grant application processes to the increasing need for self-promotion, often placing certain groups at a disadvantage for funding opportunities if additional contexts are not considered. I also want to highlight the importance of better language when discussing disability/neurodiversity in teaching and publications and including those with lived-experience in experimental design and discussion where possible.

Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

Even as an early career neuroscientist, at a stage when many have advised me to “accommodate their wishes” and “not stir the pot”, I am outspoken in my critiques of inequity in our research. I have published articles highlighting the lack of gender, ethnic, and geographic diversity in my field of research, and identifying concrete actions to make neuroscience research more accessible to researchers and research participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. In my own work, I strive to provide an inclusive research experience for participants, for instance by developing demographic questionnaires that offer participants diverse and culturally-sensitive options for self-identification. My formal and informal work to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in neuroscience was recognised by the ALBA and FENS-Kavli Networks with the Diversity Prize in 2023.

I want to join the ALBA Board of Directors so that I can continue this EDI work and expand its scope in collaboration with colleagues who are invested in promoting authentic equity and inclusion in our research. The ALBA Network’s advocacy work, publicly-available resources, and global reach have resulted in measurable impact on the neuroscience community. By joining the ALBA leadership, I want to contribute my time, skills, and lived experience in service of this mission, which aligns so well with my personal values and passion for equity and inclusion.

Skills and experience

I have extensive practical experience in informing and driving EDI-related initiatives within multiple organisations across the US, the UK, and South Africa. This experience will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the ALBA leadership.

The network would benefit from my lived experience as a queer brown immigrant with an acute understanding of the experience of multiple minoritisation, particularly in academia. I also bring knowledge of people management informed by EDI principles (including equitable recruitment and retention of staff), navigating difficult conversations around evolving EDI-related policies with stakeholders at all levels, and support and management of EDI working groups within large organisations.

As a neuroscientist and EDI professional, my versatility in communicating and collaborating with a broad range of individuals is my greatest strength. I leverage this skill to bring people together towards a shared goal of affecting sustainable, long-lasting change. I also have a demonstrable record of delivering trainings to foster a culture of inclusion in higher education and research. I am forthright in highlighting areas for improvement at all organisations where I work, and hold both institutions and individuals to a high standard with regards to equity and inclusion.

In all, I am exceedingly well-placed to help drive institutional change and policy development to integrate equity and inclusion in neuroscience research across the globe, given my lived experience and professional track record in promoting EDI in research.

Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots



Position Doctoral Researcher
Affiliation Edinburgh Neuroscience,
University of Edinburgh
Country United Kingdom
[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

From previous experience, I know that the success of EDI initiatives is contingent on their sustainability. Therefore, rather than coming into this role with a barrage of new ideas, my first priority will be to ensure that the ongoing initiatives within the network continue to be delivered successfully and sustainably. The network has achieved substantial impact in a few short years, and if elected, I intend on approaching this role with humility, so that I can best understand what is working well to create this positive impact, and what can be improved.

In addition, I want to prioritise support for immigrant researchers to thrive in neuroscience. Barriers due to “passport inequity” range from the inability to attend major conferences organised in visa-restricted locations to exploitation of researchers who must depend on their PIs for continued visa sponsorship. As someone who has frequently lost out on career-advancing opportunities due to visa restrictions, I hope to lead on initiatives to address these inequities.

I envision this work to comprise two strands: first, to organise workshops highlighting the personal and professional costs of passport inequity, and second (and more ambitious), to leverage the strengths of ALBA as a large and global network to advocate for visa policies that support global mobility for researchers. Many of us often assume that immigration policies cannot be challenged. Perhaps as individuals we cannot change these policies, but the collective power of a network as diverse and impactful as ALBA can affect real change.

Why be part of the ALBA Board of Directors?

I'm passionate about neuroscience research, with the goal of doing research that ultimately improves the lives of people with mental illness. However alongside my research, I believe I have an equally important role to actively support equity and diversity efforts to improve representation in our field, to ensure that innovative solutions can be developed for mental health that benefit a wider range of communities.

I think the ALBA network are doing fantastic work in our field to set new expectations on how to approach equity and diversity in neuroscience, and I'd love the opportunity to contribute to this. I know that a big challenge for institutions and academic societies that want to make positive changes to improve equity diversity and inclusion can be not knowing where to start and not always knowing what positive changes they need to make. I know from my own experience on an EDI committee meeting discussing inclusive language for a membership survey for questions around gender and sexuality, and that we found ALBA resources in this area very useful to guide us. I'm eager to support ALBA's Board of Directors to help shape the policies and activities of this fantastic organization over the next 3 years to continue making positive impacts through the neuroscience research community.

Skills and experience

I've contributed to committees for a number of societies, including the Society of Biological Psychiatry (SOBP), International Behavioural Neuroscience Society (IBNS), and Australasian Neuroscience Society (ANS), including as a committee chair, which provide important experience serving with colleagues from around the world to work towards causes of importance to an external organization.

With regards to specific activities, during the last 3 years I've had important experiences developing EDI programs in Australia which I think may provide useful perspectives for the development of activities in ALBA. I've learnt some valuable lessons through my work to support training opportunities for Indigenous researchers in Australia and New Zealand through my involvement in programs at my institute and leading a new travel award program at ANS.

As a woman and someone who has done a postdoc where I am not a citizen, I also bring my personal experiences to conversations around gender equity and supporting trainees who can be vulnerable when studying and working outside their home country. I have valuable skills in committee leadership (institutional and international society level) and program development (e.g. Indigenous research fellowships and travel awards), as well as connections to regional and international EDI committees that I'm currently a member of, that will be beneficial for a position in ALBA leadership.

Elizabeth Manning



Position Senior Lecturer Physiology

Affiliation School of Biomedical Sciences and Pharmacy,
The University of Newcastle

Country Australia

[Website](#)

What are the actions that you wish to take if you are elected?

Much of my focus over the last 3 years has been to build activities that support and empower Indigenous researchers in neuroscience (and biomedical sciences more broadly) to access outstanding opportunities for training and mentorship while also feeling culturally safe. I have been very fortunate to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and support staff at my institution to learn about the needs of our students, and the role that decolonising academia will have in meaningful change. Through my work coordinating the ANS travel award program I met Māori researchers who are involved in an innovative research institute (the Mātai) that is really leading the way to rebuild academic institutions at all levels to do research that is co-developed by Māori communities to benefit Māori communities. I'm hoping that I can work with ALBA to enhance our understanding of Indigenous contributions to neuroscience on a global scale by empowering a new generation of First Nations research leaders.

I have also developed a strong interest in the experiences of international trainees. This includes those training far from the research epicentres of Europe and North America, facing difficulties accessing conferences and networking opportunities. Additionally, it pertains to those working outside their homeland, facing the vulnerability associated with working on a visa, which can lead to missed opportunities to travel home or overseas for work opportunities, such as conferences, due to visa bureaucracy. I think it's important to find ways to support trainees with these experiences and to consider strategies for addressing them during award assessments, etc.