

Plato

International applicant

PROFILE SUMMARY

Greek national with a UCL MSc and 2 years of research experience in Prof. Michael Häusser's lab — one of the world's top dendritic computation groups. Strong technical foundation in patch-clamp electrophysiology (whole-cell and in vivo loose-patch), optogenetics, and calcium imaging in rodent cortical pyramidal neurons. First-author Journal of Neuroscience paper (2025) on backpropagating action potentials and calcium electrogenesis in distal dendrites — a publication record that places this applicant in the top tier of incoming PhD candidates. 3.90 GPA and FENS poster further reinforce the profile. Target subfields (synaptic plasticity, dendritic computation, inhibitory circuits, cortical microcircuits, E/I balance) align tightly with top US systems/cellular neuroscience programs.

STRENGTHS

- First-author Journal of Neuroscience publication (2025) on dendritic integration — exceptional for a PhD applicant
- 2 years in Häusser lab (UCL), a globally recognized leader in dendritic computation
- Strong patch-clamp electrophysiology skills (whole-cell, in vivo loose-patch) — a rare and valuable technical profile
- Combined ephys + optogenetics + calcium imaging toolkit aligns with modern systems neuroscience labs
- 3.90 GPA at top-tier institutions (Athens BSc, UCL MSc)
- FENS Forum 2024 poster demonstrates international scientific community engagement
- Tightly focused research interests in dendritic computation, synaptic plasticity, and cortical microcircuits

AREAS TO ADDRESS

- International status makes you ineligible for NIH F31/F30, NSF GRFP, and HHMI Gilliam — must rely on program-funded stipends and institutional fellowships
- Confirm English proficiency scores (TOEFL/IELTS) meet thresholds (Harvard requires TOEFL 100+ / IELTS 7+)
- Some programs (e.g. Georgetown) explicitly fund international students only in exceptional cases — research international funding policies carefully before applying
- Plan for higher application fees as international applicant (e.g. UC Berkeley \$155 vs \$135 domestic)
- Reach out to PIs early (August–September) given the competitive nature of top programs and the importance of fit conversations

PROGRAM RANKINGS

REACH PROGRAMS

Program	University	Deadline	Stipend	Research fit	Why this tier
Neurobiology and Behavior	Columbia University	December 1 (ET)	\$42,000	Columbia's Zuckerman Institute is a global hub for cortical microcircuit and dendritic research. Attila Losonczy's lab directly extends your dendritic computation work into hippocampal place coding using two-photon calcium imaging in behaving mice – a near-perfect technique and topic match. Nathaniel Sawtell adds sensorimotor circuit options.	Reach: Columbia NB&B admits ~15–20 students/year from a very large applicant pool; admitted students typically have first-author publications and top-tier letters. Your J. Neurosci paper and Häusser-lab pedigree make you genuinely competitive here, but cohort size and applicant strength keep this firmly in reach territory. International applicants are explicitly welcomed with no stated funding restrictions.
Program in Neuroscience (PiN)	Harvard University	December 1 (ET)	\$43,800	Harvard PiN hosts Bernardo Sabatini (synaptic transmission, dopamine, calcium imaging), Venkatesh Murthy (olfactory circuits, synaptic plasticity), and Bence Ölveczky (motor learning, basal ganglia) – multiple PIs whose techniques and questions overlap directly with your dendritic ephys + imaging skillset. Strong cortical microcircuit and synaptic plasticity ecosystem.	Reach: PiN is one of the most competitive neuroscience PhD admissions in the world, with cohorts of 20–25 from thousands of applicants. International students are funded and welcomed, but TOEFL iBT 100 / IELTS 7 minimums apply. Your first-author J. Neurosci paper and Häusser-lab training place you in the competitive band, but admission remains uncertain.
Brain and Cognitive Sciences PhD	MIT	December 1 (ET)	\$51,226	MIT BCS hosts Fan Wang (somatosensory circuits, calcium imaging in behaving mice), Mehrdad Jazayeri (timing, motor control), and Edward Boyden (optogenetics tools). Strong cellular/systems neuroscience ecosystem with multiple labs using your exact technique stack. Note: Mark Harnett's dendritic computation lab at MIT would be your most direct topical match – confirm current faculty roster.	Reach: MIT BCS admits 17–22 students/year and is among the most selective neuroscience programs globally. Stipend is the highest in this tier (\$51,226). International funding is explicitly available. Your dendritic computation expertise is a natural fit but applicant pool is extremely strong.

