

# Trainee Spotlight

Yui Na



## Research

Yui's work centers on the interactions within polymer-protein crystals. These unique crystals form when polymer monomers wrap around the protein surface and polymerize, creating an amorphous shell that stabilizes and enables the crystal's expansion. Her goal is to unlock the precise mechanisms behind these responsive materials, paving the way for innovative applications.

## Background

Originally from a suburb near Seoul, South Korea, Yui immigrated to the U.S. at 16 and later completed her undergraduate studies at UC San Diego's Sixth College. Her research journey began in the Opella Lab, using solid-state NMR to study membrane proteins. During a research rotation, she became fascinated by the way protein-polymer crystals expand and contract—an inspiration that led her to her current Ph.D. focus.

## Fun Facts

Yui's love for science started young—she once raised silkworms and butterflies! Now, her home includes over 50 plants, with a rare variegated monstera and a pink alocasia. When she is not caring for her plant babies, she is hanging out with her cat, breaking a sweat in Pilates, or exploring the latest art exhibits.

## What's next?

After her Ph.D., Yui aims to transition into industry, with a future goal of moving into management and earning an MBA. One key lesson she is taking from her Ph.D. experience is the value of social skills in science—a reminder that intellectual prowess and technical skills alone don't build a thriving scientific community. Yui hopes to bridge the gap between hard science and the human side by mentoring others and advocating for a broader perspective on what it means to succeed in STEM.