

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

**Executive Committee Report**

**Dr. Joya Chandra, Chair**

**Meeting on August 29, 2019**

**I. Approval of Minutes from March 21, 2019 Meeting**

Minutes were approved as written.

**II. Introduction of New GSBS Staff Members**

- Conner Clark is the new Coordinator of Admissions. She will assist in the application process and visitation.
- Raquel Salinas is the new Assistant Director of Career Development. She will begin one-on-one student meetings soon and will hold workshops and seminars for student career development opportunities.
- Yi Fang is the new Programmer Analyst. She is behind the scenes, but has an important job to keep our database working seamlessly.
- Amanda Minogue is a Baylor doctoral student completing a summer internship in the Office of Academic Affairs. She is analyzing alumni and exit survey data.

**III. GSA Report**

Wayne Jiang reported:

- Mr. Jiang is the new GSA President for the 2019-2020 academic year. He is a doctoral candidate in the Cancer Biology Program. His advisor is Dr. Kunal Rai who is in the Department of Genomic Medicine at MD Anderson.
- Peer Mentoring
  - This initiative is to help new students transition into graduate school and Houston seamlessly.
  - Each new student is paired with a current students – current and new students sign up to be part of the program
  - 57 new students joined the program and 62 current students signed up to mentor.
  - The first priority when matching students up is their academic goals and then program.
  - Per feedback from students that have participated, their peer mentors have been very helpful.

**IV. MS Program Review**

Dr. Eric Swindell reported:

- The GSBS Deans' Office received the reviewer response two days ago so the official response hasn't been completed.
- Reviewers:
  - External
    - James Sterling, PhD, Professor and Director, Postdoctoral Professional Master's Program, Keck Graduate Institute; Faculty Director of the Professional Science Master's National Office
  - Internal
    - James Bankson, PhD, Professor, Imaging Physics ,MD Anderson Cancer Center
    - Heidi B. Kaplan, PhD, Associate Professor, Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, McGovern Medical School, UTHealth
- Purpose of the Review: To conduct a peer assessment to determine if the Individualized Master of Science Program is meeting its stated goals, providing its students with a high quality MS—level graduate education, and performing in a manner consistent with GSBS standards and expectations, and to recommend improvements.
- Program's Weaknesses:
  1. Issues of Inclusion.

- Beginning this summer MS students are able to affiliate with any PhD Program.
- 2. Limited Career Development opportunities.
  - This office is now back up and running and part of the goal is to have seminars and workshops specifically for the MS student population, as well as one-on-one meetings with MS students.
- 3. Financial Challenges for MS students.
  - MS students are self-funded and are aware of this when they are admitted into the MS Program, however they still need money to support themselves.
  - Additional discussions are needed in order to determine a possible solution to this challenge.
- Alumni and current students were surveyed for the review.
- A formal response to the reviewers' recommendation with more details than above will be provided at the next Executive Committee meeting.
- Discussion:
  - Need to gather more data on students, especially underrepresented minority status and first generation.
  - MS students were able to participate in the Peer Mentoring Program.
  - Additional research should be done to find best practices on funding MS students.
  - It would be helpful if MS students were able to complete mini-rotations before choosing a lab.
  - Karen Weinberg, Associate Director of Admissions, informs students that they are admitted into the program in late spring. She answers any questions they have or refers them to another GSBS staff member to help them through the process.
  - Dr. Kelly Moore, Assistant Director of Graduate Education, starts contacting them shortly after they receive admission letter. In these communications, she informs them to start contacting possible faculty mentors in June, but they can wait until orientation.
  - Many of our MS students apply for the PhD student and the success rate is fairly high.
    - Are international students also applying and for PhD and successful at receiving admission? Not entirely sure, but initial thought is yes.
    - Seven of our new PhD students were in our MS program.
      - Two admissions MS students applied, but did not receive admission.

## V. PhD/MBA Discussion

Deans Barton and Blackburn reported:

- Initial communication has been made with the McCombs School of Business Dean at The University of Texas at Austin.
  - The Dean offered a few different options: onsite MBA at UT-Austin, Executive MBA Program in Houston, and a MS program.
  - Initially ask about the MBA in Houston, but there is no flexibility in the curriculum.
  - MBA in Austin would have more flexibility in curriculum, but would require students to be in Austin.
  - Additional discussions are needed with other schools in Houston and surrounding areas, especially Rice University and the University of Houston.
  - Price is negotiable with UT-Austin, to what extent is yet to be determined.
- Based on the surveys, students are excited about this possible opportunity, but faculty are less so.
- A catered MBA for biomedical degrees would be ideal, but would take significantly longer to develop.
- Discussion:
  - Do students want the experience and information (more akin to a certificate) or do they want the degree? - Having the MBA is what is desired.
  - There were concerns brought up about student's being able to balance being in the lab full-time and completing an MBA at the same time along with extending the time to degree.
  - Additional information is needed to see if a MBA is necessary. Many businesses will help pay for the program if it's needed and some the PhD is sufficient.
  - It's helpful to be multi-disciplinary and can see why students are interested in this degree.
  - Determine if this is part of their career development and target students for this program instead of opening this program to all students.

