

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

Executive Committee Report

Dr. Michael Galko, Chair

Meeting on October 15, 2020

I. Approval of Minutes from August 20, 2020 Meeting

Minutes were approved as written.

II. GSA Report

Malcolm Moses reported:

- The GSA recently held a Student Town Hall, which are typically held once each semester. Prior to each Town Hall a survey is sent out to the entire student body so that questions and concerns can be compiled and sent to the Dean's Office before the Town Hall. The survey asked if students specifically had any concerns over leadership changes, shuttles, parking, social, academic, COVID-19, and other concerns. The students could select as many concerns as wanted. The main topics at the Town Hall were: Discussing changes in leadership at GSBS, COVID safety and cost and safety of transportation. There were 82 participants in all at the Town Hall, which included GSBS staff.
- The GSA is working on a way to replace pet therapy.
- Dr. Blackburn reminded Malcolm that the Dean's Office is a resource and to let us know of any issues or complaints he hears from the student body at any time – not just during student town halls.

III. GSBS Visitation

Eric Swindell reported:

- Four Visitation dates have been set and they will occur completely virtual this year to ensure safety for everyone – January 15, January 29, February 12 and February 26.
- We are currently working on the schedule and hope to have it as close to the in-person Visitation as possible. We hope that you will be able to be available for virtual interviews.
- To students we make an offer to, we will invite them to tour the school, of course, maintaining social distancing and other COVID safety precautions.
- If you have any recommendations, please reach out to Dr. Swindell.
- Recommendations:
 - The Genetic Counseling Program had to switch to virtual visitations last year. They would be willing to provide the ways they were able to make it a more personal experience and provide as much information as possible.
 - Hold a mock visitation beforehand to work out any possible issues and troubleshoot before the Visitation day.
 - Have a way to allow applicants hang out with current students so that they can answer questions without staff or faculty present.
 - Create a closed Instagram group and invite alumni and faculty.
 - Have students do tours of their labs and/or apartments complexes, etc. Tap into the social media platforms they are on.

IV. Spring Classes

Eric Swindell reported:

- Most Spring courses will be virtual. Some smaller classes can be done in person with social distancing in place. No classes can be taught in the GSBS classrooms at this time and will move forward with the same plan as the Fall.
- Accommodations will be made for students and faculty that would prefer to attend virtually. UTHealth and MD Anderson have different rules for gatherings (courses included) so the institution policies will have to be followed. We want to ensure the safety of our faculty and students and remain as flexible as possible.
- Most of our students that are in their third year and beyond are not taking courses these issues only affect are first and second year students.
- Course evaluations do include questions on how to improve the online/virtual learning environment. We don't have evaluations for all courses, but we could implement this for all courses, even seminars as the information could be useful.
- We will need to revisit this for Fall 2021 and we may reconvene the GSBS COVID-19 Task Force to address ongoing changes that may need to be implemented.

V. Dean's Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- Thanks for everything you have and are doing on the Standing Committees you are serving on.
- The Dean group is meeting usually two times per week to get updates and provide feedback on issues.
- We understand that transportation and parking is an issue for our students, which includes public transportation and safety moving around campus. Egresses in and out of buildings have changed which has changed walking patterns as well. Both Dr. Mattox and I are serve on different committees at UTHealth and MD Anderson and have brought these concerns up. As of right now, the only solution is to pay for parking, but that's not tenable option.

Discussion/Suggestions:

- At UTHealth you are unable to have a bicycle and/or battery powered devices in the building. Is there a way to change this or have an area to store them? There are higher numbers of these users since the pandemic and it would help with some safety concerns.
- A few students have stated they would like to have additional shuttles.
- There is a discount for parking at night.
- If the TMC was more bike friendly, that would help.
- Advertise the cleaning processes of the shuttles.
- Have students that concerns contact us so that we can help directly.
- Remind students of the services that are available, UTPD can escort you to your car, The Pressler garage has a discount rate for after-hours parking, utilize B-Cycle, etc.
- Announcement of Staff Departures
 - Connor Clark has left GSBS and her position has been posted.
 - We will be officially announce soon that Brenda Gaughan will be retiring at the end of the semester. She has been with GSBS for a while now and will be greatly missed. Please help us celebrate Brenda.

VI. New Business

- Both MD Anderson and UTHealth have institutional committees for graduate education, Graduate Education Committee (GEC) and Graduate Student Education Committee (GSEC) respectively. Moving forward, it was recommended to have both committees provide reports at the Executive Committee since it's likely that they will have overlapping interests. This suggestion was supported by Dr. Blackburn.

