

Hi all,

My name is Alexandra “Ally Grace” McConnell, and I am honored to serve as this year’s GSA President. I served as GSA Secretary during 2023-2024 and can report on the remainder of the Spring 2024 until the present day in the Fall Semester of 2024.

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 2024 Report

Housing Transportation Survey: GSA collaborated with the MD Anderson Research, Education, and Training Office to create a Housing and Daily Commute Survey and sent the new survey to students in March.

McGovern Award for Outstanding Teaching: Based on students’ vote the final recipient of the McGovern Award for Outstanding Teaching was awarded to Michael Beierlein, PhD, in the Neuroscience Graduate Program. Takeese McKenzie, the outgoing GSA President, gave a speech at commencement honoring Dr. Beierlein.

Election of new GSA Officers: In June, Takeese sent out a survey to nominate and elect the new GSA officers for the 2024-2025 school year. The results were as follows:

Four programs are represented by the officers: Neuroscience (AGM, MP), Cancer Biology (MP), G&E (JQ) and MTB (CH).

Early Fall 2024 Report

Orientation: GSA hosted three events during orientation on Friday, August 23, 2024. 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



Dr. Beierlein received the McGovern Award for Outstanding Teaching. From left to right: Alexandra McConnell (GSA 23-24 Secretary), Dr. Michael Beierlein,

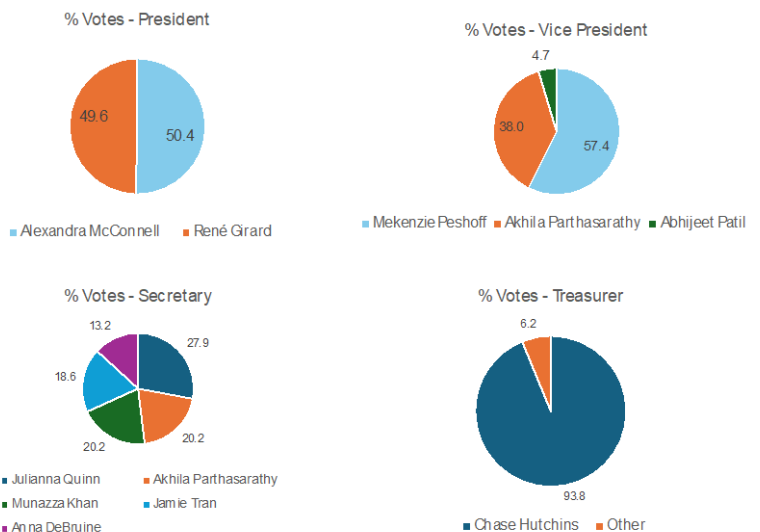
GSBS Graduate Student Association 2024 Election Results Summary

Total Student Votes = 129		
President	% Votes	# of Votes
Alexandra McConnell	50.4	65
René Girard	49.6	64

Vice-President	% Votes	# of Votes
Mekenzie Peshoff	57.4	74
Akhila Parthasarathy	38.0	49
Abhijeet Patil	4.7	6

Secretary	% Votes	# of Votes
Juliana Quinn	27.9	36
Akhila Parthasarathy	20.2	26
Munazza Khan	20.2	26
Jamie Tran	18.6	24
Anna DeBruine	13.2	17

Treasurer	% Votes	# of Votes
Chase Hutchins	93.8	121
Other	6.2	8



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. The program format has switched from one-on-one to small groups consisting of 1-2 mentors to 3-5 mentees grouped by research interests. We have 24 small groups participating. Another change was to provide a mandatory lunch on the first Friday of the month to discuss a set topic with set discussion questions. This takes the pressure off the students having to find time to meet individually and has a structure to the conversations. In September, we had over 100 people participate in the first lunch, where we discussed finding a community and settling in Houston. Future monthly topics are drafted below:

- October – Picking your next rotations
- November – What scientifically motivates you? (Alternative: Picking a program; Setting goals)
- December – Prioritizing Rest and Breaks
- January – Holiday Break (no meeting)
- Feb – Applying for Funding (scholarships, fellowships, and more) **
- March – 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 movie nights, delivering breakfast to South Campus students, Grad School Prom, and more. The following events are what has been planned so far:

Fall 2024:

- Peer Mentoring Lunches
- Town Hall – Proposed date in November
 - o Topic: Meet the Dean

Spring 2025:

- Peer Mentoring Lunches
- Graduate Student Appreciation Week – April 7-11, 2025
- Graduate School Prom – TBD (goal is to have it at the end of GSAW week)
 - o A new event we are working on! We have spoken with the McGovern social coordinators who plan the Medical School Prom to propose a budget and have an idea of how to host one for the graduate students
- McGovern Teaching Award – Mar-May 2025
- 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 alexandra.mcconnell@uth.tmc.edu**

Sincerely,

2024-2025 GSA Officers

President: Alexandra “Ally Grace” McConnell

Vice President: Mekenzie Peshoff

Treasurer: Chase Hutchins

Secretary: Julianna Quinn