

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

Executive Committee Report

Dr. Jeffrey Frost, Chair

Meeting on August 20, 2020

**I. Approval of Minutes from June 18, 2020 Meeting**

Minutes were approved as written.

**II. Diversity & Inclusion Discussion**

Cherilynn Shadding reported:

- Over the summer, GSBS administered a Climate Survey that was sent out to faculty, students, and staff. About 300 people responded to the survey and more started it but never finished. We will have an external evaluator analyze the results of the survey and then report back to GSBS the results. From there, we will determine our next steps.
- GSBS will be participating in an NIH study in Culturally Aware Mentoring beginning in January. We will need roughly 25 GSBS faculty participate in the study. Additional information will come once we know which arm of the study we are in and additional details about the study.
- During recruitment season will be targeting schools that have a minority focus. We have developed a faculty and student ambassador program to help us with our recruitment efforts. If have ideas on how to get the word out and get a better response, please let us know.

**III. Onboarding/Orientation**

Eric Swindell reported:

- Orientation begins on Monday, August 24. Due to the pandemic we had to pivot and organize a completely virtual orientation this year. We will be utilizing Zoom for the live sessions next week and there are additional sessions that have been recorded and uploaded to Canvas for the students to complete before and after orientation week. Each Program will have a 2-hour session for them to talk about their programs and the activities and resources they provide. If you would like more information about your program session, please contact your program coordinator.
- At Orientation, there will be a session about COVID and the current guidelines from our parent institutions. In addition, all our students (incoming and current) will receive a reusable face shield. GSBS recently distributed many face shields at the TMC Commons.
- Rotations for PhD students have been pushed back to start on October 1 to allow students more time to find a faculty member and/or to self-quarantine. We are aware that some students have already selected a rotation advisor and Academic Affairs will work with each student on a case by case basis to approve an earlier start date.
- GSBS classes will start on Monday, August 31. All didactic classes will be held online to comply with institutional guidance and to maintain safe social distancing for our faculty and students.
- Due to the pandemic, a number of US Embassies abroad have been closed and due to travel restrictions, fifteen students have deferred to the Spring 2021 semester and an additional two have decided to defer to Fall 2021. Since we have a fairly large number of students planning to start in the Spring we will need to develop an academic plan for these students since they will be unable to take the core course until the Fall which may impact Program requirements.
- Public transportation and parking in the TMC is a major concern for our students. There isn't an easy solution to this. One suggestion was for students to use a bicycle as a form of transportation around campus. Karen has some information as part of the transportation Canvas module about biking in the TMC.

**IV. GSA Report**

Unexpectedly no GSA representative was present at this meeting to provide an update.

## V. Deans' Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- **GSBS Leadership**
  - We recently had a WebEx send off for Shelley on August 18.
  - At the current time, both institutions are in favor of a one-dean model rather than the two-dean model that we've had for the past eight years.
    - A task force was created of faculty representatives at MD Anderson to provide persuasive recommendations in support of the two-dean model. These recommendations were submitted to Dr. Draetta's, but at the moment it has not had a positive effect to change their decision.
    - A suggestion from the group was to have the Executive Committee draft a letter, but overall the decision was to wait to take any action.
  - In order to maintain the same level of operation, we have promoted Dr. Bill Mattox to Senior Associate Dean of Graduate Education. With this new role he will attend many of the committee's Dr. Barton was attending and will work with leadership to ensure GSBS has a voice and our school and students are taken into consideration when decisions are being made. Dr. Blackburn has ongoing with leadership at MD Anderson as well.
- The SACS-COC major review is nearing the end. The on-site visits are will occur in the Spring. We are grateful for UTHealth and MD Anderson working together to share data to lighten the load. Thank you for everyone that helped put this together and especially, Eric Swindell.
- We reached our fundraising goal for the year of 1 million dollars. The Hawkins family provided a new gift to support another fellowship bringing funding for two full rides. John Harper provided a gift to support a full fellowship. It's been amazing to continue to build these relationships over the years.

## VI. COVID-19 Update

GSBS Dean and Associate Deans reported:

- We continue to monitor the status of COVID in our community and research labs. Thankfully, at GSBS we have only had a few students that have tested positive for COVID and none required advanced care. Overall, there has been a decrease in hospitalizations. There are daily conversations about the current status of COVID at UTHealth and the community.
- Communication has been extremely important and we continue to provide updates to our faculty and staff. Tracey Barnett created a one-page resource flyer with a lot of helpful information.
- As of today, UTHealth is in phase 3 and MD Anderson is in phase 2. MD Anderson is moving towards Phase 3. MD Anderson is administering "pulse surveys" to check on how faculty, staff and trainees feel about reducing shift work. There are no longer shifts on the weekend, which has been a positive shift for experiments. Based on previous surveys there were a lot of people that were not fans of the shifts because it made it difficult to perform some experiments with those time constraints. During every phase, MD Anderson wants to hear from everyone, especially trainees about any issues they may have.
- Per the GSBS COVID-19 Recommendations, we are requiring students to have a just-in-time meeting (not a formal advisory committee meeting) with their advisory committee and about 100 students have had this meeting.
- Please help us advocate for our students on these issues: public transportation safety and child/elder. If you have any ideas, send them our way.

## VII. New Business

- **Proposed Standing Committees for 2020-2021**
  - Proposed committees were voted on and approved.
- **Proposed President Elect for 2020-2021 – Michael Galko, PhD**
  - Proposed president elect was voted on and approved.
- **MD/PhD Students**

- There have been some issues/obstacles in getting MD/PhD students appointed at MD Anderson. Dr. Bodurka will look into this issue, please follow-up with her on any specific issues anyone has faced. It is highly possible that COVID did play a role in the delay in getting the student badge access to the lab.
- MD/PhD students have a badge that has logos for the McGovern Medical School and GSBS.

**VIII. Old Business**

No old business was discussed.