VII. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

Meeting on January 21, 2021

I. Meeting was cancelled

Meeting on March 25, 2021

I. Approval of Minutes from October 15, 2020 Meeting

Minutes were approved as written.

II. GSA Report

Malcolm Moses reported:

- Two new officers have joined the GSA – Anik Banerjee is Treasurer and Rian Morgan is Secretary.
- The Spring Student Town Hall will be on April 16 at 2:00PM.
 - Dr. Raghu Kalluri has been invited to speak about his role at GSBS.
- At this time, we have not found a mental health event to replace pet therapy.
- It was requested by Dean Blackburn to survey the GSA and possibly the student body regarding their thoughts on returning to normal in the fall. If possible, please have this information for the Town Hall.
- Question: There was a student Town Hall after George Floyd, will there be something similar after the Georgia shooting?
 - At this time no, since we have a Town Hall planned in a few weeks.
 - However, there is a seminar scheduled for tomorrow at noon from the Diversity and Inclusion Office.

III. GSEC Report

Rachel Miller reported:

- The Graduate Student Education Committee (GSEC) is at UTHealth.
- The mission is to: Create educational opportunities, provide chances for learning and career development, recognize graduate student achievements, recruit future graduate students, and most importantly support our graduate students.
- The traditional activities of this committee include:
 - Research Poster Competition at the Medical School Retreat, which was held virtually on March 2.
 - Dean's Research Scholarship Awards for Research Distinction. There were six awardees in 2020 and received between \$1500-\$3000.
 - Graduate Program Support - \$ 11,000 to Biochemistry and Cell Biology (BCB), Microbiology and Infectious Disease (MID) and Neuroscience.
 - Travel Awards for Conference Presentations which provides up to \$750.
 - Grant Submission Bonuses which provides \$250 to BCB, MID and Neuroscience students.
 - At the next meeting, Dr. Miller will bring up the issue of being inclusive to all GSBS Programs.
 - Currently students applying for external awards would be eligible for this award. More clarity is needed on the types of grants that this award applies to.
- The GSEC conducted a Student Support Survey. Based on the responses they created subcommittees to address student needs as follows: GSEC Visibility/Website and Social Media, Career Speakers/Roundtable Discussions, Student Research Symposium, and Trainee Virtual Groups. Programs are being implemented based on work from these subcommittees.
- New activities of the GSEC:
 - The Laptop Loan Program was set-up for McGovern Medical School based GSBS students so they can borrow one of six laptops (3 MacBook Air, 3 Dell Latitude 5500) for one-month which can be renewed. Unfortunately, this hasn't been overly popular – we have publicized it to all MMS students and also at the GSBS Program level.

- The Parking Assistance - These funds traditionally used for Travel Awards were instead used to provide parking assistance to students. We were able to provide 58 students a TMC value pass with a value of \$115 for \$100 each, plus we received two for free. This only is about two weeks of full-time parking. There are plans to add this into our budget for next year.
 - The MID Program used some of their Program funds to assist students with parking.
- Discussion:
 - It's really inspiring to see how everyone is repurposing their budgets. It would be a smart idea to track these differences.
 - It was suggested to do a survey at the end of the year to collect data on impact the parking program had on students.
- Prior to 2020, there were no elections and the chair position rotated between the GSBS Program Directors of BCB, MID, and Neuroscience. Effective 2020, there will be an election of the chair for a one year term and will be open to all GSEC faculty members who have served at least one year on the committee.
- The current GSEC roster can be found here - <https://med.uth.edu/gsec/members/>.

IV. GEC Report

Mohammad Salehpour reported:

- At beginning of fiscal year, the Committee selects topics based on input from the chair, co-chair, and Drs. Mattox and Bodurka. These are assigned to subcommittees to work on each topic independently and then report back to the entire Committee.
- One topic that has been discussed numerous times and is a current subcommittee is having a set Family and Parental Leave policy in place at MD Anderson.
 - Human Resources is also looking into setting up a policy as well, however, the outlook is different. Their recommendation is to have them switch to accruing PTO and also utilize short-term disability.
 - It's been recommended to refrain from using parental leave, but instead parental accommodation.
 - The GSBS has put in a great deal of work to create a draft GSBS policy. Patricia Bruesch is leading this effort. Want our policy to be in line with our parent institutions and we should continue communication with both GEC and GSEC.
 - At the institutional level, they want equity to all groups – staff, students, residents, faculty, etc.
 - Even though this may only affect a small portion of students, it's a big issue for those students it impacts.

