
HOUSTON HELIX

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS GENETIC COUNSELING PROGRAM



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Program Director Update

It has been a hard year in academic medicine on many fronts. You will notice that for the first time in many years we have a class of nine students. Our 10th matched student was impacted by the international visa issues in the spring and summer. We are grateful that GCEA allowed a special deferral pathway for this circumstance and we look forward to her joining the next incoming class. The class of nine has been doing great and they are excited to almost have the tough first semester behind them.

We are grateful for those we were able to see at NSGC and thinking of those who were not able to travel. We were lucky to receive support from the GSBS Deans Office to allow all second year students to travel to NSGC in Seattle despite the school's travel restrictions. They had a fantastic time learning and networking; mission accomplished! It seems that some restrictions may be lifting at institutions across the country in 2026, so here is hoping for positive growth in research funding, industry, and the overall genetic counseling job market.

We continue to refine the curriculum and consider new ways to support our students. We would also love to hear about areas where you have gained insight or expertise that you think we should incorporate into the curriculum



- we love virtual lectures from our alumni and appreciate all of the ideas you shared in the alumni survey this summer. There were worries across the country about the board pass rate, thus we doubled down efforts to supply second years with study materials such as flashcards, content binders, and study courses.

We also incorporated the ABGC practice exam into CI class. This year we plan to utilize GCEA's new resources and practice questions to further enhance board readiness. Our graduates continue to do well and we are so proud of all of their study efforts. As the whole process is not without stress, let us know if you hear of innovative and effective tools.

Program Director Update Continued

Rotations today look the same, but also different, than when many of you came through our system. Prenatal and Cancer have a significant telehealth component, while Medical Genetics remains primarily in person. This allows students to be ready for a wide variety of job formats. We also continue to grow both the synchronous and asynchronous supplemental rotations. They allow our second years to explore subspecialties, industry roles, and other aspects of a genetic counseling career such as writing case reports or the business of healthcare. Do you have an idea for a supplemental rotation? We would love to hear it! Want to record sessions and create projects for an asynchronous option? We are all ears!

As your careers continue to take you in new directions, please add new information to our [google form](#) and reach out to me and copy Ayisha.M.Hawkins@uth.tmc.edu to make sure we keep in touch. Our network of outstanding alumni across the country is a powerhouse. I hope you will feel free to use our [alumni connections](#) to network as you seek new opportunities.

Until next time,

Claire



FACULTY UPDATES

There have been a lot of exciting changes down the highway at UTMB genetics with an expanding team, new space, and more growth on the way! The university has a lot of excitement about genetics right now, in part due to the expansion of our gene therapy program.

At UTMB our medical genetics, prenatal, and cancer programs are all housed under the department of pediatrics and together make up the division of medical genetics and metabolism. Earlier this year, our clinical team consisted of two physicians, five genetic counselors, and one dietitian. This summer, we were able to bring on four new genetic counselors (Cindy Canales - UTGCP, Katie Mazzon - Boise State, Rahma Ali - Emory, and Nneka Ogbonnaya - Wayne State).

We have three medical genetics GCs, two cancer GCs, two prenatal GCs, and two GCs who split time evenly between prenatal and cancer.

Our home base and much of our clinical practice now takes place in Clear Lake (opposed to rotating clinic sites between League City and Galveston). The students have appreciated the somewhat shorter drive down from Houston when they are on rotation with anyone from our group!

The increase in providers has brought some much needed support and relief to our team. But they are also excited to be involved in the UTGCP. Our new genetic counselors have already given lectures, volunteered for workshops, and are excited to have students rotate with them once they are able!

FACULTY UPDATES

Looking to the future at UTMB, we continue to anticipate more growth. We are currently working to bring on two more physicians as well as additional genetic counselors in the coming few years. With even more additional providers, we will continue to expand into new clinic spaces, and be able to have the option to provide even more rotation opportunities to the students of the UTGCP.

