

First OFEA Newsletter

From Office of Faculty Excellence and Advancement <ofea@mbzuai.ac.ae>

Date Fri 1/23/2026 11:13 AM

To Faculty <faculty@mbzuai.ac.ae>

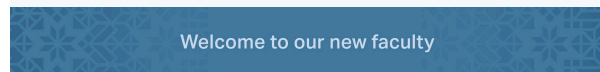


Welcome to the first issue of the OFEA faculty newsletter

We are pleased to introduce the Office of Faculty Excellence and Advancement (OFEA) and to launch this new internal newsletter for our academic community.

OFEA serves as MBZUAI's central hub for faculty lifecycle support and institutional excellence. Our mission is to support faculty at every stage of their careers, promote high standards across academic practices, and foster a strong sense of community and belonging.

This newsletter is designed as a regular space to share updates, highlight faculty achievements, and communicate relevant opportunities and initiatives. We are delighted to share the first edition below!



Join us in welcoming the 19 new faculty members who joined MBZUAI recently.



Fatima AlKaabi
Affiliated Associate Professor of Personalized Medicine
[Bio](#)



Carlos Bustamante
Adjunct Professor of Personalized Medicine



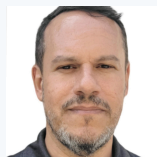
Hongyuan Cao
Visiting Professor of Statistics and Data Science
[Bio](#)



Gregory Chirikjian
Professor of Robotics
[Bio](#)



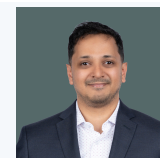
Yan Gong
Visiting Assistant Professor of Statistics and Data Science
[Bio](#)



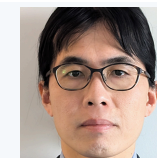
Augusto Guerra
Visiting Associate Professor of Epidemiology
[Bio](#)



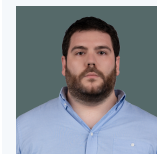
Haiyan Huang
Visiting Professor of Statistics and Data Science
[Bio](#)



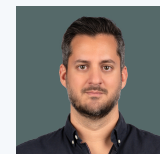
Vaishnav Kameswaran
Assistant Professor of Human-Computer Interaction
[Bio](#)



Junpei Komiya
Assistant Professor of Machine Learning
[Bio](#)



Marcos Matabuena
Assistant Professor of Epidemiology
[Bio](#)



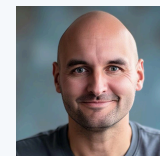
Georgios A. Pavlopoulos
Visiting Professor of Computational Biology
[Bio](#)



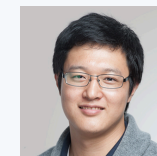
Rosario Pérez
Visiting Lecturer of Computational Biology
[Bio](#)



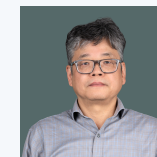
Fabio Pizzati
Visiting Lecturer and Research Scientist of Computer Vision
[Bio](#)



Johannes Schöningh
Affiliated Professor of Human-Computer Interaction
[Bio](#)



Chaoyang Song
Associate Professor of Robotics
[Bio](#)



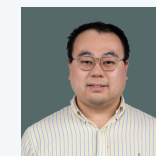
Peter Xuekun Song
Visiting Professor of Statistics and Data Science
[Bio](#)



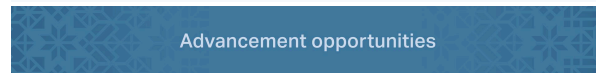
Nicholas Watson
Visiting Lecturer – Undergraduate Department
[Bio](#)



Jun Wen
Assistant Professor of Computational Biology
[Bio](#)



Tianyi Zhou
Visiting Assistant Professor of Natural Language Processing
[Bio](#)



Advancement remains a central focus of OFEA's work. We actively support faculty development, recognition, and career progression through internal initiatives and external opportunities.

