

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

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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

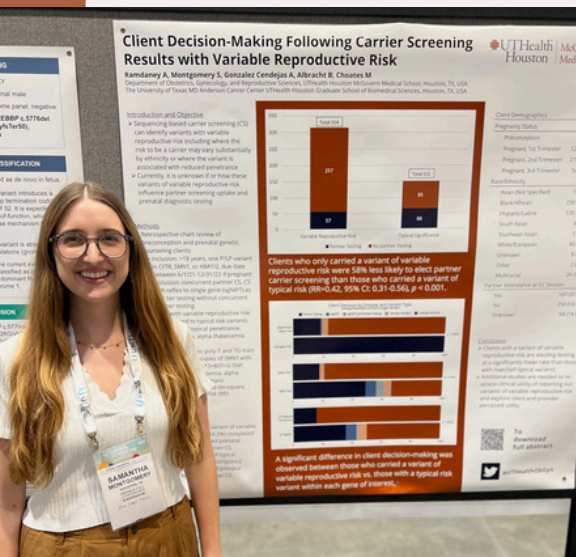
To help tackle even more outreach endeavors, this fall we established a new program Outreach Committee. Through events and speaking opportunities, the committee hopes to reach a larger audience and introduce a broader array of students to the GC pipeline. Additionally, we want to help connect students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



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# thank you for you support!