REALISTIC PROGRAMS

Program	University	Deadline	Stipend	Research fit	Why this tier
Neuroscience PhD Program	Johns Hopkins University	December 3 (ET)	\$38,000	JHU Neuroscience has strong systems/cellular ecosystem including Alla Karpova (motor learning, striatal circuits, calcium imaging) and Daeyeol Lee (decision making, ephys). Multiple labs use patch-clamp and calcium imaging in behaving rodents.	Realistic: JHU admits 20–25/year with a strong but slightly less hyper-selective applicant pool than Harvard/MIT. Your publication record places you well above the typical applicant. No stated international restrictions, though stipend (\$38,000) is on the lower end and Baltimore cost of living is moderate.
Center for Neural Science PhD Program	New York University	December 1 (ET)	\$38,000	NYU CNS is strong in systems and computational neuroscience with cortical microcircuit and visual perception labs. Smaller cohort gives more individualized attention. Good fit for your synaptic plasticity and E/I balance interests.	Realistic: 10–15 per year cohort with no stated international restrictions. Your profile is highly competitive for this program tier. Stipend (\$38,000) is modest given NYC cost of living – budget carefully.
Neurosciences PhD Program	University of California San Diego	December 1 (PT)	\$38,000	UCSD Neurosciences hosts Takaki Komiyama – your single strongest technique-matched PI (two-photon calcium imaging in behaving mice, motor learning, systems neuroscience). Komiyama's lab is actively recruiting and his work on cortical reactivations and motor learning directly extends your dendritic computation training into circuit-level questions.	Realistic: UCSD admits 20–25/year. Strong fit with Komiyama's lab makes this an excellent target, and his active recruitment status is a notable plus. No stated international funding restrictions. Your profile is well above the typical admitted student.
Neuroscience Graduate Group	University of Pennsylvania	December 1 (ET)	\$38,000	Penn NGG within BGS umbrella has strong cellular and systems neuroscience faculty. Solid fit for synaptic plasticity and cortical circuit work. No application fee is a practical plus.	Realistic: Penn BGS receives 3,000+ applications across all programs but NGG-specific cohort is smaller. One-program-only rule within BGS – choose carefully. No stated international restrictions.

SAFER PROGRAMS

Program	University	Deadline	Stipend	Research fit	Why this tier
Graduate Program in Neuroscience	Boston University	December 15 (ET)	\$34,000	BU GPN has solid cellular and systems neuroscience faculty with options in cortical circuits and synaptic physiology. A reasonable backup given your stated interest and the program's good record placing graduates in postdocs.	Safer: 10–15 per year cohort with December 15 deadline (later than most). Your J. Neurosci paper and Häusser training place you well above the typical admitted student. No stated international restrictions, though stipend (\$34,000) is low for Boston cost of living.
Neuroscience Graduate Program	Baylor College of Medicine	September 1 (CT) – PhD 2027 cycle	\$40,000	Baylor NGP is strong in systems neuroscience with cortical and circuit-level research. Houston ecosystem includes connections to Rice and the Texas Medical Center. Good cellular/systems training environment.	Safer: 10–15 per year, no application fee, no GRE, and \$40,000 stipend goes far in Houston's lower cost of living. PhD 2027 deadline is unusually early (September 1) – note this carefully. Your profile is strong for this program.
Neuroscience Graduate Program	Salk Institute (via UCSD)	December 1 (PT) via UCSD	\$38,000 (- UCSD rate)	Salk hosts world-class systems and cellular neuroscience, with PIs working on cortical circuits, plasticity, and dendritic function. Note: Salk PhD students typically matriculate through UCSD Neurosciences – apply via UCSD program with Salk PI interest indicated.	Safer/Realistic hybrid: Salk-affiliated PhDs come through UCSD Neurosciences, so admissions feed through that program. Listed as safer here because your profile (J. Neurosci paper + Häusser training) is exceptional for the typical admit. Confirm specific Salk PIs of interest and contact via UCSD application.

