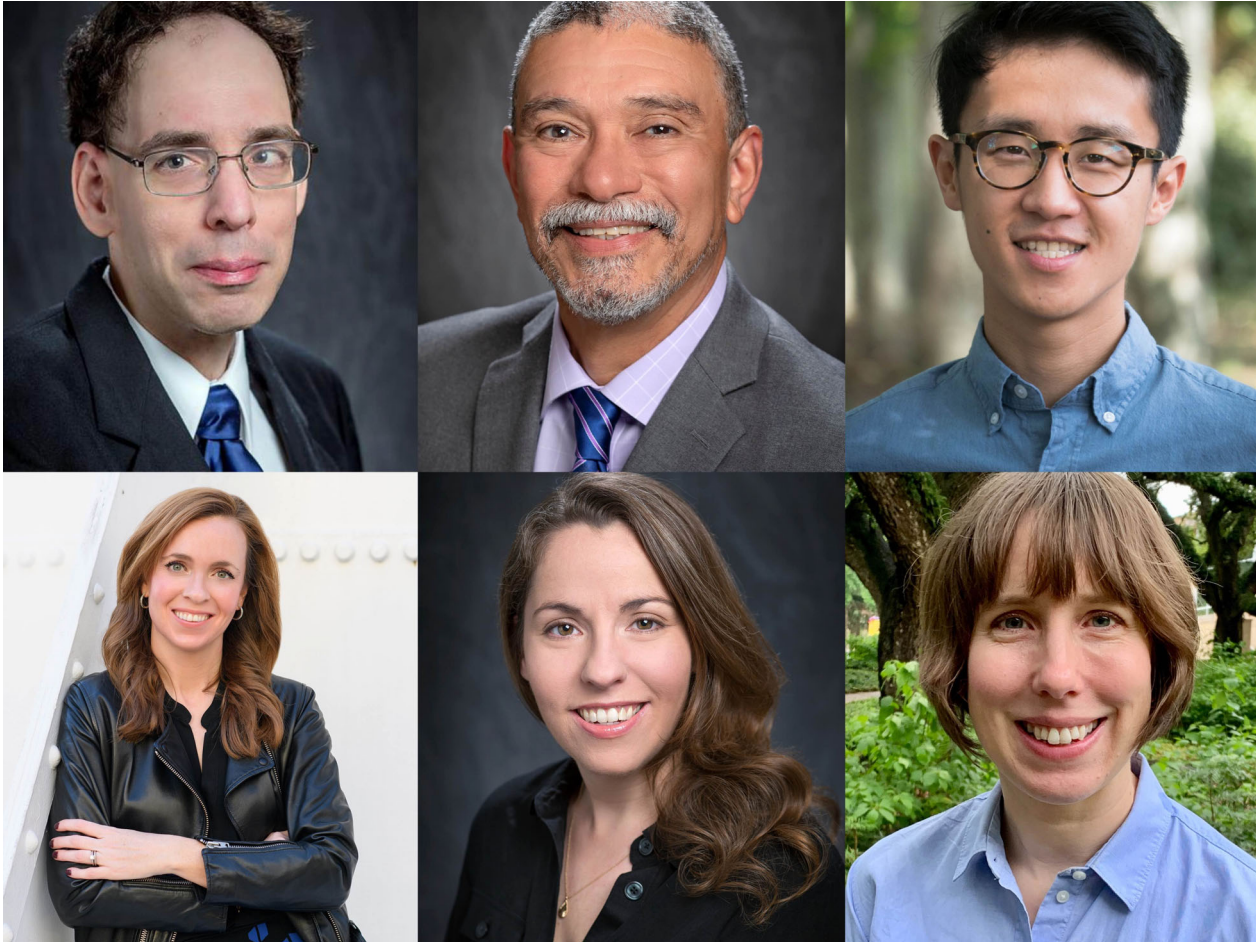


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LSU CELEBRATES SIX RAINMAKERS

March 01, 2024



LSU celebrates six 2024 Rainmakers

BATON ROUGE – Six LSU faculty members have been selected as Rainmakers this year by the LSU Council on Research based on their outstanding scholarship and creative activity within their respective ranks and disciplines. The Rainmaker awards recognize sustained work with high impact on the academic community and beyond, often in alignment with [LSU's Scholarship First Agenda](#) to elevate lives.

“These incredible faculty stand out as leaders in their respective research fields,” said Robert Twilley, vice president of research and economic development at LSU. “Their high-caliber discoveries further the university’s mission to improve lives in Louisiana and all around the world.”

The Rainmakers include faculty who are at the early, middle and senior stages of their careers. They have built strong track records in securing external research funding, publishing in high-impact journals, and gaining national as well as international recognition for their work.

The Rainmaker awards are presented in partnership with Campus Federal Credit Union with a one-time cash stipend of \$1,000. On Thursday, March 21, this year's winners will be recognized during a reception and celebration in the Huey P. Long Fieldhouse Ballroom on the flagship campus.

2024 Rainmakers

Emerging Scholar in Arts, Humanities, Social & Behavioral Science

Don Zhang, Psychology, College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Associate Professor Don Zhang is working to understand how people make decisions under risk and uncertainty at work. His research focuses on the measurement of risk-taking as a personality trait and its impact on work outcomes such as safety, innovation and counterproductivity. His current research examines how and why risk preferences differ, and how these differences impact personal and career achievements.