V. MD Anderson Endemic Phase Planning for Education

Drs. Bodurka & Mattox reported:

- One committee at MD Anderson is working on next steps for trainees as it relates to COVID.
- Suggestions and recommendations are being gathered to be presented to MD Anderson Leadership.
- Since GSBS is located in an MD Anderson building we are mandated to adhere to their policies.
- At current, holding in-person events and classes wouldn't be a possibility, but we are working on relieving current restrictions in place.
- Student mental health is important and having in-person meetings/events/classes would be a step to help students.
- There are plans being made regarding incoming students and a need to quarantine and/or verifying if they are fully vaccinated.
- MD Anderson administrative staff are currently able to go back to work in September 1, however, due to the academic calendar, this date makes having some aspects of orientation impossible.
- Currently, students and faculty have access only to the building they work, but this would need to be lifted to allow students to come to GSBS to speak with staff, go to classes, events, etc.
- All of these issues have been raised by the committee.

Discussion

- One item to consider is that virtual shouldn't be viewed as temporary, but a permanent feature of our lives moving forward.
- Allow a hybrid classroom and set a number so we can determine the number of students that can opt for in-person versus virtual learning.
- We need to learn the best way to maximize virtual/hybrid learning and determine what does and does not work.
- Work with IT to determine what equipment is needed moving forward for a hybrid model.
- It was suggested to reconvene the GSBS COVID-19 Task Force.
- If you have any suggestions or items that this group should consider, email Dr. Mattox.

VI. GSBS Admissions and Visitation Update

Eric Swindell reported:

- I want to thank the Admissions Committee and all the faculty who interviewed applicants during our virtual Visitations this year, which was very successful despite being held virtually.
- We extended 124 offers of acceptance, which is similar to previous years.
- At the current moment, 39 applicants have accepted our offer, 18 declined our offer, and 67 are outstanding. The deadline for these applicants to accept, is April 15.
- Based on the current numbers, we will likely have more than 50 applicants accept our offer. Thankfully, Pat Bruesch always builds in a little buffer for this into our budget.
- Every year we offer select applicants the Dean's Excellence Award. This year, we presented nine offers and currently three have accepted and one has declined.
- We have started a new program called – The Academy at GSBS. Dr. Shadding will speak about this in more depth later in the meeting. However, through the Academy we have offered six scholarships to help recruit URM's. At this time, three have accepted and one has declined.
- On April 1, we have invited applicants who haven't accepted to talk to current students via Zoom. About 20 current students plan to attend.

VII. Dean's Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- Staff Changes
 - Eric Swindell will be leaving us and will be Associate Dean of Baylor College of Medicine Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. His last day at GSBS will be April 16. We thank you for everything you have done for our school.
 - We are working to strategize short-term interim plans. It is likely we will recruit some of our GSBS faculty to assist us on certain items.
- SACSCOC
 - MD Anderson's SACS virtual site visit was last week which went very well. Next week is UTHealth's site visit. Thank you to everyone that help in this monumental effort.
- Conversations with MD Anderson Leadership
 - Since Dr. Barton's departure, we are continuing to educate and speak with MD Anderson leadership about GSBS to support our graduate students. Dr. Raghu Kalluri has been assisting with this.
 - Moving forward Dr. Kalluri will be a permanent member of the Executive Committee and will hold an honorary Assistant Dean position at GSBS.
- COVID Update
 - Vaccination efforts continue to roll out and ramp up.
 - All new incoming students will be eligible to receive the vaccine.

VIII. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Updates

Cherilynn Shadding reported:

- GSBS is currently participating in an NIH pilot on wellness. There is a total of six session with a focus on resiliency. Twelve GSBS students are participating along with some postdoctoral fellows. After the completion of this pilot, we plan to fold this into our events.
- UTHealth created a taskforce on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This taskforce has now been approved as an official council. In the future, we would like to invite the GSBS faculty representative to the Executive Committee in the future.
- The Academy at GSBS was designed off another program that was Dr. Shadding created at her previous institution. This year, we will focus on PhD students, but plan to incorporate master's students as well. Five students will receive a scholarship and all other URM students will be invited to join. This academy is focused on leadership and development of skills to help students thrive in graduate school. Additional information can be found here - <https://gsbs.uth.edu/current-students/diversity/the-academy-at-gsbs>.
- GSBS is also participating in the Culturally Aware Mentoring (CAM) study through the National Research Mentoring Network. The CAM workshops will be on June 7 and 14 and will focus on culturally responsive mentoring practices. Please participate in the workshop!
- The Climate Survey data will be discussed at an upcoming webinar on April 19 from noon – 1:30PM. You are required to register to attend the event - https://mdacc.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Bm2t8g8TTIOX9i3nJ9kaRQ. We will present an overview of the survey results, UT-Houston Police will provide a report, and we will discuss current and future plans.
- Graduate Student Appreciation Week is April 5-9 and will be a week long celebration that will include career development events. We have a Kudo Board for faculty to write thanks and well wishes to GSBS students. Additional information can be found here - <https://gsbs.uth.edu/graduate-student-appreciation-week/>.
- GSRD will be held virtually on June 24. We will have an elevator speech, oral skills, and poster competition. Dr. Shelina Ramnarine will be the keynote speaker. Please encourage your students to participate.