PROFESSOR MATCHES

Professor	University	Research focus	Technique match	Taking students	Recommended action
Takaki Komiyama	University of California San Diego	Motor learning, cortical circuits, two-photon calcium imaging in behaving mice	Strong: two-photon calcium imaging + optogenetics in behaving mice directly overlaps with your in vivo loose-patch and calcium imaging skills. Komiyama's work on cortical reactivations and motor learning is a natural extension of your dendritic integration training.	likely	Email in August–September 2026. Highlight your Häusser-lab in vivo loose-patch experience and ask about ongoing projects on dendritic contributions to motor learning.
Attila Losonczy			Excellent: Losonczy explicitly works on dendritic computation in hippocampal pyramidal neurons using two-photon calcium imaging –	likely	Priority outreach. Email in late August referencing his 2024 Nature paper on synaptic basis of

	Columbia University	Hippocampal circuits, place cells, dendritic computation, memory encoding	direct continuation of your dendritic integration work in a different cortical structure.		feature selectivity and your J. Neurosci paper.
Bernardo Sabatini	Harvard University	Synaptic transmission, basal ganglia, dopamine, learning circuits	Strong: two-photon calcium imaging, ex vivo and in vivo electrophysiology, optogenetics – full technique overlap. Synaptic plasticity focus aligns with your stated interests.	likely	Reach out via Harvard PiN application process. Reference his work on cortical-striatal circuits and your interest in synaptic plasticity at the dendritic level.
Bence Ölveczky	Harvard University	Motor skill learning, basal ganglia, striatum, neural variability	Good: calcium imaging, ephys, optogenetics in behaving rodents (mice and rats). Your in vivo loose-patch experience is highly transferable.	likely	Consider as secondary contact at Harvard PiN. His 2024 Nature paper on motor cortex demands for flexibility is a good reference point.
Lisa Giocomo	Stanford University	Spatial navigation, grid cells, entorhinal cortex, memory	Strong: two-photon calcium imaging, electrophysiology, optogenetics in behaving mice – full overlap with your technique stack.	likely	Strong outreach candidate even though Stanford isn't on your initial list. Consider adding Stanford Neurosciences to your application list given the fit.
Loren Frank	University of California San Francisco	Memory consolidation, hippocampus, sharp-wave ripples, spatial learning	Strong: calcium imaging, electrophysiology, optogenetics in behaving rats and mice. Your rat experience is directly relevant.	likely	Consider UCSF if open to one-program-only rule. Note November 16 deadline is earlier than most programs.
Venkatesh Murthy	Harvard University	Olfactory circuits, synaptic plasticity, sensory processing, learning	Strong: two-photon calcium imaging, optogenetics, electrophysiology in behaving mice. Synaptic plasticity focus is a direct topical match.	likely	Mention as a secondary interest in Harvard PiN application.
Hillel Adesnik	University of California Berkeley	Sensory cortex, holographic optogenetics, neural circuit dissection, perception	Excellent: two-photon calcium imaging + holographic optogenetics – Adesnik is a pioneer of all-optical circuit interrogation, a natural next-generation extension of your patch-clamp/optogenetics toolkit.	likely	Consider Berkeley Helen Wills program (early November 21 deadline). Adesnik would be your priority PI there.
Nathaniel Sawtell	Columbia University	Sensory processing, cerebellum, motor prediction, neural circuits	Good: calcium imaging, electrophysiology, optogenetics. Adjacent fit – cerebellar circuits rather than cortical, but methodology overlaps fully.	unclear	Secondary PI at Columbia. Confirm recruitment status before deep engagement.