*Megan Morand (UTGCP 2021)
and Colin Bixler (faculty)*



MEET THE CLASS OF 2027



From left to right, top to bottom: Brady Erlandson, Alexa Grimm, Faith Petersen, Lauren Cho, Allison Brewer, Janna Herman, Melana Vaughn, Stephanie Helton, Emily McDonald



Lauren
Che



Wichita, KS



Northwestern University



Biological Sciences



Stephanie
Helton



Tallahassee, FL



University of South Florida



Cell and Molecular Biology



Emily
McDonald



Brunswick, GA



University of Georgia



Environmental Health



Allison
Brewer



Bulls Gap, TN



Tusculum University



Biology Pre-Med



Melana
Vaughn



Mercer, PA



Slippery Rock University



Biology



Faith
Peterson



Geneva, IL



University of Wisconsin, Madison



Genetics and Genomics



Alexa
Grimm



Champlin, MN



University of Minnesota



***Genetics, Cell Biology, and
Development***



Jianna
Herman



San Antonio, TX



University of Texas



Biology



Brady
Erlandson



Hastings, MN



University of Minnesota, Twin Cities



Genetics, Cell Biology, and Development

welcome!

CLASS OF 2027



THESIS UPDATES

Class of 2026

Katie Ledden

Evaluation of Genetics Awareness Among Ophthalmology Residents

Chairs: Katie Leal and Leslie Dunnington

Jessie Scarlett

Necessity of Diagnostic Testing for ONTD Surgical Candidacy

Chairs: Blair Stevens and Rosemary Rogers

Jolie Bourek

Do patients have preferences with regards to carrier screening panel size?

Chair: Meagan Choates

Sara Pickett

Conversations Regarding Disordered Eating in Metabolic Patients with Prescribed Diets

Chairs: Paige Roberts and Megan Morand

Kathryne Rojeck

Personal and family history of patients with RAD51C, RAD51D, and BARD1 pathogenic/likely pathogenic variants

Chair: Jessica Corredor

Michelle Luong

Genetic Counselor Perspectives and Shift of Practice Regarding Evolving CDH1 Cancer Risks

Chair: Maureen Mork

THESIS UPDATES

Class of 2026

Savannah Berger

Profiling Genetic Testing Yield and Racial Disparities in Patients with Male Breast Cancer

Chairs: Hiam Abdel-Salam and Gabriela Chen

Erin Sharkey

Testing follow-up for pathogenic/likely pathogenic variants in TP53

Chair: Jessica Corredor

Marissa Williams

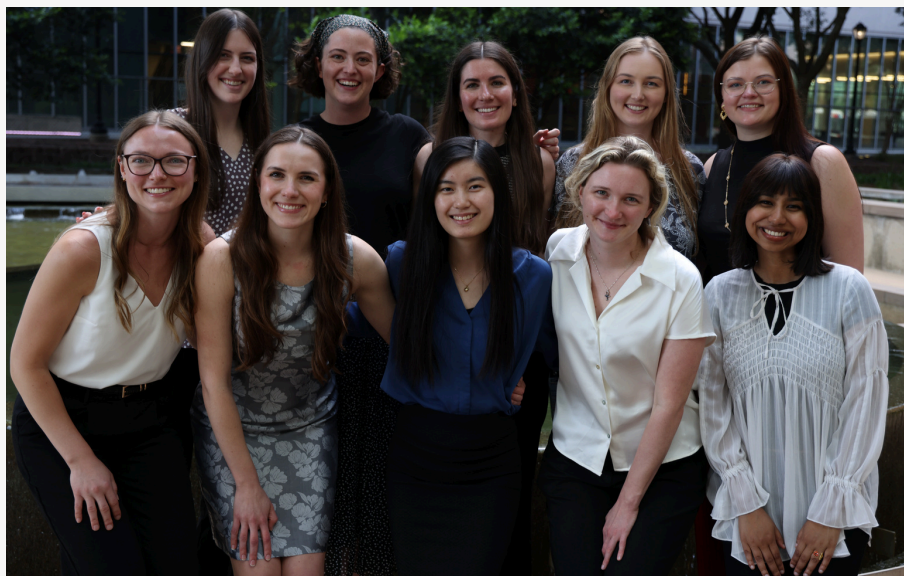
Diagnostic Yield of Genetic Testing in High-Risk Patients

Chair: Jordan Zeiger

Lamia Haque

Exploring How Teratogen Training in Graduate Programs Impacts Genetic Counselors' Self-Perceived Preparedness Towards Teratogen Counseling

Chair: Myla Ashfaq & Kate Richardson



Where are they now?