- Complete the degrees in sections, similar to the MD/PhD so they aren't splitting their time between two degrees at the same time.
  - The model is still yet to be determined – there are many ways it could be structured and finding the best fit for our students will be part of further discussions.
- Reach out to alumni in the business sector to gain their insights on whether an MBA would have assisted them in reaching their career goals.
- Discuss this item at a Student Town Hall to gain additional insight from current students.
- Additional research, data and opinions will be taken into consideration before a final decision is made.

## VI. Deans' Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- Thank you for everyone that has served on this committee and will be rotating off.
- There were 105 new students attending orientation. It was a busy week, but everyone had a good time and learned a lot about GSBS and the programs we have.

## VII. New Business

- **Proposed Standing Committees for 2019-2020**
  - Proposed committees were voted on and approved.
- **Proposed President Elect for 2019-2020**
  - Proposed president elect was voted on and approved.
- **GSBS Programs: Annual Progress Reports**
  - Major Program reviews occur every seven years and a mini-review occurs yearly.
  - After Reshaping, we stopped the mini-reviews, but now it is time to start them again.
  - We are hoping to revamp the process.
    - GSBS provides Program data for the previous academic year and requests answers to the "Guiding Questions for Annual Progress Reports from GSBS Programs."
      - Previously, the questions were optional but now Programs would be required to answer all questions.
      - Some questions have been changed.
    - This committee, will review the GSBS report and Program progress reports for oversight purposes and bring up any concerns or commendation.
    - Finally, this information would be shared with Program Directors Committee
  - The review timeline aligns with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
  - Suggestions:
    - Questions to ask:
      - What changes are you anticipating?
      - What has changed from the previous year?
      - What are your major challenges you faced this year?
    - Ask the Programs' to set goals and ask what innovative activities/changes have they implemented – look more towards the future.
      - Numerous committee members were in favor of this idea.
    - Complete mini-review less frequently.
    - Drill down to the beneficial information – reduce number of questions, if possible.
    - Program don't mind providing information, but they would like to receive what other Programs are doing and hear recommendations in order to improve and make changes.

## VIII. Old Business

- Update on Electronic System for GSBS Forms & Signatures

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- The goal is to have forms signed electronically rather than the student running around campus getting all the required signatures.

- Our intern, Amanda Minogue, researched a few companies and her recommendation was SignEasy.
- SignEasy allows for parallel signatures so multiple people can sign the form at the same time. It also does not require you to log-in.
- If we do begin using electronic signatures for forms, we will use it for one to two forms at first rather than all at once to see how the new process is received from both students and faculty.
- The next step to move forward will be to look into cost and having a demo.

**Dr. Jeffrey Frost, Chair**

### **Meeting on October 17, 2019**

#### **I. Approval of Minutes from August 29, 2019 Meeting**

Minutes were approved as written.

#### **II. Introduction of New GSBS Staff Member**

- Nicolle Patterson is the TL1 Program Manager. She will assist the 15 trainees that will be appointed through this grant. There will be eleven pre-doctoral fellows and four postdoctoral fellows.

#### **III. GSA Report**

Wayne Jiang reported:

- The GSA will host the following events:
  - Halloween Pumpkin Carving Contest on October 24 at 4:00PM in the Large Classroom
  - Pet Therapy on November 14 at 4:00PM in the Large Classroom
  - Thanksgiving Peer Mentoring Social on November 22 at 4:00PM in the Large Classroom
- The GSA held the Fall Student Town Hall on October 10.
  - Prior to the meeting they solicited the student body for questions or concerns they had.
  - From now on, the GSA will publish the minutes of every meeting after Dr. Shadding approves them.
  - Question: How can we get more students to attend the town halls?
    - Attendance is dependent on the topics that will be discussed at the meeting.
    - The plan for future meetings will be to put the agenda together in advance of the meeting so that students are aware of the topics that will be discussed.
    - The GSA will video conference to south campus to see if they can increase attendance.

#### **IV. MS Program Review**

Dr. Eric Swindell reported:

- The MS Program was reviewed for the first time
- Reviewers:
  - External
    - James Sterling, PhD, Professor and Director, Postdoctoral Professional Master's Program, Keck Graduate Institute; Faculty Director of the Professional Science Master's National Office
  - Internal
    - James Bankson, PhD, Professor, Imaging Physics, MD Anderson Cancer Center
    - Heidi B. Kaplan, PhD, Associate Professor, Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, McGovern Medical School, UTHealth
- Purpose of the Review: To conduct a peer assessment to determine if the Individualized Master of Science Program is meeting its stated goals, providing its students with a high quality MS—level graduate education, and performing in a manner consistent with GSBS standards and expectations, and to recommend improvements.
- Issues of Inclusion.
  - Beginning this summer MS students are able to affiliate with any PhD Program so that they can be a part of social activities, journal club, etc., however, this is not a requirement.

