

December 2024, Volume 21

Houston Helix

Alumni Newsletter for the University of Texas Genetic Counseling Program



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PROGRAM DIRECTOR UPDATE



The 2023-2024 academic year was a time of growth and change at the UTGCP, with Meagan Choates embracing the Assistant Program Director role and Leslie Dunnington expanding the Assistant Director of Fieldwork position. We were able to grow our leadership team in the summer of 2024, bringing Samantha Montgomery in as our Coordinator of Ethics and Outreach and bringing new faculty into teaching, supervising, and thesis mentoring roles. We are grateful for the contributions of everyone in the UTGCP community.

This fall has been a time of preparation for implementation of the new ACGC Practice Based Competencies. We leaned on our colleagues in the Medical Education office at McGovern Medical School, as well as our Program Director network, to learn about developmental frameworks that might be applied to the new PBCs. While ACGC has indicated that programs should use a developmental framework for evaluation of the PBCs, they did not dictate the model. We have chosen a combination of the Dreyfus and Dreyfus and O Scale models. You can access brief summaries of these in the appendix to the PBCs. Supervisors have been hard at work drafting, piloting, and revising our tools. We are ready to launch them in January of 2025 when the Class of 2026 begins their clinical rotations. This also gives us the opportunity to re-examine how we track logbook cases (but Typhon appears here to stay in some capacity) and how we provide global evaluations. We will take a hard look at the pros and cons of the new system in the summer of 2025 and adjust accordingly. We welcome your feedback and ideas.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR UPDATE

It was wonderful to see so many alumni in New Orleans at the NSGC AC. This year was not kind to many in the industry space and that trickled down to entry level positions as well. Thanks to all who responded to my networking emails to get students and alums connected to one another. While always important, it was even more so in this market. Also, a huge thank you for the donations to the Research and Education Fund (almost \$1,000 raised at the AC!) and the Jaqueline T. Hecht Endowed Scholarship Fund. Your support has been tremendous and continues to ensure our ability to support our students. Feel free to reach out with any gifting questions.

We do not know what the future holds and what adversities we will face, but the UTGCP leadership will continue to hold strong to our ideals and support our students as we aim to fulfill our mission to excel in the training of versatile genetic counselors by facilitating competency-based learning, supporting personalized growth, and immersing students in the depth and breadth of genetic counseling practice.

Caire





FACULTY UPDATES

In May of this year, I enthusiastically began my role as the Coordinator of Ethics and Outreach with the UTGCP. This novel faculty title has given me the opportunity to expand my program involvement with dedicated time throughout my busy clinic week.

For those I have yet to meet, I am originally from New Orleans but have been in Houston since 2017. I graduated from the UTGCP in 2019 and have been working as a prenatal counselor with UTHealth since that time. I bought and renovated an old home in 2022 so most of my time is spent dealing with the rollercoaster that is homeownership if I am not baking or cuddled up with my two cats, Chuck (Charles Darwin) and Marie (Marie Curie).

I have been involved with the program in various ways over the years, teaching lectures on abortion care and the genetics of mental health, serving as a clinical supervisor, coordinating prospective student shadowers, and reviewing program applications. I was thrilled when Claire asked if I would be interested in further expanding my role with the program in a unique way that fit my skills and interests.

As the Coordinator of Ethics and Outreach, I served as the course coordinator of Biomedical Ethics for the Genetic Counselor this fall and will be serving a co-course coordinator with Claire for Psychosocial Issues II in the Spring. I truly enjoyed taking on the Ethics course and especially appreciated the time spent getting to know the first year students throughout our class discussions.

The outreach aspect of this position is still evolving but primarily has included taking on program social media endeavors, aiding with recruitment events, and going out into the community to share more about our wonderful profession.