"I find the challenge of solving problems to help people and organizations thrive very fulfilling," Zhang said. "I also enjoy watching students grow as thinkers and apply what they've learned to make the workplace more meaningful."

Zhang earned his PhD in industrial and organizational psychology at Bowling Green State University.



Associate Professor Don Zhang

Emerging Scholar in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Christine Lattin, Biological Sciences, College of Science

Assistant Professor Christine Lattin works to understand how animals cope—or fail to cope—when faced with changes in their environment. Last year, she received the largest National Science Foundation early-career award in LSU history to advance her research on neophobia, or "fear of the new," in house sparrows and European starlings. Lattin looks at the endocrine and neurobiological mechanisms that animals use to respond to stressors, and why physiological stress responses sometimes switch from being helpful to harmful. The hormone and neurotransmitter pathways she studies are similar in all vertebrates, from fish to birds to mammals, so her research findings are also applicable to people who struggle with anxiety and PTSD.

"Some individuals respond to new objects, foods or environments with wariness, whereas others are willing to approach and explore," Lattin said. "My research seeks to understand not only the neurobiological differences, but also the situations, like social learning, that can cause wild populations and people to change their behavior."

Lattin earned her PhD in biology at Tufts University.



Assistant Professor Christine Lattin

Mid-Career Scholar in Arts,



Humanities, Social & Behavioral Science

Kathleen Searles, Political Science, College of Humanities & Social Sciences; Mass Communication, Manship School of Mass Communication

Associate Professor Kathleen Searles works to counter problems in today's digital society where our communication systems face unprecedented attacks. While advancements in technology offer increased access to information, that technology may also facilitate the spread of non-credible information, as well as coordinated campaigns of online abuse and harassment. In this challenging information environment, Searles seeks to understand what information people consume and how they consume it, its effects and how it shapes politico-social contexts.

"My research agenda looks outward to communicate public science and solve societal-scale problems," Searles said. "Journalistic practice, political communication institutions and information communication technology reflect the scope, complexity and normative importance of developing a research program that seeks to improve our democratic processes."

Searles earned her PhD in political science from Washington State University. This is her second time receiving the LSU Rainmaker award, having previously earned it as an emerging scholar in 2018-2019.



Associate Professor Kathleen Searles

Mid-Career Scholar in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Catherine Deibel, Physics & Astronomy, College of Science

Professor Catherine Deibel's research lies at the intersection of nuclear physics and astrophysics in the area of experimental nuclear astrophysics. In her research group at LSU, she studies the properties of short-lived atomic nuclei to understand astrophysical phenomena such as stellar explosions by determining the nuclear reactions that drive such explosions in hydrogen- and helium-rich environments. Deibel's group develops, builds and tests state-of-the-art detectors on the LSU flagship campus, which she then brings to accelerator facilities around the world to measure nuclei and nuclear reactions.

"For me, the excitement of basic research lies in finding the answers to fundamental questions about the world around us," Deibel said. "With our research, we are trying to answer one of the most basic questions: Where did we come from? Just a few minutes after the Big Bang, hydrogen, helium, and lithium were formed, but the oxygen in the air we breathe, the calcium in our bones, the iron in our blood, and all the other elements that make up our bodies and the world around us were foraged in stars."

Deibel earned her PhD in physics from Yale University. This is her second time receiving the LSU Rainmaker award, having previously earned it as an emerging scholar in 2015-2016.



Professor Catherine Deibel

Senior Scholar in Arts, Humanities, Social & Behavioral Science



Rafael Orozco, World Languages, Literatures & Cultures, College of Humanities & Social Sciences

Professor Rafael Orozco's main research area is variationist sociolinguistics, specializing in the study of the social, cognitive and linguistic factors that drive language variation and change. While his primary focus is on Spanish in the United States and Latin America, his current research on the variable presence or absence of subject personal pronouns consists of a cross-linguistic analysis that extends to other languages, including Mandarin, Persian, Portuguese and Swabian German. Orozco now leads one of the largest investigations of any linguistic phenomenon ever attempted, analyzing more than 250,000 instances of pronominal variation drawn from more than 1,000 sociolinguistic interviews, conducted with speakers of five different languages in 24 locations across the globe. His work will soon result in a book, currently under contract with Cambridge University Press.



Professor Rafael Orozco

"As a life-long learner, I love being a researcher," Orozco said. "Making significant contributions to our collective knowledge of linguistic phenomena translates into priceless personal and professional fulfillment. My research accomplishments also make me a better teacher."

Orozco earned his PhD in linguistics from New York University.

Senior Scholar in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Michael Malisoff, Mathematics, College of Science

Professor Michael Malisoff's research is on applied dynamical systems, with a focus on mathematical systems and control theory, which entails choosing specific parameters to achieve desired behaviors, states and operating modes. At LSU, Malisoff works in close collaboration with engineering faculty to apply his mathematical methods to strengthen U.S. defense systems, including in aerospace. He also contributes to coastal science by advancing the state of the art in marine robotics. His research has been continuously funded by the National Science Foundation since 2004, and supported by the U.S. Office of Naval Research and the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research.



Professor Michael Malisoff

"Pursuing nationally competitive research, in collaboration with excellent students and faculty collaborators here at LSU, has always been a privilege and pleasure for me," Malisoff said. "I hope to inspire others."

Malisoff earned his PhD in mathematics from Rutgers University. This is his second time receiving the LSU Rainmaker award, having previously earned it as a mid-career scholar in 2013-2014.

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