- GSBS just began having a month MS seminar series where an MS student will present at each seminar. At this time this is not a requirement, nor an official GSBS course, but it's possible this will become both required and an official course in the future – this semester is a pilot program.
- Limited Career Development opportunities.
  - We have discussed having seminars and workshops specifically for the MS student population, as well as one-on-one meetings with MS students with the Career Development Office.
- Financial Challenges for MS students.
  - MS students are self-funded and are aware of this when they are admitted into the MS Program, however most need money to support themselves.
  - There is a lot of confusion from both students and faculty of the type and level of support they can provide. We will look into the possibility of a standard level of support for MS students.
    - Everyone in attendance likes the idea of having a standard level of support.
  - We will look into the possibility (budget and best practices) of providing GSBS funding for the first semester. If this is a possibility, the MS students could use this semester for mini-rotations in order to find the best lab fit.
- Drs. Swindell and Moore will begin meeting with MS students and their advisors to discuss GSBS policies (i.e. expectations for advisory committee, how often should they meet, timelines, etc.)
- The Executive Committee unanimously approved the responses and recommendations of this review.

## **V. Alumni Survey Data**

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- GSBS Intern, Amanda Minogue, analyzed survey responses from two different surveys – Alumni and Exiting Student.
- The information provided is just a sampling of the data that would be of interest to this group.
- Within the Exiting Student Survey: Advanced Training, Breadth of Courses, Course Quality, and Flexibility to Accommodate Needs has all significantly improved and a majority of alumni responded favorably to all these topics with either Very Good or Good responses.
- 80% of our alumni had a first-author publication upon graduating from GSBS.
- In the Exiting Student survey, MS students are overrepresented (over one third of the responses are from MS students) in the responses, however, we confirmed that 100% of our PhD students did have a first-author paper.
- From the Alumni survey, there is evidence that not all our students have the opportunity to give a scientific presentation. We plan on looking into this to increase these numbers.
- Currently this is a fairly small data set, but we plan to continue to survey the students to build upon the data and crosscheck throughout the years.
- The questions on the Alumni survey have been revamped, but didn't change all the questions so we didn't lose the ability to review changes from previous years.

## **VI. Deans' Report**

Deans Barton and Blackburn reported:

- The inaugural Kopchick Symposium will occur on Monday, November 4, please attend if you are available.
- There were some concerns brought up at the Student Town Hall.
  - Email storage for students at UHealth is limited and has become problematic for students.
    - Dr. Blackburn has asked the students to articulate that information in an email and he will then forward that information to IT to look into options.
  - Deans Barton and Blackburn have put in a lot of effort regarding direct shuttles from south campus to the main campus. With that, additional refinement is needed – specifically for them to run later and increase the number of express shuttles.
- First-year students would like to apply for travel awards to attend conferences. Everyone was in favor of allowing them to apply if they will be presenting research that they performed while at GSBS (tutorials), but not if they just want to attend a conference.

- Thank you all for serving on the Executive Committee, please feel free to bring up any issues that you want to discuss – we want your feedback and opinions.

## **VII. 2021 SACS Review & Site Visit**

Dr. Eric Swindell reported:

- Every ten years MD Anderson and UTHealth go through a major SACS review, which includes a written report and site visit. Every 5 years an interim review is completed. The last interim review was completed in March 2016 and it was approved as written.
- Both MD Anderson and UTHealth are gearing up for the 10-year major review. Both institutions will hold mock-site visits next year and the official site visits will occur in 2021.
- We are currently in the process of collecting data and writing up writing narratives to address the 72 standards.
- It's highly possible we will need your assistance during the site visits so we wanted you to be aware of this. We will appreciate your time and effort with this in the future.

## **VIII. New Business**

### **• Proposed Faculty By-Law Change**

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- The reason for the requested by-law change is because there are cases in which people do not hold a faculty title, but have the appropriate degrees and credentials to teach and/or mentor our students.
- This change would specifically address Genetic Counselors at MD Anderson being able to apply and GSBS staff that want to direct a course.
- The Executive Committee approved the change to the by-laws with a minor correction in wording.

## **IX. Old Business**

### **• Update on Electronic System for GSBS Forms & Signatures**

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- SignEasy provided a demonstration to GSBS and it everything they offered would work well for our purposes. Unfortunately, they are cost prohibitive.
- We looked into using Qualtrics, but it won't work for our needs.
- We plan on looking into Embark and other companies similar to SignEasy.
- MD Anderson has a contract with DocuSign, it might be possible to utilize their contract.
- PDF electronic signatures have not been successful and only allow one signature per form.