



Faculty Meeting Report

Fall 2025

Hi y'all,

My name is René Girard, and I am honored to serve as this year's GSA President. I served as GSA Vice President during 2023-2024 and can report on the remainder of the Summer 2025 until the present day in the Fall Semester of 2025.

Mission

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) of The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) has as its purpose to provide a student forum for discussion of common needs, to work cooperatively with the faculty and administration to build a recognized and respected institution, and to develop student fellowship and social activities. Since the last faculty meeting, GSA has successfully continued or initiated several key projects that align with this mission, including:

Late Spring 2025 Report

Election of new GSA Officers: In May, Ally sent out a survey to nominate and elect the new GSA officers for the 2025-2026 school year. The results were as follows: Rene Girard won the presidency, Llaran Turner won VP, Ciara Chen won Treasurer, and Mackenzie Wienke won Secretary.

Three programs are represented by the officers: MTB (René), G&E (Llaran, Mackenzie, Ciara) and Cancer Bio (Ciara).

Early Fall 2025 Report

Orientation: GSA hosted three events during orientation on Friday, August 22, 2025. The first event was welcoming the students to Houston and providing tips and tricks throughout graduate school. The second event was the Peer Mentorship Program lunch, which was highly successful and will be touched on below. The final event was on behalf of the 2023-2024 GSA officers and budget, the Friday Afternoon Club (FAC). We had a great turnout for all events.

GSBS Mentorship Program: The GSBS mentorship program is an initiative spearheaded by GSA to allow incoming GSBS students to have a smoother transition into graduate school by pairing them with current GSBS students. A few changes have been made this year to update the program and facilitate participation. We moved back to the one-on-one mentoring style. The first meeting which was at orientation was an icebreaker event where they played a GSBS board game. The goal of this one is to get the mentees and mentors comfortable with each other so that they can build a stronger relationship through "play". This was something that worked well when I was at the Yale Ciencia Academy where graduate students from all over the country were brought together for a career development seminar. By doing a fun activity students are more open to sharing their struggles openly and are able to relate with their peer mentor through a shared activity. We currently have 55 pairings, with at least two separate matching points such as program choice or hometown, etc. The plan for future meetings is not fully laid out yet; however, in October we are going to host a panel with students from different areas of campus. Mackenzie brought up that having some idea of what it's like to work in south campus or other areas may help students make decisions about the labs that they would like to pursue a rotation in. Future monthly topics are drafted below:

- October – Campus Location Panel
- November - Picking your next rotations
- January – Holiday Break
- Feb – Choosing a Mentor & How to navigate conversations with your PI
- April – Work-Life balance
- May – End of year wrap up

Future Initiatives and Events

We are currently reviewing our budget for this upcoming year to plan and host events. Our fantastic officers have great ideas to build community, such as hosting open mic nights, board game nights, powerpoint presentation practice, white elephant following events are what has been planned so far:

Fall 2025:

- Peer Mentoring Lunches
 - o Planning one for October since Sept has been full of events by the other student Orgs.
 - o Potential Powerpoint Party
 - Will use it to give mentees a platform to practice for their first committee meeting.
 - “Who am I” will be the focus and they can practice with a mixed audience so they can get some experience with speaking about a topic they should know very well.
 - For the mentors:
 - They can do a similar one but with the framing of “how to sell yourself”
 - o Students can practice presenting their research with the end goal of obtaining a job
 - This can be academia, industry, etc.
- Halloween Costume Contest
 - Planned for October 31
 - Would love the GSBS staff/ faculty to also participate
- Social Events
 - o Instilling a sense of community among the different programs can foster more collaboration and help students strengthen their projects.
 - o Open Mic Night with LGBTQ
 - Hosted Open Mic Night
 - Low turnout for this event maybe due to late time. Will consider other options to help increase the turnout
- Town Hall – Proposed date in November
 - o Topic: Talk about current NIH funding ruling and what the future of the funding looks like
 - o Initiative: Will open a suggestion box to student to submit anonymous concerns. The most brought up concerns will be forwarded to the dean and will be featured at the town hall.
- Resilient Scientist
 - o Rene is Core Course TA and wants to host the resilient scientist session after hours for students who wish to have a more in-depth application of the program. Initially open to the first years but due to the program being fully new we may open it up to the older cohorts. Want input from faculty to see if this is something that could be taken up by other organizations along with GSA.

Spring 2026:

- Peer Mentoring Lunches
- Graduate Student Appreciation Week –
 - o Potentially host mini GSBS conference where students can present posters to the whole school instead of only programs.
- McGovern Teaching Award – Mar-May 2026
- Town Hall – TBD

GSA would like to thank the Deans, faculty, and GSBS staff for their continued support, assistance and encouragement. Together, we will continue to make GSBS the best graduate school for our students. **If there are any recommendations for future events or initiatives, please email me at rene.a.girard@uth.tmc.edu**

Sincerely,

2024-2025 GSA Officers

President: René Girard

Vice President: Llaran Turner

Treasurer: Ciara (Shuaitong) Chen

Secretary: Mackenzie Wienke