

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Maria Balhara  
**Email:** mbalhara@sas.upenn.edu  
**Phone:** (954) 952-4567

### I. Education:

- 2024-27      **Rising Junior (Third Year Undergraduate)**      University of Pennsylvania
- CGPA 3.92
  - Questbridge Scholar.
  - Growing up in a mixed-ethnic home, Latinx (mom) and Indian (dad), with low-income, I saw my family delay doctor visits due to financial constraints. With the support of the Questbridge scholarship, I attended Vanderbilt and then transferred to Penn.
- Summer 2025      **Fulbright UK**      University of Birmingham, UK
- Some of the most effective models for equitable healthcare come from international health systems. I was selected by the US-UK Fulbright Commission to study at the University of Birmingham in England. I aim to study the UK's National Health Service and collaborate with a research group with the aim to publish comparative research in US-UK models of care.  
<https://fulbright.org.uk/people-search/maria-balhara/>

### II. Pediatric Endocrinology:

- Summer 2022      **Joslin Diabetes Center**      Harvard Medical School
- Shadowing Placement
  - I shadowed in Pediatric Endocrinology outpatient clinic, observing doctors, a nurse, a nutritionist, and a child-life specialist on separate days. Each had their own way of caring for patients, but together they supported them medically, emotionally, and practically. These experiences showed me that teamwork is at the heart of medicine.
- Summer 2022      **Mass General Hospital**      Harvard Medical School
- **Research Assistant**
  - Adolescents with bone health conditions like osteopenia, the same condition I was diagnosed with as a teenager, don't have effective treatment options. I supported ongoing trials in osteopenia that explored underlying endocrine disorders, and prepared materials for patient visits, ensured they understood and followed study protocols, and assisted with trial recruitment efforts. Key clinical trials included the REACT Study and GABA Study. Being part of this research gave me a deeper understanding of osteopenia, and different underlying conditions that can cause it.
- Research      **Balhara M.** *European Society for Pediatric Endocrinology ESPE 2022*; September 15-17, 2022; Rome, Italy. Available at: [Link](#). Single Author.

### III. Adult Endocrinology:

2023	ENDO2023 Symposium	Endocrine Society
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chair and Moderator, Symposium on ‘Impact of the Changes in Food Environment in the Development of Obesity’</li><li>• Food has changed so much over the years - how it’s made, what’s in it, and how it’s packaged. At ENDO 2023, we reviewed how these changes are fueling obesity and hurting our health. We talked about things like endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in food packaging, which people don’t often think about but are part of the bigger picture. It was the first time these issues were front and center as theme of a symposium at ENDO. Available from: <a href="#">Link</a>.</li></ul>	
Research	<b>Balhara M.</b> <i>Endocrine Society ENDO 2022</i> ; June 11-14, 2022; Atlanta, GA. doi: <a href="#">DOI</a> . <b>Balhara M.</b> <i>Society for Endocrinology SfE BES 2022 Conference</i> ; November 14-16, 2022; Harrogate, England. doi: <a href="#">DOI</a>	
Outreach	Press release on my research by Endocrine Society <a href="#">Link</a> Interview on my research findings Healio Endocrinology <a href="#">Link</a>	
2023-present	<b>Annual ENDO Conference Abstract Reviewer</b> , Endocrine Society, US	

### IV. Pediatrics:

Research	<b>American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Oral Presentation (Single-Author)</b> To study how the unprecedented pandemic affected teenagers, I conducted a research study on the impact of COVID-19 on teenagers' diet and health. My aim was to uncover the hidden consequences of the pandemic on adolescents' well-being. My study found that for the first time in the last 30 years, the consumption of ultra-processed foods among teenagers declined during the COVID-19 pandemic. <b>Balhara M.</b> An investigation of the associations between COVID-19, adolescent obesity, and ultra-processed food intake. <i>Am Acad Pediatr Conf.</i> 2022;2022 Oct 7-11; Anaheim, CA. <a href="#">Link</a> .  <b>Children Hospital of Philadelphia CHOP CME Conference (Single-Author)</b> <b>Balhara M.</b> Molecular Insights into Congenital Heart Disease. <i>Cardiology 22: 25th Annual Update on Pediatric and Congenital Cardiovascular Disease</i> ; 2022 Aug 30. <a href="#">Link</a> .  <b>Balhara M.</b> <i>European Academy of Pediatrics EAPS 2022 Conference</i> ; October 7-11, 2022; Barcelona, Spain. Available at: <a href="#">Link</a> ; p3036-3.	
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## V. Cardiology:

2023-present	<p><b>Research Assistant, Kirabo Lab, Vanderbilt University Medical Center</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High blood pressure, the “silent killer,” often goes unnoticed, especially in low-income communities where regular check-ups aren’t an option. My father has struggled with this condition, and I’ve seen how it affects so many lives. Most of the time, hypertension is labeled as essential hypertension, since we don’t fully understand what’s causing it. With guidance from mentors <a href="#">Dr. Annet Kirabo</a> and <a href="#">Dr. Antentor Hinton</a>, I worked on a systematic review to explore how Endoplasmic Reticulum Stress influences hypertension and salt-sensitivity of blood pressure. Our related publication is linked below:</li></ul>
Publication	<p><b>Peer Reviewed Journals: Hypertension (First Author)</b></p> <p><b>Balhara M</b>, Neikirk K, Marshall A, et al. Endoplasmic reticulum stress in hypertension and salt sensitivity of blood pressure. <i>Curr Hypertens Rep</i>. 2024;26:273–290. doi: <a href="#">DOI</a>.</p>
Abstract	<p><b>NIH-NINDS Brain Initiative Meeting (Single-Author):</b></p> <p><b>Balhara M.</b> A review of gene therapy using gene-switch to regulate protein expression. <i>NIH-NINDS Brain Initiative Meeting</i>; 2022 Jun 21. (conducted during high school).</p>
Presentation	<p><b>American Heart Association (AHA) Oral Presentation (Single-Author)</b></p> <p>Ultra-processed “gateway” foods may encourage adolescents to adopt broader unhealthy eating patterns, increasing their risk for chronic conditions like hypertension. I presented my research proposing a new gateway food model at the American Heart Association’s Hypertension Scientific Sessions in 2022, examining the connection between adolescent eating behaviors and modifiable hypertension risks.</p> <p><b>Balhara M.</b> Proposing a new ‘gateway food model’ for adolescent eating behavior and its implications for modifiable hypertension risk factors. <i>Am Heart Assoc Hypertens Conf</i>. 2022;2022 Sep 8; San Diego, CA. doi: <a href="#">DOI</a>.</p>
Poster	<p><b>Balhara M.</b> <i>American Heart Association Sci Sessions</i>. 2022;2022 Nov 5. Chicago, IL. doi: <a href="#">DOI</a>.</p>
Invited Article	<p><b>Balhara M.</b> Examining food deserts and cardiovascular disparities in the U.S. <i>The Gazette</i>. July 10, 2023; Page 10. Available at: <a href="#">Link</a></p>
Outreach	<p>Press release on my research by American Heart Association <a href="#">Link</a></p>
Interviews	<p>Healio Cardiology <a href="#">Link</a>, Medscape <a href="#">Link</a>, American Heart Association <a href="#">Link</a></p>

## VI. Primary Care:

2023-present	<p><b>Medical Assistant, Faith Family Medical, Nashville TN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faith Family Medical Center serves 10,000 patient visits a year, offering care at a lower cost (\$20 to \$55 per visit) for uninsured and underinsured patients. About 40% of the patients only speak Spanish.</li><li>• Before I went to Penn, I volunteered there as a medical assistant. I took vitals, documented patients' concerns, and assisted doctors during appointments. I also identified and screened for barriers to care, like financial issues, lack of transportation, or other resource gaps, and connected patients with programs to help with medications. I learned a lot working with patients managing chronic illnesses like hypertension and diabetes, many of whom had severe or uncontrolled symptoms because they hadn't been able to access care earlier.</li></ul>
Research	<p><b>Balhara M.</b> <i>Nutrition Society Irish Section</i> 2022; June 15-17, 2022; Cork, Ireland. <a href="#">Link</a>.</p> <p><b>Balhara M.</b> <i>Nutrition Society Summer</i> 2022; July 12-15, 2022; Sheffield, England. <a href="#">Link</a>.</p>
Invited Article	<p><b>Balhara M,</b> Carranza Leon BG. Dietary strategies fail to reduce chemical exposure. <i>WebMD Medscape</i>. July 23, 2023. Available at: <a href="#">Link</a>.</p>
Other Media Advocacy	<p>Chilean Obesity Society <a href="#">Link</a>, El Mundo Newspaper Spain <a href="#">Link</a>, Herald Scotland <a href="#">Link</a>, UK Daily Mirror <a href="#">Link</a>, The Independent UK <a href="#">Link</a>, BBC Science Focus Magazine <a href="#">Link</a>.</p>

## VII. Committee Service:

2024-present	<p><b>Member, LMSA National Publications Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many patients from historically underserved communities report better outcomes when cared for by physicians who share their background, but underrepresentation remains a persistent challenge across many communities.</li><li>• As a member of the LMSA National Publications Committee, I support the editorial process for the <i>Journal of the Latino Medical Student Association</i>, helping highlight stories, research, and advocacy from students working to build a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system.</li></ul>
2022-2024	<p><b>Member, Strategic Communications Committee, Nutrition Society, UK</b></p>
2022-2023	<p><b>Member, College Pathway Core Committee, Broward College, US</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When students face academic challenges, poor grades, or other setbacks, they may start to doubt if they can reach their career goals. Sometimes, instead of finding the support they need, they get feedback that makes them question if their chosen path is right for them. To help address these challenges, I served on Broward College's faculty-student committee, sharing a student perspective and contributing to initiatives that supported academic success.</li></ul>