CLASS OF 2025 UPDATES

GRACE RA

Medical Genetics in Boise, ID

AVA HENSON

Medical Genetics in Houston, TX

NICOLE TALABA

Medical Genetics in Houston, TX

JESSICA CLARK

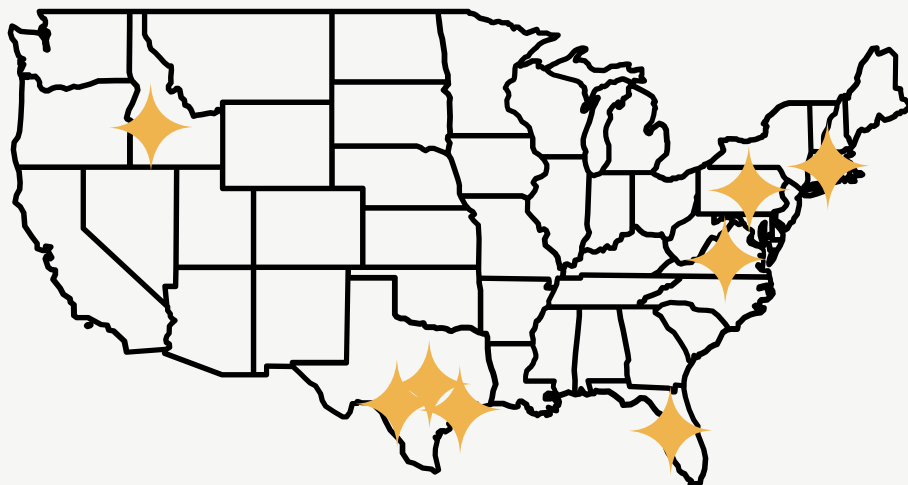
Research and Clinical Craniofacial Genetics in Boston, MA

KARLI LIVINGSTON

Cancer Genetics in Tampa, FL

CINDY CANALES

Prenatal Genetics in League City, TX



HILLARY ESPLEN

Pediatric Medical Genetics and Craniofacial clinic in San Antonio, TX

NADIA ENGLISH

Cancer Genetics in Charlottesville, VA

BRENNA ALBRACHT

Medical Genetics in Autism, TX

FARREN LOPEZ

Cancer Genetics in Central Pennsylvania



Class of 2025

GRADUATION AND RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



UTGCP Awards

2025



EXCELLENCE IN PUBLICATION AWARD

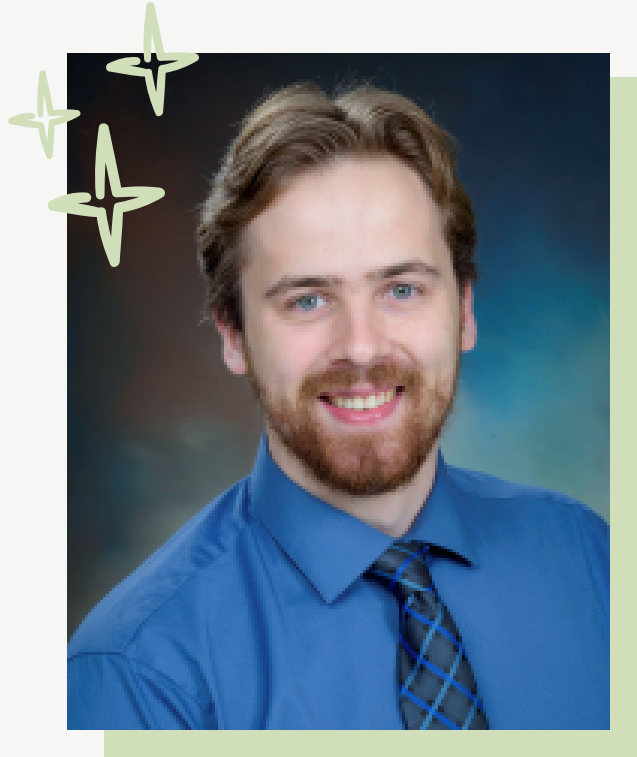
Jack Colleran, class of 2023

“Perceived Utility of Genetic Carrier Screening in a
Diverse Patient Population”

Published in the Journal of Genetic Counseling November 2025

UTGCP Awards

2025



OUTSTANDING CLINICAL SUPERVISOR AWARD

Colin Bixler

Here's what students had to say about Colin:

“Colin is an extremely calming presence for students both in introductory courses as well as on rotation. He is always open to discussion and is immensely encouraging in all aspects of a session from reviewing case prep to providing constructive feedback. Colin fosters confidence in his students by placing his trust in us and emphasizes that we can and should develop our own style. Moreover, he takes the time to get to know us as more than just students, but as people and future colleagues.”