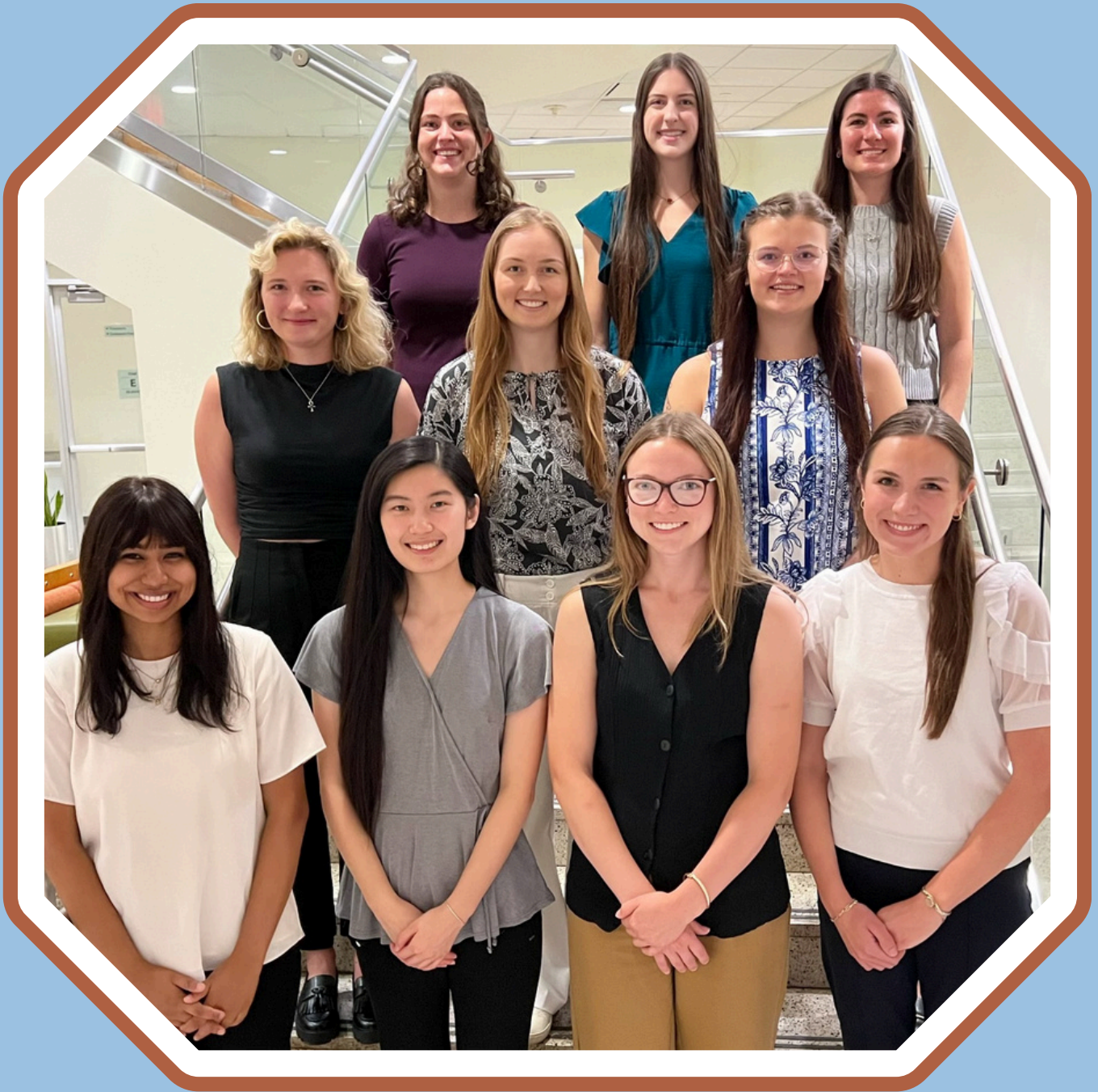


With your generous donations, the UTGCP raised almost \$1,000 for the Research and Education Endowed Fund and the Jacqueline T. Hecht Scholarship this fall! We are truly grateful for the donations you made this year at the NSGC alumni lunch, GC Awareness Day, and Annual Day of Giving.

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

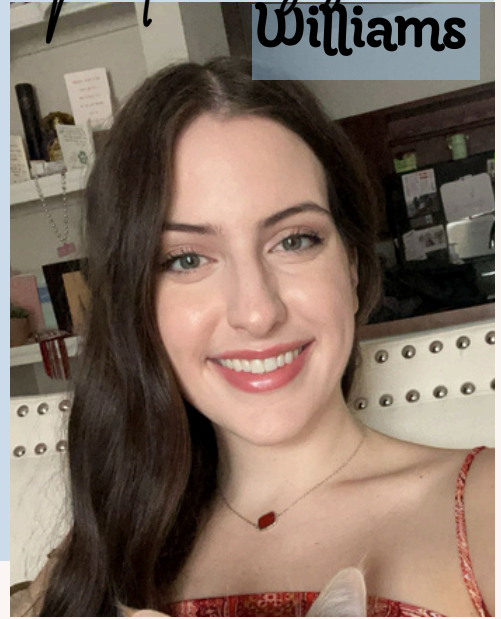


**From left to right, top to bottom:** Jessie Scarlett, Marissa Williams, Erin Sharkey, Jolie Bourek, Katie Ledden, Savannah Berger, Lamia Haque, Michelle Luong, Sara Pickett, Kathrynne Rojeck

Michelle  
Luong



Marissa  
Williams



Spring, TX



University of Houston



Biology



Odessa, TX



Texas Tech University



Cell and Molecular Biology

Lamia  
Haque



Jolie  
Bourek



Pflugerville, TX



University of Texas



Nutrition



Austin, TX



University of Texas



Biology

Katheryne  
Rejeck



Sara  
Pickett



Ann Arbor, MI



Michigan State University  
Human Biology & Genomics  
& Molecular Genetics



Milford, NH



Tennessee Technological  
University  
Biology



Katie  
Ledden



Savannah  
Berger



Brea, CA



California State Fullerton  
Molecular Biology



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*

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## **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*

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## **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

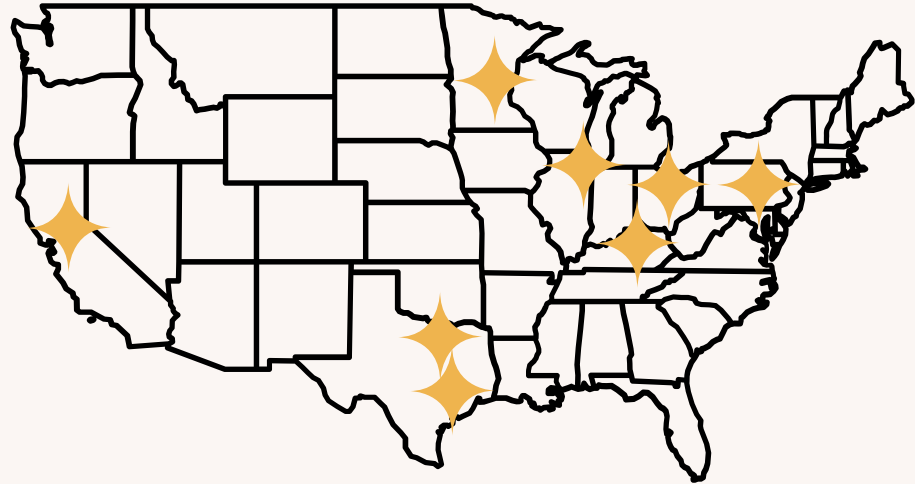
Prenatal Genetics in Dallas, TX

### 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