FACULTY UPDATES

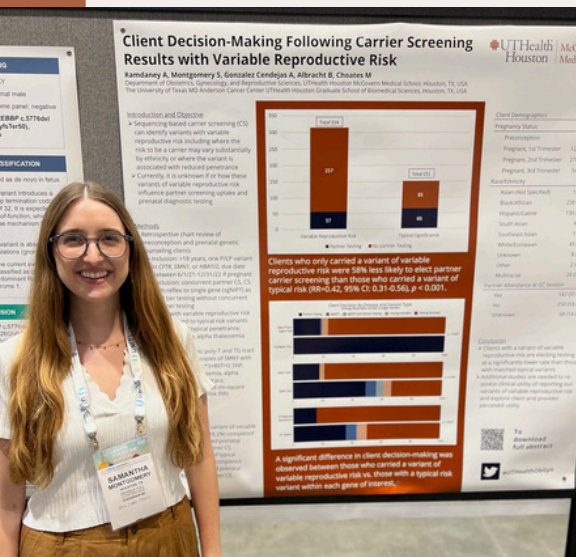
To help tackle even more outreach endeavors, this fall we established a new program Outreach Committee. Through events and speaking opportunities, the committee hopes to reach a larger audience and introduce a broader array of students to the GC pipeline. Additionally, we want to help connect students to shadowing opportunities with UTGCP faculty and alumni.

During the pandemic, many institutions ceased shadowing programs and prospective students turned to informational interviews to gain exposure to the field. In 2024, we have seen many organizations bring back shadowing, both in person and virtual options. So we ask that if you know of a shadowing experience, please tell us about it at the survey below. When students reach out to the program, we hope to share this information so they can gain additional experience and in turn, alumni can help us identify future graduates of the UTGCP!

Call for Shadowing Opportunities

Please reach out with any questions and hope to connect with you all in the New Year.

Sam Montgomery



thank you for you support!



With your generous donations, the UTGCP raised almost \$1,000 for the Research and Education Endowed Fund and the Jacqueline T. Hecht Scholarship this fall! We are truly grateful for the donations you made this year at the NSGC alumni lunch, GC Awareness Day, and Annual Day of Giving.

If you missed out on those fundraising efforts, you are more than welcome to donate throughout the year at the link below.

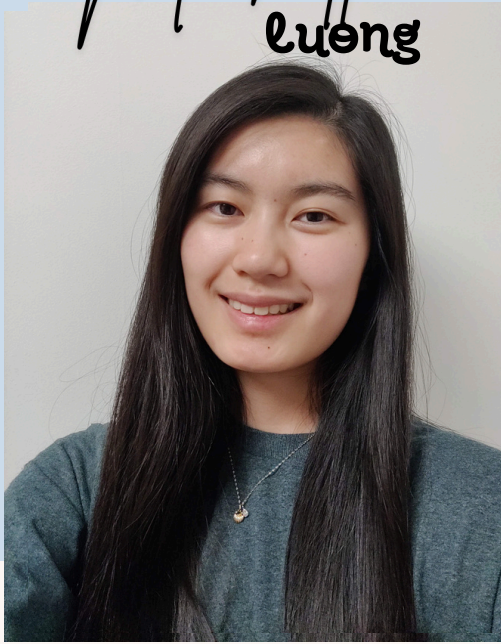
[Click here and select your area of support in the drop down list](#)

MEET THE CLASS OF 2026



From left to right, top to bottom: Jessie Scarlett, Marissa Williams, Erin Sharkey, Jolie Bourek, Katie Ledden, Savannah Berger, Lamia Haque, Michelle Luong, Sara Pickett, Kathryne Rojeck

Michelle
Luong



Spring, TX

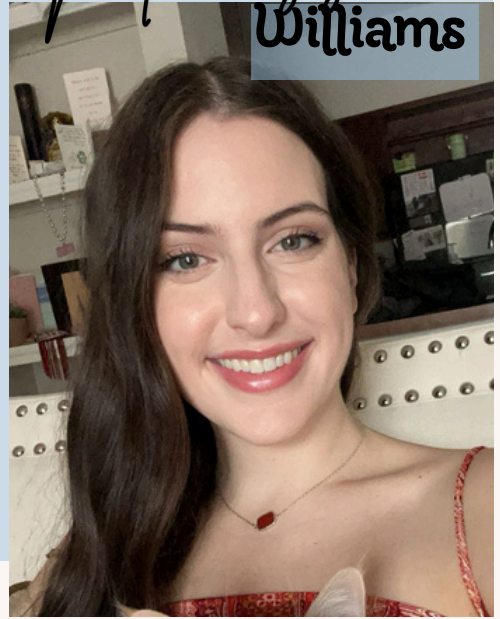


University of Houston



Biology

Marissa
Williams



Odessa, TX



Texas Tech University



Cell and Molecular Biology

Lamia
Haque



Pflugerville, TX



University of Texas



Nutrition

Jolie
Bourek



Austin, TX



University of Texas



Biology

Katheryne
Rejeck



Ann Arbor, MI



Michigan State University
Human Biology & Genomics
& Molecular Genetics



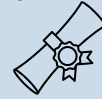
Sara
Pickett



Milford, NH



Tennessee Technological
University
Biology



Katie
Ledden



Brea, CA



California State Fullerton
Molecular Biology



Savannah
Berger



Pflugerville, TX



St. Mary's University
Forensic Chemistry



Erin
Sharkey



Jessie
Scarlett



Western Springs, IL



University of Wisconsin-Madison



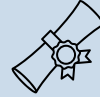
Genetics & Genomics



Pittsburgh, PA



Dickinson College



Neuroscience

welcome!