UTGCP Awards

2025



OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD

Deanna Barnes

Here's what nominees had to say about Deanna:

“Deanna has built a remarkable career that exemplifies excellence in patient care, education, research, and leadership in the field of genetic counseling. At UT, she has shared her expertise on medical racism and her lived experience as a genetic counselor of color, helping students engage in critical conversations about equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness in genetic counseling practice. She has moderated plenary sessions at the NSGC Annual Conference, served as a panelist at national and international forums, and contributed to consensus efforts on the responsible use of polygenic risk scores. Her advocacy for equitable genetic services and representation in our field continues to influence both clinical practice and the professional culture of genetic counseling.

She not only represents the best of what our program produces—skilled, compassionate, and innovative genetic counselors—but also continues to give back through mentorship, teaching, and leadership”

PAST AWARD WINNERS

Excellence in Publication Award

Class of 2013 — Kate Dempsey

Class of 2014 — Jacqueline Mersch

Class of 2015 — Sarah Huguenard

Class of 2016 — Theresa Wittman

Class of 2017— Jordan Berg

Class of 2018—Kate Mowrey

Class of 2019— Danielle Williams Carr

Class of 2020 — Sarah Burke

Class of 2021 — Megan Morand

Class of 2022 — Gina Sanchez

Class of 2024 — Rachel Notestine

Outstanding Clinical Supervisor Award

2018 — Sarah Bannon

2019 — Blair Stevens

2020 — Shannon Mulligan

2021 — Brittanie (Morris) Shelton

2022 — Leslie Dunnington

2023 — Meagan Choates

2024 — Luana Goulet



Outstanding Alumni Award

2005 Recipient — Catherine Wicklund

2006 Recipient — Sarah Jane Noblin

2007 Recipient — Michelle Strecker

2008 Recipient — Jennifer Hoskovec

2009 Recipient — Marianna Raia

2010 Recipient — Jennifer Czerwinski

2011 Recipient — Jamie Chance

2012 Recipient — Blair Stevens

2013 Recipient — Sandra Darilek

2014 Recipient - Carolyn Wilson-
Brackett

2015 Recipient — Kaylene Ready

2016 Recipient — Laura Amendola

2017 Recipient— Julia Wynn

2018 Recipient—Salma Nassef

2019 Recipient— Jennifer Eichmeyer

2020 Recipient — Carol Brooks

2021 — Tamara Solomon

2022- Christina Falugi

2023- Carla McGruder

2024 — Gabriel Lazarin

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 1991

Deb Durand

Class of 1992

Patricia Sculley

Pamela (Nackajski) Welgenhausen

Class of 1993

Becky Finkboner

Marnie Rocklin

Cathy Wicklund

Class of 1994

Fara Etzel

Jennifer McKeand

Cassidy Rodnick

Class of 1995

Melanie Andrews Casal

Robin (McKenney) McGoey

Jill Sawyer

Class of 1996

Heather (Ferguson) Coldebella

CarolLynn (Lockmiller) Crossman

Sadie Ellen (Maynard) Blake

Tricia Zartman Page

Class of 1997

Noelle (Agan) Danylchuk

Ellen (Friday) Steinwachs

Andi Hillard Evans

Class of 1998

Erika (Martin) Miller

Joylnn Swantkowski

Melissa Trant-Kline

Class of 1999

Sara Cooper

Ashley (Nelson) Solomon

Michelle Strecker

Sarah Jane (Tew) Noblin

Class of 2000

Saleen Chenevert

Angie (Gibson) Jacobson

Amie (Ortman) Blanco

Leslie (Rogers) Evans

Class of 2001

Betsy Clark-Gaye

Kendra Waller

Lauren (Wright) Nelsen

Class of 2002

Valerie Banks

Jennifer Bayliss Saucier

Stephanie (Manzo) Hill

Laura Pine Ellis

Jennifer (Seifert) Eichmeyer

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2003

Sandra Darilek

Emily (Gutter) Burke

Jennifer (Malone) Hoskovec

Carolyn Wilson-Brackett