IX. Commencement 2021

Dr. Bill Mattox reported:

- Commencement will be held on Sunday, May 2 at Minute Maid Park at 1:00PM and will be a combined with the School of Biomedical Informatics (SBMI) and McGovern Medical School (MMS).
- The order is based on size of the graduating class so SBMI is first, we are second and MMS is last.
- We will not have a processional since it would take too much time.
- We have roughly 30 minutes to confer degrees and will be done in two lines to speed up the process.
- Advisors have been invited to attend commencement, but we will have a special group of hooders so it's highly likely faculty mentors will not hood their own students.
- Everyone attending – guests, students, and faculty will receive tickets. Guest allowances are still being finalized.
- Last year we did not hold commencement, though graduates did receive a program and tassel. The graduating class of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 have been invited to attend this year's commencement.
- There are many details that need to be finalized, but as soon as we know, we will inform all interested parties.

X. New Business

No new business was discussed.

XI. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

Meeting on June 17, 2021

I. Approval of Minutes from March 25, 2021 Meeting

Minutes were approved as written.

II. GSA Report

No GSA representative was present so no report was provided.

III. GSEC Report

Rachel Miller reported:

- The Student symposium was held and five students received the Dean's Research Award.
- We provide travel awards of up to \$750 for one conference per year. Since many were virtual this year, we had a request for assistance for a student to attend an advanced research training course. This has been approved and will be an option for students moving forward.
- Our next steps are to make plans for the upcoming year. We will survey the students to assist in the planning process. We will likely build parking assistance into our budget for next year.
- Dr. Miller is the first chair of the GSEC that hasn't been a Program Director. The next chair will be recruited from current members. Many members are returning next year. There was seven student members. In the future, the plan would be to have a more diverse group of students – based on programs, gender, location, etc.
- There is a software disparity between our institutions and even within labs on the types of software options available to our students. For example – BioRender, but it's not limited to just this program.
 - We've had discussions with IT to see if any software that is offered by MDA would be available to UTHealth GSBS students. Final outcomes have not been determined.
 - GSBS will survey our students to determine the software/programming needs of our students and come up with a plan from there.

IV. GEC Report

Mohammad Salehpour reported:

- The GEC isn't an official committee of MD Anderson. It has been asked that the GEC met with former chairs and GSBS Deans, review old documents and develop an official charge, membership, and whom the committee reports to.
- Trainees have received additional vacation and sick leave, which has been a direct change due to requesting a student parental leave accommodation.

V. UTHealth DEI Council Report

Dr. Dan Harrington reported:

- Dr. Harrington is the GSBS Faculty representative.
- The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force has been formed into an official Council.
- The Task Force made a number of recommendations that were specific at the student, faculty and staff levels.
- Most of the original task force members will remain on the newly formed Council.
- The charge and goal of the Council will be to understand and respond to DEI related issues.

VI. MD Anderson Endemic Phase Planning for Education

Dr. Bodurka reported:

- Thank you for everyone's help with parental leave and increasing the vacation and sick leave.
- There is a Research townhall tomorrow and it will give an update to the endemic phase
- All trainees and students will be coming back to campus July 1.

- Effective June 28, PPE requirements will change. Masks in certain locations will become recommended and not required along with a few additional changes.
- Discussion:
 - A challenge that GSBS is currently facing is having 50% occupancy in classrooms. These numbers are not adequate for our courses and our classrooms are in high demand. Is there any way to prioritize rooms? In addition, the moat poses some additional challenges in the ability for our students to enter our building.
- Dr. Bodurka will bring this topic up at the townhall.
 - What will the access for our new students be?
- We will know more soon. We are advocating for this group.