CLASS OF 2026



THESIS UPDATES

Class of 2025

Cindy Canales

Denial of Inpatient Genetic Testing: A study on yield and outcomes outpatient

Chairs: Katie Leal and Kathleen Shields

Nadia English

Spanish-Speaking Patient Perspectives: The Benefits and/or Barriers of Telemedicine in Genetic Counseling

Texas Society of Genetic Counselors Spring Grant Recipient

Chair: Aranza Gonzalez Cendejas

Grace Ra

Examination of a reproductive genetics module: does triage to genetic counseling impact prenatal care equitably?

Chair: Blair Stevens

Brenna Albracht

Scientific literacy and carrier screening decision making

Chair: Meagan Choates

Nicole Talaba

Expanding the phenotype of SETD5-related disorder through a Facebook support group

Chair: Myla Ashfaq

Farren Lopez

Achieving the Practice-Based Competencies: Are More Than 50 Cases Needed?

Chair: Aarti Ramdaney

THESIS UPDATES

Class of 2025

Jessica Clark

"The Magic Computer in the Sky" – Participant Perspectives on Control and the Genetic Counseling Admissions Match

Chair: Claire Singletary

Hillary Esplen

Evaluating Cancer Rates, Cancer Types, and Variant Hotspots Between Different Ancestries Among Individuals with Li-Fraumeni Syndrome

Chair: Jessica Corredor

Karli Livingston

The Impact of Personal and Family History of Huntington's Disease on the Decision and Ability to Obtain Life, Long-term Care and Disability Insurances.

Chair: Leslie Dunnington

Ava Henson

Exploring the psychosocial impacts of attending and participating in Camp PHEver

Chair: Megan Morand



Where are they now?

CLASS OF 2024 UPDATES

CARLEY BRUECKNER

Prenatal and Cancer Genetics in northern KY

MINDY KOLODZIEJSKI

Medical Genetics in Lexington, KY

DISHA PATEL

Cancer Genetics in Lexington, KY

NICOLETTE MURPHEY

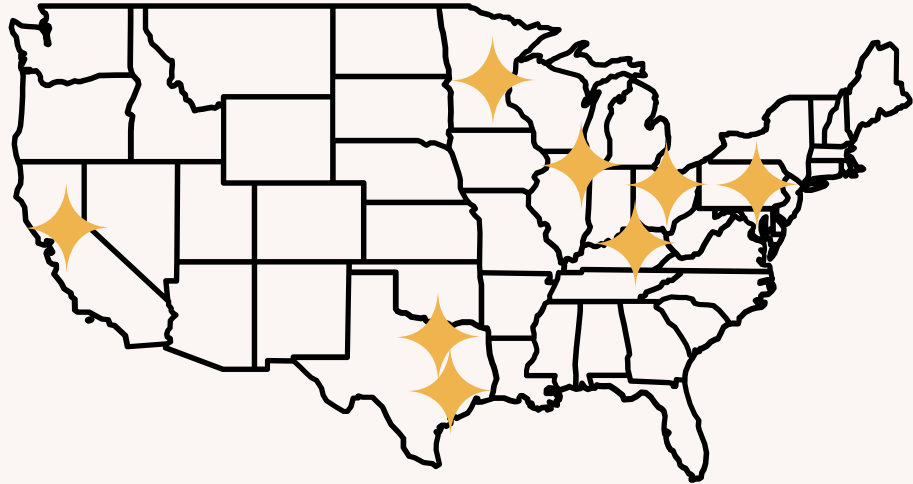
Prenatal Genetics in Dallas, TX

RACHEL NOTESTINE

Newborn Screening in Columbus, OH

MARIA HERNANDEZ

Prenatal Genetics in Houston, TX



JORDAN STEFFEN

Medical Genetics in Chicago, IL

KIKI RISGAARD

General Genetics in St. Cloud, MN



EMMA BILLINGS

Industry in Sacramento, CA

LAURA GORECKI

Cancer Genetics in Allentown, PA



Class of 2024

GRADUATION AND RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



UTGCP Awards

2024



EXCELLENCE IN PUBLICATION AWARD

Gina Sanchez, class of 2022

“Status of Abortion Curriculum in Genetic Counseling”

