

I am a third year Ph.D. student in the Immunology, Microbiology, and Virology program. I am doing my thesis research in Dr. Scott Gerber's laboratory and with the support of Graduates Working in Science (GWIS), I recently had the opportunity to attend the 2026 American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Annual Meeting in San Diego, California. I was chosen to present my thesis research titled "Reprogramming of Exhausted T Cells in Pancreatic Cancer with SBRT/IL-12 Therapy," during a poster session. This meeting featured the most up to date findings in the field of cancer biology and tumor immunology, including insights into improving CAR-T cell therapy, achieving minimal residual disease, the role of metabolism in mediating immunotherapy responses, and the use of AI in clinical practice and oncology research. Two sessions in particular that were directly relevant to my research stood out to me, including a session on immune evasion and dysregulation in the tumor microenvironment and a session on recent therapeutic advances in pancreatic cancer.

In addition to the numerous educational sessions and research talks, attending this meeting provided me with the opportunity to network with scientists from around the world. I had the opportunity to attend professional development sessions and gained valuable insights into what a career as an independent scientist entails. During my poster session, I discussed my research with scientists from a wide range of research fields. It was an excellent experience to practice my science communication skills, and these conversations gave me new perspectives and ideas to consider as I continue to develop my research.

I am very grateful to GWIS for supporting my travel to this meeting. AACR 2026 was an inspiring meeting that was extremely beneficial to my training as a scientist in the field of tumor immunology.