VII. MDACC Office of Training and Mentoring Scientists Update

Dr. Raghu Kalluri reported:

- Our goal is to be a liaison for the GSBS.
- Leadership at MD Anderson is engaged and the graduate school and our students are a priority.
- Our group has held some successful townhalls with trainees at MD Anderson.

VIII. Dean's Report

Dean Blackburn reported:

- The legislative session just finished which approved to maintain the formula funding rates. Formula funding does not cover the entire budget for GSBS. Each year, we ask our presidents for assistance in the remaining balance.
- Dr. Swindell is now an Associate Dean at Baylor College of Medicine. We are working to determine how the Dean's Office will look like moving forward. We will provide additional details soon.
- Our hope is to have all courses, especially the Core Course in person for the Fall, but we are still figuring out the specifics.
- Dr. Swindell was the director of the Core Course. Moving forward we will have two faculty directors and a steering committee made up of GSBS faculty. For this Fall, Michael Lorenz and Swathi Arur will be the Directors of the course. Academic Affairs will be hiring a Program Manager that handle the day to day activities of the Core Course.
- As of today, Student Health Services hasn't seen a positive COVID case in a GSBS in a few months. Based on the response from a survey asking faculty, staff and students at UTHealth if they are or plan to receive the vaccine, 92% of those that responded to the survey said yes.
- The GSBS is asking incoming students to disclose their vaccination status to determine the percentage of this group that is vaccinated.
- We follow CDC recommendations – if you are fully vaccinated, you do not have to wear a mask and if you are unvaccinated you should wear a mask and social distance.
- Graduate Student Research Day will be held on June 24, virtually through Zoom. All day – 9 is the keynote and she's meeting with personal chat with some URM students. Oral skills competitive, elevator speech. Tune in with awards presentation at 4?
- Question – Would GSBS go back to supporting students for 2 years instead of the current 16 months?
 - Answer – At this time this is not possible due to budgetary constraints.

IX. Proposed creation of the GSBS DEI Standing Committee

Dr. Cherilynn Shadding reported:

- One of the outcomes from the climate survey was to create a task force.
- We are proposing a create a new GSBS standing committee that will provide oversight for DEI concerns.
- Proposal:

The GSBS Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion shall consist of members from the GSBS community: students, faculty, and staff. The committee will be comprised of members from each parent

institution. The committee will meet at regular intervals as determined by its members, but shall meet no less than twice in an academic year. The committee will include ad hoc members (less than 25%), including individuals external to the GSBS and/or parent institutions, as determined necessary to meet the goals. All membership will be approved by the GSBS Dean's Office.

The primary goal of the committee will be to ensure that the GSBS creates and maintains an environment that is inclusive and equitable for GSBS students maximizing their success. Duties of the committee shall include but are not limited to: regular assessment of the community, establishing impactful training and programming for the community, reviewing GSBS data and setting benchmarks, surveying GSBS policies and mission and making recommendations to the Deans.

- At the time of the meeting eight members of the GSBS faculty agreed to endorse this proposal. After the meeting concluded an additional two faculty agreed which is the minimum requirement set in the Faculty Bylaws to move this proposal forward.

X. GSBS Admissions Update

Dr. Cherilynn Shadding reported:

- 2021 Entering Class
 - Total: 106 *
 - PhD: 72
 - MS: 23
 - SMS: 11

* including 12 deferrals from 2020, only included in this section
- 2021 Admissions Data - All Degree Programs
 - Applied: 1174
 - Admitted: 174
 - Accepted Offer: 94
 - URM Applied: 151
 - URM Admitted: 27
 - URM Accepted Offer: 18
 - International Applied: 546
 - International Admitted: 66
 - International Accepted Offer: 34
- PhD Program
 - Applied: 774
 - Admitted: 135
 - Accepted Offer: 65
 - URM Applied: 74
 - URM Admitted: 19
 - URM Accepted Offer: 11
 - International Applied: 463
 - International Admitted: 60
 - International Accepted Offer: 30
- These are the top schools with the most students declined our offer decided to attend instead:
 - Baylor College of Medicine – 10
 - Johns Hopkins University – 4
 - Washington University in St. Louis – 3
 - Duke University – 2
 - Mayo Clinic Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences – 2

- Northwestern University – 2
- Rice University – 2
- University of California, Berkeley – 2
- University of California, San Francisco – 2
- There were additional one-off schools and other personal reasons students declined our offer.

XI. Orientation Update

Ms. Karen Weinberg reported:

- Planning is underway. We are working on different options (in-person, hybrid, and virtual) in the event we need to pivot due to the pandemic.

XII. New Business

No new business was discussed.

XIII. Old Business

No old business was discussed.