FUNDING ELIGIBILITY MATRIX

Fellowship	Eligible	Reason	Notes
NIH F31 Predoctoral Fellowship	No	Requires US citizenship or permanent residency. You are a Greek national.	Not available. Focus on program-funded stipends and institutional fellowships.
NIH F30 (MD-PhD)	No	Requires US citizenship or permanent residency, and is for MD-PhD trainees.	Not applicable – you are pursuing a PhD only and are international.
NSF Graduate Research Fellowship (GRFP)	No	Requires US citizenship, national, or permanent residency.	Not available to international applicants.
HHMI Gilliam Fellowship	No	Requires US citizenship or permanent residency.	Not available.
Program-funded stipend (institutional)	Yes	All PhD programs on your list provide stipends to admitted students regardless of citizenship	This will be your primary funding mechanism. Confirm each program's international funding policy – some (e.g. Georgetown) fund international students only in exceptional cases.
Onassis Foundation Scholarship (Greek nationals)	Yes	Open to Greek citizens pursuing graduate study abroad	Apply in parallel with PhD applications. Can supplement program stipend and strengthens your application materials.
Fulbright Foreign Student Program (Greece)	Yes	Open to Greek nationals for US graduate study	Highly competitive but prestigious. Greece-US Fulbright deadlines are typically in winter – verify with Fulbright Greece office. Strongly recommended for international applicants.
Bodossaki Foundation Scholarship (Greek nationals)	Yes	Supports Greek graduate students abroad	Another Greek-specific funding source worth pursuing.
Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds PhD Fellowship	Yes	Open to international PhD students in biomedical sciences	Highly competitive European-administered fellowship. Strong fit for systems/cellular neuroscience and would be an excellent addition to your portfolio.

COST OF LIVING SUMMARY

University	City	Cost	Median 1BR Rent	Monthly Stipend	Stipend / Rent ratio	Notes
Columbia University	New York, NY	High	\$3,500/mo	\$3,500/mo	1x	Stipend covers roughly 1 month of rent – NYC is extremely expensive. Plan for roommates and budget tightly.
Harvard University	Boston, MA	High	\$3,000/mo	\$3,650/mo	1.2x	Stipend slightly exceeds median rent – manageable with roommates but living solo will be tight.
MIT	Cambridge, MA	High	\$3,000/mo	\$4,269/mo	1.4x	MIT's \$51,226 stipend is the highest in your list and covers rent + reasonable living expenses comfortably for Cambridge.
	Baltimore, MD	Medium	\$1,600/mo	\$3,167/mo	2x	

Johns Hopkins University						Stipend covers ~2 months of rent – comfortable financial situation for Baltimore.
New York University	New York, NY	High	\$3,500/mo	\$3,167/mo	0.9x	Stipend does not cover median NYC rent – plan for roommates and frugal living.
University of California San Diego	La Jolla, CA	High	\$2,400/mo	\$3,167/mo	1.3x	Stipend covers rent with some margin – La Jolla is expensive but more manageable than NYC/Boston.
Salk Institute	La Jolla, CA	High	\$2,400/mo	\$3,167/mo	1.3x	Same cost environment as UCSD since Salk PhDs matriculate through UCSD.
University of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia, PA	Medium	\$1,900/mo	\$3,167/mo	1.7x	Stipend covers rent with reasonable margin – Philly is one of the more affordable major US PhD cities.
Boston University	Boston, MA	High	\$3,000/mo	\$2,833/mo	0.9x	Stipend does not cover median Boston rent – budget will be very tight. Plan for roommates.
Baylor College of Medicine	Houston, TX	Medium	\$1,700/mo	\$3,333/mo	2x	Stipend covers ~2 months of rent – comfortable financial situation for Houston.