Class of 2004

Andrea Atherton

Colleen (Buechner) Wu

Jamie Chance

Carol (Linsner) Brooks

Alice Schindler

Class of 2005

Jennifer LeMoine

Tamara Solomon

Cindy Trotter

Emily Gutter

Class of 2006

Marianna (Horz) Raia

Gabriel Lazarin

Stacey Miller

Kaylene (Whetstone) Ready

Jennifer (Sherrill) Czerwinski

Julia Wynn

Class of 2007

Jennifer (Defant) Burgess

Alyssa (Knisley) Wright

Erin Salo-Mullen

Cathy Sullivan

Catherine (Tipps) Vendola

Amy (Stanford) Wells

Class of 2008

Lauren (McNair) Baggett

Sarah Guerra Seth

Lauren (Spurck) Youngborg

Blair Stevens

Matt Tschirgi

Class of 2009

Laura Amendola

Sarah Colosimo

Jennifer Fowler

Travis Morgan

Lauren Murphy

Rebecca (Sample) Carter

Marisa Vineyard Andrews

Class of 2010

Justine Cooper Pickarski

Carrie Crain

Deanna Darnes

Leslie (Newman) Dunnington

Gina Nuccio

Amy (Sommer) Poole

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2011

Emily Gabitzsch

Laura Godfrey Hendon

Trisha Nichols

Sarah (Swain) Barnett

Laura Panos Smith

Ashley (Henriksen) Woodson

Class of 2012

Nevena (Cvjetkovic) Krstic

Carolyn (Garby) Haskins

Roya Mostafavi

Salma Nassef

Sam (Penney) Douglass

Katie (Rock) Forster

Ann (Simmons) Bunnell

Class of 2013

Allison (Copeland) Ortega

Jessica (Davis) Lopez

Kate (Dempsey) Principe

Michelle McDougale

Nikki Mohrbacher

Brad Rolf

Class of 2014

Amanda Hanson

Andi (Lewis) Ybarra

Jackie Mersch

Shannon Mulligan

Emily (Parham) Nazar

Aarti Ramdaney

Stephanie Thompson

Class of 2015

Lizzie (Baack) Bowdish

Callie (Jenevein) Diamonstein

Carla McGruder

Sarah (Mayes) Huguenard

Katie Sagaser

Haley Streff

Kayla (Vaughn) Rosnau

Caiqian (Wu) Cropper

Class of 2016

Torry (Breen) Howell

Katie Chan

Christina Falugi

Meagan (Giles) Choates

Jessie (Ross) Corredor

Ginger Tsai

Victoria Wagner

Theresa Wittman

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2017

Jordan (Berg) Hunter
Maggie (Clifford) Hendrix
Leslie (Durham) Granger
Amanda Gerard
Meagan (Kaulfus) Bolin
Katy (Reese) Winfrey
Chelsea Wagner
Ellen (Zirkelbach) Jarret

Class of 2018

Sarah (Azam) Khan
Taylor (Beecroft) Dawson
Lauren Fleddermann
Ellie (Gould) DeCristofaro
Kate (Mowrey) Richardson
Jess (Omark) O'Shea
Annelise Pace
Sara Wofford

Class of 2019

Peyton (Busby) Nunley
Alexa Bream
Georgiann Garza
Emily (Krosschell) Thoreson

Class of 2019 (continued)

Danielle (Williams) Carr
Allison Moats
Samantha Montgomery
Carol Nowlen

Cayleen Smith
Angelica Starnes

Class of 2020

Kaitlyn Amos
Caroline Bertsch
Wendi (Betting) Gill
Sarah Burke
Aranza Gonzalez-Cendejas

Addison Johnson

Bradley Power

Autumn Vara

Emily Stiglich

Class of 2021

Renee Bardini

Grant Bonesteele

Lauren Douglas

Katlyn Frane

Katie Huang

Luke Kruidenier

Emily Martin

Meaghan (Mones) Taggett

Megan (Pope) Morand

Rose Rogers

Katie Shields

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2022

Michelle Appel

Emilyn Banfield

Katie Baudoin

Mandy Chamberlain

Jenny Do

Jenna Lea

Émile Moura Coelho da Silva

Gina Sanchez

Natalie Stoner

Shelly Zelnick

Class of 2023

Latonya Alexander-Smith

Madeline Alpar

Erin Atkinson

Yusra Aziz

Jack Colleran

Emily Daykin

Teresa Heller

Cindy Hernandez

Jasmine Tyson

Jordan Zeiger

Class of 2024

Emma Billings

Carley Brueckner

Laura Gorecki

Maria (Hernandez) Mercado

Mindy Kolodziejski

Nicolette (Murphey) Backert

Rachel Notestine

Disha Patel

Kirsten Risgaard

Jordan Steffen

Class of 2025

Brenna Albracht

Cindy Canales

Jessica Clark

Ava Henson

Nadia English

Hillary Esplen

Karli Livingston

Farren Lopez

Grace Ra

Nicola Talaba