

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

**Executive Committee Report**

**Dr. Joya Chandra, Chair**

**Meeting on January 17, 2019**

**I. GSA Report**

Robert Williams reported:

- The GSA had their first meeting of the semester to devise a strategic plan.
- The housing survey that was created last year, specifically to address apartments that flooded during Hurricane Harvey will be repeated this year. This year the survey will include price ranges of the apartment. The survey will be sent out earlier this year in order to help more first year students make the best decision on their housing options around the Medical Center.
  - Auxiliary Enterprises will continue to hold units at University Housing Opening for GSBS students, but this does depend on availability.
  - Auxiliary Enterprises will be under new management soon and updates will be made. One such update will be a portal to pay rent online.
- There will be a Student Town Hall with the Deans on March 27<sup>th</sup> at 10:30AM in the GSBS Large Classroom.
- There are plans to have a separate Student Town Hall to address concerns about UT Housing and safety.
- Another Pet Therapy day is scheduled for February 15<sup>th</sup> at 12:30PM in the GSBS Large Classroom.
- UTHealth and MD Anderson Postdoctoral Fellows met with the GSA because they want to collaborate with students.
- GSA will have a photo booth at commencement.

**II. GSBS Social Media Strategy**

Ms. Tracey Barnett & Dr. Mike Lorenz reported:

- In general, our PR/social media strategy is to publicize our student and faculty successes to entice prospective students, and to build a sense of community among our current students, faculty, and alumni.
- The GSBS currently uses these social media platforms:
  - Facebook
    - Main page: [www.facebook.com/mdandersonuthgrad/](http://www.facebook.com/mdandersonuthgrad/) (@mdandersonuthgrad)
    - Alumni group: [www.facebook.com/groups/mdandersonuthalumni/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/mdandersonuthalumni/)
  - Twitter
    - [https://twitter.com/MDA\\_UTHGrad](https://twitter.com/MDA_UTHGrad) (@MDA\_UTHGrad)
    - Does not have to be original content
    - Retweet from trusted individuals to start your presence on Twitter.
    - MD Anderson offers training through the Education Center
  - LinkedIn
    - Company page: <https://www.linkedin.com/school/uthealth-md-anderson-cancer-center-biomedical-sciences>
    - Career development group: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12035576/> (LinkedIn login required.)
    - Alumni group: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3903065/> (LinkedIn login required.)
  - YouTube
    - [www.youtube.com/user/UTGSBS](http://www.youtube.com/user/UTGSBS)
    - Mainly used for commencement videos
- Across these platforms, we use the school's hashtag, #WeAreGSBS, and if you are active on social media, please feel free to use the hashtag for GSBS-related posts.

- To share news about faculty or student successes (research breakthroughs, awards, etc.), please contact Tracey at [tracey.r.barnett@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:tracey.r.barnett@uth.tmc.edu).
- To help spread news about the school, be sure to identify yourself in news stories (local, national, international, or institutional) as a GSBS faculty member.
- There has been discussion to add Instagram as another social media platform, but the concern there was that we didn't have a large enough catalog of photos. Now that there is a trend to share stories here as well, we need to discuss joining Instagram again.
  - The Genetic Counseling Program uses Instagram and it is highly effective for recruitment and current students.
- Suggestions:
  - Mention student and/or faculty alma maters to extend reach of each post.
  - On the application question: "How did you hear about GSBS", add social media to the list.

### III. Deans' Report

Deans Barton & Blackburn reported:

- MD Anderson's president emeritus and GSBS faculty member John Mendelsohn passed away on Jan. 7. A moment of silence was held in his honor.
- Jim Allison, Ph.D., won the Noble Prize in Physiology or Medicine for launching an effective new way to attack cancer by treating the immune system rather than the tumor. He shared this award with Tasuku Honjo, M.D., Ph.D., of Kyoto University, Japan. Allison accepted his award at a formal ceremony in Stockholm on Monday, Dec. 10.
- Casey Ager has been awarded the 2018 Jess Hay Chancellor's Graduate Student Research Fellowship. This prestigious award is given to two students per year across the entire UT System. Casey Ager is a Ph.D. student in the Immunology Program and his advisor is Michael Curran, Ph.D.
- Three GSBS faculty members were named AAAS Fellows: Patrick Hwu, M.D., Jeffrey E. Gershenwald, M.D., and Jacqueline T. Hecht, Ph.D.
- Two students receive NIH awards:
  - Ph.D. student Teresa Nguyen received an NIH Predoctoral Individual NRSA (F31) Fellowship, her advisor is Juan Fueyo, M.D.
  - M.D./Ph.D. student Deborah Silverman received an NIH Individual Predoctoral NRSA M.D./Ph.D. Fellowship (F30) and her advisor is Patrick Hwu, M.D.
  - Dr. Kelly Moore works on fellowship applications with the students via one-on-one meetings. In addition, she keeps a list of all positive and negative comments received and continues to make tweaks on the boiler plates and advice she provides to the students. Roughly 33% of our students that apply for fellowships are funded.
- The new class of Kopchick Fellows have been announced and they are:
  - Daniela Branco; Advisor: David Followill, Ph.D.
  - Alex Cogdill; Advisors: Jennifer A. Wargo, M.D. and James P. Allison, Ph.D.
  - Natasha Kharas; Advisor: Valentin Dragoi, Ph.D.
  - Roxsan Manshoury; Advisor: Don Gibbons, M.D., Ph.D.
  - Alexis Mobley; Advisors: Jaroslaw Aronowski, Ph.D. and Louise McCullough, M.D., Ph.D.
  - Sydney Moyer; Advisor: Guillermina Lozano, Ph.D.
  - Tristen Tellman; Advisor: Mary Farach-Carson, Ph.D.
  - 2019 Charlene Kopchick Fellow - Brittany Jewell; Advisor: Dung-Fang Lee, Ph.D.
- The application deadline for our Ph.D. and S.M.S. programs was January 4.
  - A total of 1,066 applications were submitted by the deadline:
    - Ph.D.: 809 (a 20% increase from last year)
    - S.M.S: 243 (228 Genetic Counseling, 15 Medical Physics)
    - M.S.: 11 (The deadline is April 1 so additional applications will be submitted)