Stipend / Rent ratio: how many months of median 1BR rent your monthly stipend covers. A ratio below 1.0x means rent alone exceeds your monthly stipend – budget carefully. Rent figures are approximate 2025 market rates for a 1-bedroom apartment near campus.

APPLICATION CALENDAR

Date	Event	Notes
August 2026	Begin PI outreach emails	Email Komiyama (UCSD), Losonczy (Columbia), and 2-3 other priority PIs. Reference your J. Neurosci paper directly.
December 1, 2026	PRIMARY DEADLINE: Columbia, Harvard, MIT, NYU, UCSD, Penn	Six of your listed programs share this deadline. Plan submission for November 28 to avoid server load.
December 15, 2026	Boston University GPN deadline (ET)	Later deadline allows time for revisions after submitting December 1 applications.
December 3, 2026	Johns Hopkins Neuroscience deadline (ET)	Includes recommendation letters in the deadline.
Early September 2026	Draft Statement of Purpose and personal statement	Center on dendritic computation work and your transition to systems-level questions. Tailor PI mentions per program.
January – February 2027	Interview season	Top programs typically extend interview invitations in late December through January. Be prepared to travel or interview virtually.
March–April 2027	Admissions decisions and visit weekends	April 15 is the universal response deadline for US PhD offers.
Mid-October 2026	Take TOEFL/IELTS if scores not current	Harvard requires TOEFL iBT 100 / IELTS 7. Most top programs have similar thresholds.

November 12, 2026	University of Washington deadline (if applying)	Earliest of the major neuroscience program deadlines.
November 16, 2026	UCSF Neuroscience deadline (PT) — one-program-only rule	If applying, this is your only UCSF biomedical program option for this cycle.
November 17, 2026	MIT fee waiver deadline	Apply for fee waiver before this date if eligible.
November 21, 2026	UC Berkeley Helen Wills deadline (PT)	If applying, note \$155 international application fee.
September 1, 2026	Baylor PhD application deadline (CT)	VERIFY whether September 1 applies to your matriculation year — this is unusually early.
September–October 2026	Request letters of recommendation	Häusser is essential. Add 2 more — ideally UCL co-authors or thesis committee.

PROFESSOR OUTREACH TEMPLATE

Subject: Prospective PhD Applicant — Dendritic Computation & Cortical Microcircuits

Dear Prof. [Last Name],

I'm a Greek national currently completing my MSc and 2 years of research as a research assistant in Prof. Michael Häusser's lab at UCL, where I've been studying dendritic computation and synaptic integration in cortical layer 5 pyramidal neurons. My first-author paper in the *Journal of Neuroscience* (2025) characterized backpropagating action potentials and calcium electrogenesis in distal dendrites, using whole-cell patch-clamp recordings in acute brain slices and in vivo loose-patch recordings in awake mice.

I'm applying for PhD programs starting Fall 2027, and your work on [SPECIFIC PAPER OR PROJECT — e.g., "the synaptic basis of feature selectivity in hippocampal neurons (*Nature* 2024)"] resonates strongly with the questions I want to pursue next. In particular, I'm interested in how dendritic integration shapes [SPECIFIC TOPIC — e.g., "place cell tuning" / "motor learning" / "E/I balance in cortical microcircuits"], and your lab's combination of two-photon calcium imaging and optogenetics in behaving animals seems like an ideal environment to extend my cellular-level training into circuit-level questions.

A few specific questions if you have a moment:

1. Are you planning to take rotation students in the 2027–2028 academic year?
2. Would you be open to discussing potential projects, particularly at the intersection of dendritic physiology and [SPECIFIC RESEARCH AREA]?
3. Are there ongoing projects in the lab where my patch-clamp and in vivo recording experience would be particularly useful?

I've attached my CV and would be happy to share my *J. Neurosci* paper or discuss further over email or video call. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Plato

[Email]

[ORCID or Google Scholar link]

[Link to *J. Neurosci* paper]