A selected group of MBZUAI faculty members were accepted to participate in the [Computing Research Association \(CRA\) 2026 Career Mentoring Workshop](#). The workshop offers a platform to gain valuable career advice and networking opportunities for early-career researchers.

Additional advancement opportunities will be announced in upcoming issues.

Initiatives

MBZUAI RAIS Postdoctoral Pilot Program

OFEA is launching the Ruwwad AI Scholars (RAIS) program – a community building initiative providing 24-month postdoctoral fellowships at leading global institutions for Emirati scholars.

RAIS advances Emirati talent by placing outstanding scholars in immersive appointments at cutting-edge research institutions, strengthening their capacity to contribute to the UAE's long-term academia and innovation ecosystem. Through sustained mentorship, competitive support, and international exposure, the program cultivates future leaders who will bring their global expertise, networks, and perspective back to the UAE.

The inaugural cohort targets two to three fellows beginning Fall 2026, with the application portal opening EOD 23 January.

Faculty can support by sharing this opportunity with networks at top institutions to help raise awareness of the program with potential host PIs or applicants.

For questions: Iman.Farah@mbzuai.ac.ae or OFEA@mbzuai.ac.ae. More details to be shared at the Faculty Meeting on 27 January.

OFEA in action



Faculty orientation

The Office led both the Fall 2025 and Spring 2026 Faculty Orientation programs, welcoming new faculty members to MBZUAI across two major intake periods.

The orientations provided an overview of academic operations, research and teaching support, faculty services, and institutional priorities. They also offered opportunities for faculty to engage directly with leadership and colleagues from other key departments across the University, supporting a smooth transition into the MBZUAI community.



Faculty information sessions

Throughout the academic year, OFEA has hosted a series of information sessions aimed at providing clarity and shared understanding of key faculty lifecycle processes. These included tenure-track model sessions for faculty and faculty review process sessions for department chairs.



Faculty engagement

As part of faculty engagement activities, OFEA hosted the Faculty Recognition and Welcome Dinner at the start of the academic year. The event brought faculty together to celebrate the new academic year and recognize outstanding contributions across research, teaching, mentorship, innovation, service, and community.



Community building

OFEA also convened a series of women faculty gatherings to provide a dedicated forum for connection and dialogue among women faculty.

Community and belonging



Faculty Spouse and Family Program

We recognize that community and belonging extend beyond the workplace. As part of this commitment, the Faculty Spouse and Family Program embedded within OFEA supports faculty and their families as they settle in Abu Dhabi.

The program offers practical guidance and regular social activities, helping families connect with one another and feel at home within the MBZUAI community.

Highlights from this academic year

Fall Celebration

1:1 Coffee Chats

For more information on the program and upcoming activities, contact Maria Takacova at maria.takacova@mbzuai.ac.ae and join the Whatsapp group:



Upcoming events

Saturday, 7 February, 2026: Faculty Spouse and Family Program [Desert Safari \(Click to sign up\)](#).

Monday, 9 February, 2026: Informal coffee chat from 9–10 a.m. for new faculty with the OFEA team.

The OFEA team

Professor Thamar Solorio

Vice Provost of Faculty Excellence and Advancement,
Professor of Natural Language Processing
[Bio](#)

Luisa Vallory
Head of Academic
Appointments

Felicity Harding
Faculty Review
Specialist

Sharon Cavlovich
Faculty Review
Specialist

Iman Farah
Program Manager –
Strategic Pipelines &
Academic Development

Ana Blatnik
Policy Development
Officer

Maria Takacova
Consultant for the
Faculty Spouse and
Family Program

Looking ahead

This newsletter marks the beginning of an ongoing conversation with our faculty community. OFEA's work will continue to evolve, guided by faculty needs and feedback.

Faculty are always welcome to share ideas, suggestions, or questions by reaching out to any member of the OFEA team or by contacting OFEA@mbzuai.ac.ae.