## VIII. Policy and Advocacy:

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|--------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| 2024-present | <b>Children's Food Trust</b> | Philadelphia, PA |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------|
- Public school lunches in the U.S. include additives banned in other countries, placing low-income children at higher nutritional risk. I founded Children's Food Trust to advocate for stronger school meal standards and the removal of harmful additives. Drawing from UK policy, we've submitted public comments on state bills (e.g., AZ HB2164 and UT HB0402), engaged lawmakers, and built coalitions to advance child nutrition equity. We share our ongoing work and resources at [www.childrensfoodtrust.org](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org)

## XI. Grants and Funding for Equity

### Approved (Funding Awarded): Research- Homelessness in Philadelphia

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| 2024-present | <b>Penn College House Research Fellow Grant</b> |
|--------------|---|
- PI
  - Every night, over 5,700 people in Philadelphia face homelessness, and nearly 1 in 5 struggle to stay housed even after finding a home. This research combines philosophical findings, like epistemic resilience and pessimism traps, with neuro-imaging insights to explore what helps people overcome homelessness. The goal is to support the city of Philadelphia in building stronger support systems.

## X. Teaching Low-Income, and First-Generation Students

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| 2023-present | <b>AmeriCorps</b> | Boca Raton, FL |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
- (600 hours) STEM Teacher, Summer Enrichment Program at Breakthrough Miami
- Every summer, I teach three STEM classes to about 50 elementary and middle school students who come from low-income families like mine. Most of them - 96% - are underrepresented minorities. Nearly half (48%) are the first in their families to aim for college, and about 50% speak a language other than English at home. Teaching them has taught me just as much in return, especially about how to make science stick in ways that matter to each student.
  - Giovanni hadn't had much exposure to STEM at his school, so I started using hands-on experiments to help him - and others like him - really connect with the material. Two years ago, I also taught Schavenicka, a talented young artist who struggled in science because her school focused too much on rote memorization. She opened my eyes to the power of art in learning. Now, I weave in drawing activities to help kids like her thrive. What I hope most is that through these classes, kids begin to see themselves in a new light - as future scientists, engineers, doctors, and leaders. I want them to feel at home in these spaces and know they belong.
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| 2024- | <b>AmeriCorps</b> | Boca Raton, FL |
|-------|-------------------|----------------|
- Founder, 'Life Essentials for Kids' (LE3) Elective Class Curriculum**
- At AmeriCorps, I help during breakfast and lunch for the kids. Because good habits start young, I created a summer class called Life Essentials for Kids (LE3). The class is based on the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8 guidelines, but I

adapted it to focus on the three areas that matter most for kids: eating healthy, staying active, and getting enough sleep. I ran it for the first time last year.

2023-

**AmeriCorps**

Boca Raton, FL

**Mentor, Public Speaking**

- Many URM students don't have access to opportunities that teach them public speaking - a skill that's so important for sharing their stories, articulating their aspirations, and advocating for themselves. I teach a public speaking class for elementary and middle schoolers. When it's time for the AmeriCorps Showcase, we practice together, I give each student personal feedback, and we celebrate all their progress along the way.

**XI. Professional Memberships:**

2023-present Undergraduate Member, Student National Medical Association (SNMA).

2023-present Undergraduate Member, Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA).

2022-present Student Member, Endocrine Society.

2022-present Student Member, American Heart Association. Mentee in AHA Mentoring Program.

2024-present Student Member, American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM).

**XII. Awards:**

2022

**Questbridge Scholar**

- As a student from a family with limited financial resources, this national scholarship program gave me the opportunity to attend college despite financial barriers.

2024

**Student Communications Honors Award**

Many first-year and international students wrestle with homesickness, figuring out a new culture, and juggling their classes. I wrote articles for Vanderbilt's student news site about experiences as a freshmen to help them feel like they're not alone.

2024

**Penn Warren Center for the Humanities' Excellence in Podcasting Award**

- Podcast: From Ashes to Resilience: The Smoky Mountains Story.
- Many people hit hardest by climate disasters slip through the cracks - they lose their homes, their loved ones, or even the roads that hold their communities together. Too often, their stories go unheard. This podcast shines a light on their lives. In this episode, we look back at the 2016 Gatlinburg Wildfire in Tennessee. Listen here: [Link](#).

2024

**'Diversity in Action' Magazine**

- My advocacy to reduce ultra-processed food consumption was recognized in *Diversity in Action Magazine's* 20 Under 20: Young Innovators List (2024). [Link](#).

2024

### **AmeriCorps Teaching Award**

In many under-resourced schools, students fall behind in STEM due to lack of targeted support. As an AmeriCorps teacher, I lead STEM instruction for highly-motivated middle schoolers that are under-resourced, many of whom are first-generation students.

## **XIII. Hobbies:**

2015-

### **Humane Society**

- Since middle school, I've been a foster parent to dogs and cats, helping them find their forever homes.

2022-

### **'A Daughter's Cookbook for Dad'**

- I craft easy recipes with four or less steps. This project, which I started to teach my dad simple recipes, inspired me to start writing a book titled "*A Daughter's Cookbook for Dad*." This book contains easy recipes aimed at helping dads and moms make simple, delicious meals, especially in single-parent homes where they might have less support.