

**The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth  
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences**

**FACULTY MEETING  
February 13, 2020 – 3:00PM**

**MINUTES**

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**Present:** Joya Chandra, Chair; Actor, Alcorn, Azhdarina, Bartholomew, Bankson, Barton, Beierlein, Berdeaux, Bernatchez, Blackburn, Bover, S. Chang, F. Cole, Cunha, De Lay, Do, Ekmekcioglu, Evans, Frost, C. Fuller, Garsin, Harrington, Hildebrandt, Hittelman, Hofmann, Hwang, Kaplan, Kaur, Klegerman, Koehler, Konovalova, Krahe, Kudchadker, C. Lin, Lorenz, Mattox, Marshak, McCrea, Miller, Morano, Ni, Olson, Pagel, Parker-Thornburg, Pickering, D. Piwnica-Worms, Plunkett, Ribelayga, Richie, Scheet, Singletary, Smith Callahan, R. Sun, Swindell, Teng, Venna, Hongyu Wang, Walters, Waxham, Weinstein, Wendt, K.K. Wong, J. Wu, L. Yang, Yin, You, Zhu

**Staff:** Barker, Barnett, Carter, Cruz Bruesch, Fern, Gaughan, Lau, Lindheim, Moore, Salinas, Shadding, Spitzenberger, Weinberg, Wilson-Toliver

**1. September 12, 2019 Faculty Meeting minutes were unanimously approved.**

**2. Faculty By-Law Change Proposal**

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- Proposed change:

**1.2 Associate Members of the Graduate Faculty**

Individuals who meet ~~most membership~~ **the above** criteria **for members** but are not presently qualified to direct student dissertation research may be appointed as Associate Members of the Faculty for a term of up to five years. **In addition, biomedical professionals who are employed as staff at a University of Texas institution in Houston, and who hold appropriate graduate degrees may be appointed as Associate Members upon nomination by the Deans and approval by the Membership Committee.** Responsibilities of Associate Members include those of Members except for the supervision of student dissertation research. Associate Members may apply for Regular Membership as appropriate.

- Reasons for change:
  - MD Anderson Genetic Counselors do not hold faculty titles at MDACC. Appointment as GSBS Associate Members requires them first to obtain adjunct faculty appointments at another UTHealth School.
  - So that qualified GSBS Staff members may serve as a course director or sit on a student's committee
  - In both situations appointments would be made upon nomination by the Deans and approval by the GSBS Membership Committee.
- Faculty present at the meeting had no objections to the proposed change.
- There will be an official vote at the next Faculty Meeting on September 10, 2020.

**3. Individual Development Plan (IDP) Update**

Drs. Cherilynn Shadding & Raquel Salinas reported:

- After a break in having a Career Development office at GSBS, we would like to ensure that all students and faculty know about the IDP and its uses.
- The IDP is a planning tool designed to help students identify and meet scientific, professional development, and career planning goals.
- In 2015, GSBS began requiring all GSBS PhD students to complete an IDP on an annual basis via the *myIDP* online tool provided by AAAS.
- An update is being proposed because of the following:

1. *myIDP* assessments are helpful, but the tools to develop training goals are generic and cumbersome to complete
  2. Little guidance is given on goal-setting
  3. Exit interviews indicate variable compliance in utilizing *myIDP* beyond the initial assessment.
- The changes will be to:
    1. Create a stage-specific IDP that incorporates milestone planning, goal setting, and career planning. We understand that goals in year one are very different than year five. We also plan to incorporate academic milestones that they are required to meet into their goal setting and career planning.
    2. Implement IDP touchpoints, which will require advising with the Career Development Office and encourage discussions with research mentors. We want to do a one on one assessment with each student and provide a guide to bolster these discussions with you, their mentors.
    3. Track and monitor IDP utilization and effectiveness via survey mechanisms.
  - The timeline for these changes will be as follows:
    - Proposal of changes – February- May 2020
      - Draft IDP policy and forms presented to faculty and students.
      - Hold focus group feedback sessions with students and faculty.
      - Final revisions based on feedback.
    - Pre-Launch – June-July 2020
      - Targeted emails to all other student and faculty explaining new IDP requirements and forms.
      - IDP training on requirements and utilization for students and faculty.
    - Launch – August 2020
      - Year 1 Cohort: Orientation.
      - Year 3 Cohort: Required advising
      - Year 2, 4+ Cohort: Advising encouraged
    - Support – Ongoing
      - Policy and forms on GSBS website.
      - Ongoing training and support provided.
      - Monitoring & measurement of utilization and effectiveness.
  - Additional information will be forthcoming.