Published in the Journal of Genetic Counseling February 2024

UTGCP Awards

2024



EXCELLENCE IN PUBLICATION AWARD

Rachel Nostestine, class of 2024

“Fraud in Genetic Testing: Swindling the System”

Published in Genetics in Medicine September 2024

UTGCP Awards

2024



OUTSTANDING CLINICAL SUPERVISOR AWARD

Luana Goulet

Here's what students had to say about Luana:

“Luana is the definition of an outstanding supervisor. She continuously fosters a safe and encouraging environment for GC students. She instills confidence in her students to take on new challenges and is their biggest cheerleader along the way. She always reminds students of the potential they have and the unique strengths that she sees in them. She is not only flexible and adaptable, but she is a supervisor who cultivates a learning environment where we felt safe and comfortable coming to her with any concerns. Luana is a true advocate for students- thank you for being such an amazing supervisor and wonderful person!”

UTGCP Awards

2024



OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARD

Gabriel Lazarin

Here's what nominees had to say:

“Pioneer. Leader. Disrupter. Challenger. Wonderer. The definitions of these words quickly come to mind when thinking of Gabriel Lazarin.

While he was not the first genetic counselor to work in an industry setting, it was still at a time when GCs were critical of those who took these positions. He has published numerous articles that have shifted practice in the field of prenatal genetics, presented on countless national and international stages, and trained hundreds of physicians, students, and other professionals to deepen their knowledge and understanding of expanded carrier screening. He has been a loyal and dedicated supporter of the UTGCP for many years and is deserving of this recognition.”

PAST AWARD WINNERS



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

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

Outstanding Clinical Supervisor Award

2018 – Sarah Bannon

2019 – Blair Stevens

2020 – Shannon Mulligan

2021 – Brittanie (Morris) Shelton

2022 – Leslie Dunnington

2023- Meagan Choates



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 Swankowski

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

Class of 2003

Sandra Darilek

Emily (Gutter) Burke

Jennifer (Malone) Hoskovec

Carolyn Wilson-Brackett

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2004

Andrea Atherton
Colleen (Buechner) Wu
Jamie Chance
Carol (Linsner) Brooks
Alice Schindler

Class of 2005

Jennifer LeMoine
Tamara Solomon

Cindy Trotter

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 Crapitto

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

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

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2012 continued

Sam (Penney) Douglas

Katie (Rock) Forster

Ann (Simmons) Bunnell

Class of 2013

Allison (Copeland) Ortega

Jessica (Davis) Lopez

Kate (Dempsey) Principe

Michelle McDougle

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

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

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2019

Peyton (Busby) Nunley

Alexa Bream

Georgiann Garza

Emily (Krosschell) Thoreson

Allison Moats

Samantha Montgomery

Carol Nowlen

Cayleen Smith

Angelica Starnes

Danielle (Williams) Carr

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

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

Madeline Alpar

Erin Atkinson

Yusra Aziz

Jack Colleran

Emily Daykin

Teresa Heller

Cindy Hernandez

Jasmine Tyson

Jordan Zeiger

ALUMNI DIRECTORY

Class of 2024

Emma Billings
Carley Brueckner
Laura Gorecki
Maria Hernandez
Mindy Kolodziejski
Nicolette Murphey
Rachel Notestine
Disha Patel
Kirsten Risgaard
Jordan Steffen



From the Editor

I want to start off by saying a HUGE thank you to Emily Martin (c/o 2021) and Meaghan Taggett (c/o 2021) for their work on the Houston Helix. They have graciously stepped back from their duties this year and decided to pass the reins. Emily and Meaghan did an amazing job over the years and have set the bar high!

I am also grateful for Gina Sanchez (c/o 2022) for her assistance in reviewing the Helix this year and ensuring I didn't miss any typos! Her assistance and willingness to join the new Outreach committee are well appreciated.

My final message is to you, the wonderful alumni. Thank you for sharing your updates and stories. I enjoyed hearing from you all and getting to know new faces while putting together this newsletter.

Happy Holidays and see you again in 2025!

Thanks,

Sam Montgomery

Class of 2019