- We have secured a new Associate Dean of Diversity, Career Development and Alumni Affairs. Dr. Cherilynn Shadding was at Washington University for numerous years. We thank the search committee and everyone who attended meetings.
- Commencement will be on May 18 at 10:00AM at Rice University, Shepherd School of Music, Alice Pratt Brown Hall. The Keynote Speaker will be President Peter WT Pisters, MD, MHCM

#### IV. Admissions Update

Dr. Eric Swindell & Ms. Karen Weinberg reported:

- Total applications submitted to date is 1,065.
  - PhD: 809
  - SMS Medical Physics: 14
  - SMS Genetic Counseling: 230
  - MS: 12 (deadline is April 1)
- PhD Applicants
  - Citizenship
    - Domestic: 319 or 40%
    - International: 490 or 60%
  - Gender
    - Female: 436 or 54%
    - Male: 372 or 46%
- Reviewed by the Admissions Committee
  - 200 total to date
  - An additional 150 is on the agenda for January 23 meeting
  - At least an additional 120 for the January 30 meeting
- Interview invitations (including 6 Medical Physics)
  - Total: 69
  - Accepted: 65
  - Decline: 1
  - Outstanding invitations: 3
  - Citizenship
    - Domestic: 40
    - International: 29
  - Gender
    - Female: 38
    - Male: 31
- We are considering moving the deadline up to either December 1 or 15. Baylor College of Medicine is one of the only schools that has a deadline after December 15, many schools have a December 1 deadline.
  - Based on analytics of when applications were submitted, there was a spike on December 1 with roughly 150 applications submitted.
- We admit the best students and do not focus on the student's research interests.

#### V. Electronic System for GSBS Forms & Signatures

Dr. William Mattox reported:

- Rebecca Berdeaux suggested this agenda item.
- The GSBS looked into this a few years ago and was working to create a homegrown program, however, it was going to be extremely expensive so we are now looking at using an off-the-shelf program like DocuSign or another similar program.
- If you are interested in helping GSBS test these products, please let Dr. Mattox know.
- Dr. Mattox will provide an update at next meeting.
- One suggestion was to require an original signature on some forms to ensure that the student and faculty member have a conversation first.

## **VI. Changes to Advisory Committee Structure**

Dr. William Mattox reported:

- There are two proposed changes to the Advisory Committee structure:
  - Requesting the advisor to step out of the room to allow the student to discuss any issues with the committee without the advisor present.
  - The chair of the advisory committee not the student's advisor.
- Overall, the committee wasn't in favor of making either proposal a requirement for the Programs to follow.
- Suggestions/Comments:
  - Challenges the students may have with their advisors is typically the exception to the rule (affecting less than 5%), but it would be helpful to implement resources for the student and/or faculty to help them navigate issues that may arise.
  - The advisory committee meeting is over so the advisor has no obligation to stay
  - The Genetic Counseling Program Director meets with the students in her Program quarterly and they can address questions and concerns at that time.
  - Create a guide for Program Directors to assist them in mentoring/advising these students and faculty.
  - Have a counterweight to the advisor. Someone that would act as an advocate for the student.
    - If a student has a secondary mentor they could be the counterweight.
  - Create a page on the website about the Ombudsmen's Office.
  - If having the advisor step out is implemented –
    - The GSBS needs to create a guideline/follow-up protocol when an issue is brought up to the committee.
  - Program Director meet with every student in the Program one-on-one with help of other faculty members a couple times per year so they can check on their progress and any concerns they have.
  - Discuss these proposals at the next Academic Standards Meeting to get their read.

## **VII. New Business**

No new business was discussed.

## **VIII. Old Business**

No old business was discussed.

### **Meeting on March 21, 2019**

#### **I. Introduction of Dr. Cherilynn Shadding – Associate Dean of Diversity, Career Development & Alumni Affairs**

- Dr. Shadding joined GSBS from Washington University in St. Louis. She is currently getting to know everyone especially different student and faculty groups and leaders.