#### 4. MS Stipend Support

Dr. Eric Swindell reported:

- The MS in Biomedical Sciences Program underwent its first external review and one area of improvement was to provide a standardized level of support.
- Currently, MS students accept the offer of admissions with the understanding that they are self-funded. Once they find a mentor many receive funding, however, the level of funding is variable.
- After doing some research and receiving suggestions from faculty at the GSBS Executive Committee the following proposal was created:
  - Funding not guaranteed by GSBS.
  - Students accept offer of admission with the understanding that they are self-funded until they identify an advisor.
  - Faculty taking an MS student **must** provide a minimal level of support (GRA) roughly tagged to Houston cost of living up to a maximum stipend equal to what PhD students receive. Stipend range of \$24,000-\$32,000, plus benefits and tuition and fees).
  - Students have the prerogative to waive this support (example: MDA/UTH employees).
  - Students who accept financial support (GRA) from their advisor may not participate in outside employment, similar to PhD students.
  - Cost to Faculty:
 

Stipend	24,000	to	32,000
Benefits (28%)	6,720		8,960

Tuition	5,818		5,818
TOTAL	36,538	to	46,778

- The rationale is that MS students are carrying out projects alongside PhD students at vastly different levels of support and they do a similar scope of work.
- Any current MS student will need to be brought to the minimum level of support beginning Fall 2020 if this proposal is approved. We will handle each case like we handle emergency funding for PhD students.
- Discussion:
  - Will MS students be eligible to complete rotations?
    - Some MS students complete mini rotations that are 3-5 weeks long.
    - The MS student would fund themselves during any rotations until they officially join a lab.
    - Unfortunately at this time, GSBS is unable to fund the first semester for all MS students.
  - There was a concern regarding the loophole that students can waive the stipend if they are interested in a lab that doesn't have the money to fund them.
  - There is still some ambiguity in having a range in stipend level, why?
    - The rationale to have a range is because MS students are not making as long of a time commitment as a PhD student, so we based the range on cost of living/attendance as the bottom end of the range and \$32,000 as the top since this is the current stipend level for PhD students.
  - About four years ago there was talk about increasing the number of MS students in order to raise additional money for the school. Wouldn't putting this into effect defeat the purpose?
    - We were going to start a Professional MS Program, but we ended up not moving forward with that plan. We agreed that we did not need to look at revenue streams above the students we currently have.
- A vote was taken to determine whether this proposal should be approved and go into effect Fall 2020. The overwhelming majority of faculty agreed to approve this proposal.

## 5. Admissions & Visitation Report

Dr. Eric Swindell reported:

- Thank you to the Admissions committee members and Program members that helped review applications.
- In 2019, there was a 27% increase in applications received and this year there was a 16% increase, for a total of 837 total applications.
- There was a 34% increase in international applications last year, however, this year there was a 30% in domestic applications.
- 2020 Visitation details:
  - 100 female and 50 male were invited
  - 145 accepted our offer to visit and interview and 5 declined
  - 89 domestic and 61 international
  - There will be 123 in person interviews over the four Visitation weekends
  - 22 will be interviewed via Skype
  - Traditional underrepresented minorities represents 37% of this group
  - As of this meeting, we have interviewed 57 applicants over the last two Visitation weekends and offered admission to 48
  - Eight applicants have accepted our offer and two have declined
  - Of the 837 applications, we offered 150 applicants interviews which is 18%
  - MDA or UTH employees made up 36% of the interview offers
  - 50% of current GSBS MS students were offered interviews
  - The probability of being offered an interview is higher in these categories, but it still doesn't mean they will get an interview
  - If you have a technician or research assistant that didn't get an offer, we are happy to speak with them about ways to improve on the next application cycle