#### **II. GSA Report**

Robert Williams reported:

- Housing survey currently has about 90 responses. They plan on publishing data at the end of April. The survey includes questions about monthly rent, neighborhood and if they would recommend the apartment.
- The call for the McGovern Teaching Award has been sent to the students and have received a good response thus far. The award winner will have a short acceptance speech at commencement
- There will be a Town Hall next Wednesday and the GSA will be introducing Dr. Shadding. The rest of the meeting will be a general brain storming session. It was requested that the GSA request feedback from the student body regarding the direct shuttles so that they have evidence that the shuttles should remain.

- There will be a final mentor/mentee luncheon in mid/late April.
- There will be a Candidacy Exam Prep talk next Tuesday which will include a student and faculty panel.
- There will be an Ice Cream Social and Photography contest in the summer.

### III. Deans' Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- 2019 Commencement **Ceremony will be held on Saturday, May 18, 10a.m.**, at Rice University, Shepherd School of Music, Alice Pratt Brown Hall. Speaker: MD Anderson President Peter WT Pisters, M.D., MHCM. Please attend if you can.
- Graduate Student Research Day will be held all-day on June 27<sup>th</sup>. The event features competitions for Graduate School students that include oral and poster presentations and elevator speeches competitions. The keynote speech will be delivered by Dr. Janelle Ayres from the Salk Institute. This event continues to evolve every year and this year is no exception. There will be a Poster Preview and reception to be held on Wednesday, June 26.
- Dr. Blackburn has been spending a lot of time in Austin since it is the legislative session to be an advocate for higher education. For the first time in quite a while, Texas is increasing the budget by three percent. There is active participation from graduate schools for this process.
- TMC3 is a collaborative project that the Deans have been part of for over 4 years. The founding partners are A&M, Baylor, TMC, UTHealth & MD Anderson. Deans Barton and Blackburn were brought in especially to bring insight on the educational aspects of this project. Contractors have been hired so the project is starting to move forward with the hope that we could have a ground-breaking ceremony in roughly a year.
- **Odemaris Narvaez del Pilar in Dr. Jichao Chen's lab and both Samantha Debes and Russell Milton in Dr. Valentin Dragoi's lab** all received fundable scores on their NIH F31 Fellowship applications.
  - These fellowships pay for a stipend of \$24,000 and GSBS will supplement the student's stipend to match our stipend of \$32,000.
  - In 2018, 37 applications were submitted and 37% were funded. 5 years ago, we only have 5% funded.
- There was talk about creating a joint career development office between UTHealth and MD Anderson to include both graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Surveys have been sent to receive feedback on this topic from all interested parties, but there hasn't been any changes made thus far. Overall, we need career development for all of our trainees, but it's a complicated landscape. The main item we want to be sure of is that if this does occur our graduate students are also a primary focus and it's not all geared towards postdoctoral fellows.

### IV. Admissions Update

Dr. Eric Swindell & Ms. Karen Weinberg reported:

- Thank you to everyone. The only reason we get great students each year is because of the time everyone devotes. Whether it be at admissions committee meetings, visitations, interviewing, and/or reaching out to applicants after their visit. Again, thank you!
- GSBS interviewed 139 applicants and offered 112 applicants admission. Currently 37 applicants have accepted our offer and 12 have declined. There are 63 outstanding offers.
- There are 13 applicants on the waitlist. We are in the process of talking to faculty that are interested these applicants. Anyone that is selected from the waitlist will receive an admission letter by April 1<sup>st</sup>.
- For the last 7 years, our acceptance rate has been around 50%. GSBS can fund around 50 paid PhD students each year.
- GSBS no longer requires the GRE (except for Medical Physics and Genetic Counseling). The Admissions Committee didn't mention anything about the GRE no longer being part of the review, however, some faculty members who interviewed applicants did mention this in their evaluations.
- Genetic Counseling received about 230 applications and interviewed 45. This was the second year of the match and the process worked well last year. After the match 10 students will be part of the entering Fall 2019 class.

- MD/PhD made 9 offers and 5 applicants accepted the offer. There has been some discussion that the program should move to a match system.
- April 1 is the Masters application deadline and there will be one Admissions Committee meeting to discuss the applications. The plan is to admit 15-25 students. Currently, there are about 100 applications submitted.
- The Masters Program is being reviewed for the first time. The external reviewer is James Sterling and the two internal reviewers are Jim Bankson and Heidi Kaplan.

**V. New Business**

No new business was discussed.

**VI. Old Business**

- Electronic System for GSBS Forms & Signatures  
Dr. Bill Mattox
  - Originally, we were trying to build a program from scratch, but it became cost prohibited. Now we are researching an off-the-shelf type of program.
  - It's important that whichever program we go with allows for customization since our forms change rather frequently. In addition, the program needs to allow parallel signatures since multiple faculty members sign these forms.
  - It's possible that UTHealth could have use for a system like this and a university wide contract could be a more cost effective option. It was recommended to bring this topic up at the next Academic Council to determine this possibility.
  - MD Anderson has adopted DocuSign and faculty this year were able to sign their contract this way. Everyone at the meeting agreed it was a user friendly experience and streamlined the process.