## 6. Deans' Report

Drs. Barton and Blackburn reported:

- In order to do our part to reduce the usage of plastic water bottles, we have reusable water bottles for everyone. Going forward we will no longer offer single-use water bottles, please bring your own water bottles from now on. Be kind to mother earth!
- The Dr. John J. Kopchick Research Award is a high-risk, high-impact research project this is a joint application between a mentor and his/her student. We currently have one \$50,000 award each year, but over the years the number of awards will increase. The 2019-2020 winner was to Chao-Hsien Chen & Dr. Michael Curran – “Reversal of neurodegeneration through clearance of pTAU by engineered monocytes.”
- The Dr. John J. and Charlene Kopchick Fellows is a highly competitive fellowship that provides funds for personal use and funds to use on their research project. These students apply through the Common Application for scholarships and fellowships and then a group of finalists are selected and then interviewed. The new class of fellows for 2020 are:
  - Brian Anderson
  - Nathan Berg
  - Medina Colic
  - Kebbeh Darpolor
  - Brittany Jewell
  - Walaa Kattan
  - Elia Lopez
  - Brigid McDonald
  - Deborah Silverman
- Dr. and Mrs. Kopchick meet the new fellows at GSRD and have dinner to talk about science and network.
- The first Kopchick Symposium was held in November and the fellows that have won the award plan and coordinate the symposium.
- External fellowships have increased exponentially since the Deans started at GSBS. Drs. Eric Swindell and Kelly Moore are the main reasons for this increase. All PhD students are required to take Scientific Writing which provides the students with roughly 21% of the information needed for a fellowship application. The other 79% is achieved by one on one meetings with Dr. Moore, our grant navigator.
  - Prior to having a Grant Navigator position we have three extramural fellowships; now there are 18 fellowships.
  - In 2014, 94% of our students who submitted an application were not funded, with only 6% funded.
  - In 2018, 68% not funded and 32% were funded.
  - These numbers are proof that offering comprehensive and individualized fellowship application support to students increases funding success.
  - 27 students submitted F30 or F31 applications in 2019. Currently two students received funding and the decisions for cycles two and three are still pending.
- With so many students applying for external fellowships, Dr. Moore created a course – GS21 1171 – NIH Fellowship Proposal Development Course. It’s an 8-week course, offered each semester to assist students in writing better proposals. In Summer 2019, 15 students took the course and here are some comments from these students:
  - “There are many documents and steps involved in the completion of this fellowship, but this class organizes everything into a digestible format.”
  - “Protected writing time was very valuable. I feel very confident about my F31 submission.”
  - “In my personal opinion, as long as students put the effort to stay up with the schedule, this course is the perfect approach to F31 writing.”
- Recently, we sent out a survey regarding interest in a dual MBA/PhD degree.
  - Of the students that responded to the survey, the vast majority are interested in having this degree program. However, if they are required to pay for it those numbers change.
  - Of the faculty that responded, there is interest but not as interested as the students.

- Dr. Shadding is going to lead this project and will work with the GSBS Advisory Council and other interested parties to come up with a possibility that could work for the GSBS. There are a lot of details that need to be hashed out. More information will come – stay tuned.
- Upcoming Events:
  - Commencement will be held on May 9th at 10:00AM at Rice University, Shepherd School of Music, Alice Pratt Brown Hall.
    - Our keynote speaker is Elaine Fuchs, PhD and her talk is entitled: “ Learning to becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable”
  - Graduate Student Research Day (GSRD) will be held on June 25<sup>th</sup> and a reception and poster preview will occur on June 24<sup>th</sup>.

## **7. Old Business**

No old business was discussed.

## **8. New Business:**

No new business was discussed.

*The following reports were not presented at the meeting but were available on the GSBS website prior to the meeting:*

1. [Report of the Standing Committees](#)
2. [Report of the Executive Committee](#)
3. [Report of the Graduate Student Association](#)

**MEETING ADJOURNED at approximately 4:00 p.m.**

Joya Chandra, Ph.D.  
2019-2020 President, GSBS Faculty