

# MOLECULAR & TRANSLATIONAL BIOLOGY NEWSLETTER

AUG 2025

Program Director  
Dr. Kristin Eckel-Mahan



*from the directors' desk*



Program Co-Director  
Dr. Kendra Carmon

Dear MTB Community, we're excited to kick off a new academic year and to introduce the launch of the MTB Newsletter! This newsletter is designed to keep our students and faculty informed with the latest updates and to celebrate the many achievements within our community. Thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of our student council, you can expect helpful information about the MTB program, as well as news on events and opportunities across GSBS and the broader university.

We're honored to continue serving as your MTB Directors and remain committed to supporting you throughout the year. As always, we welcome your feedback, news of recent student/ faculty accomplishments, and other ideas on how to help MTB grow and thrive.

## NEW MTB PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

The MTB Program is happy to announce a new peer mentoring program to help students prepare for candidacy!

This program will pair 1 post-candidacy student with 1 to 2 pre-candidacy students to encourage timely completion of pre-candidacy milestones, enhance exam readiness, and promote ongoing success through their training in MTB.

This program is **not** meant to replace the natural connections and support that already happen within the MTB community, but to provide additional guidance for students who want a more structured approach for candidacy preparation. The deadline for applications has closed, but if you would still like to participate, please reach out!



**(Reminder:** If you are taking your candidacy exam soon & would like to hold a mock exam, please reach out to schedule a meeting!)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MTB PROGRAM ORIENTATION

AUGUST 20  
2-2:50 PM, MSB 3.001

Followed by a self-pay social at Valhalla!

### MTB RETREAT

SEPTEMBER 26  
1-7 PM, SPINDLETAP BREWERY  
10622 HIRSCH RD, HOUSTON, TX  
77016

Including a keynote address by our Distinguished Faculty Awardee: Dr. Vihang Narkar!

### LAB COAT CEREMONY

OCTOBER 17  
4:30 PM



## UNIVERSITY MATTERS & OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS



**Aug. 15:** Open Course Registration

**Aug. 25 - Sept. 10:** Late Registration

**Sept. 1:** Labor Day, Institutional Holiday

**Sept. 29:** First Rotation begins

**Aug. 1:** Application deadline for Student Intercouncil

**Tuesdays 6:30-7:30 PM and Saturdays 9-10 AM:** UTHealth Houston Fitness in the Park @Discovery Green

## MTB COURSES OFFERED THIS FALL

**GS12 1011** MTB Seminar Series

**\*New! Current Methods in Molecular and Translational Biology (CMMTB)\***

**GS03 1221** CMMTB Module 2: Advanced Omics

**GS03 1231** CMMTB Module 3: Structural and Functional Analysis of Proteins

**GS03 1241** CMMTB Module 4: Model Systems in Cell and Tissue Biology

# UPCOMING CONFERENCES

**Sept. 13:** GCC 4th Annual Face to Face, Shoulder to Shoulder: Let's Talk about Prostate Cancer  
**Oct. 22:** GCC 6th Annual Single Cell & Spatial Omics Symposium  
**Oct. 24:** 35th Annual Keck Research Conference  
**Nov. 19-21:** Nature/MDACC The Tumor Ecosystem: From Bench to Clinic and Back  
(Abstract deadline: Sept. 19 at 11:59 PM)

## FELLOWSHIPS & SCHOLARSHIPS

**Sept. 3:** AHA Pre-doctoral Fellowship

**Sept. 8:** TIPS Application Deadline

**Oct. 12:** NIH K99/R00 Submission Deadline

**Dec. 8:** F30/F31 Submission Deadline

## MEME OF THE QUARTER



Log-arithmetic Kitty  
@kitesva

The best PhD defense is a good PhD offense

Print out your doctoral committee's old theses beforehand and spend the first 30 minutes of your defense eviscerating them

Share your favorite science meme with us by following us on social media!

@MTBATGSBS

ON INSTAGRAM  
& X (FORMERLY TWITTER)



## mentor minute

YOUR QUICK DOSE OF WISDOM FROM MTB FACULTY — WHETHER IT'S ADVICE THEY WISH THEY HAD IN GRAD SCHOOL, A FAVORITE QUOTE, OR JUST A ONE-LINER TO KEEP YOU MOTIVATED.

“As a pharmacologist, my favorite quote comes from Paracelsus, the 16th-century physician who famously said, “The dose makes the poison.” He meant it for medicine, but I think it works just as well for coffee, Netflix binges, and for social media!”

DR. HARRY KARMOUTY-QUINTANA

## MTB HIGHLIGHTS

share news, use Link/QR code at the bottom of this newsletter

Cell Reports paper just accepted in  
**Eckel-Mahan lab!**

Congratulations to **Nikki Cao** on receiving an  
NIH F99 Fellowship!

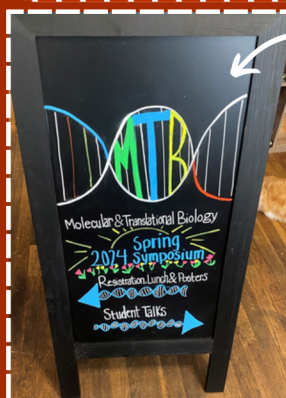
Congratulations to **Ester Lujan** on receiving the American  
Legion Auxiliary Fellowship in Cancer Research

Congratulations to **Steve Farmer** on receiving the  
GSBS Presidents' Research Scholarships for 2025!

### Open Postdoctoral Position!

Available postdoctoral research position in Structure & Function of Ion Channels in Dr. Irina Serysheva's laboratory in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at McGovern Medical School.

Email [irina.i.Serysheva@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:irina.i.Serysheva@uth.tmc.edu) with a single PDF file containing curriculum vitae, a brief statement of research interests and career goals, and the names and contact information of three references.



Special shoutout to  
**Madisyn Estella Williamson Concha**  
for the wonderful art at the  
MTB Spring Symposium!!

### FUN FACT

Before becoming the Molecular and Translational biology program, it was the Biochemistry and Cell Biology program. And before that, it was separated into 2 programs: Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and Cell and Regulatory Biology



# MTB LEADERSHIP

## DR. KRISTIN ECKEL-MAHAN



MTB Program Director

When not at work, Kristin enjoys travelling, cooking, running and swimming with her husband and three children. (Oh yea, she also loves to work on grants and papers in very, very, very loud natatoriums!)

## DR. KENDRA CARMON



MTB Program Director

When outside the lab Dr. Carmon enjoys still thinking about science, spending time with her dog Chucky, watching TV (particularly reality and true crimes shows), and hanging out at coffee shops (you will rarely find her not drinking coffee).

## AMANDA WILLIAMSON

MTB Program Manager



Amanda's current role is to assist the program directors with administrative duties. She also assists the student council with logistics of event planning and she is almost always available to answer questions. Please feel free to drop by her office (MSB 7.262 – M/W/Thu). Outside of work, Amanda enjoys the beach! Her last trip was to San Juan, Puerto Rico where the water was absolutely beautiful, and she enjoyed watching the cruise ships disappear into the night!

## ★ ★ YOUR 2025-26 MTB STUDENT COUNCIL! ★ ★

## STEPHEN FARMER



President

Stephen loves exploring new places with his wife, most recently visiting Geneva, Switzerland, and has a passion for creative writing, having self-published one science-fiction novel (*Prionic Tribulation*) and one literary criticism piece (*Philosophy of Shelley's Quondam Capitalism*).

## ESTER LUJAN



Vice-President

Ester loves to explore coffee shops around town, going to the gym, hanging out with her cat, Lanie, and she really enjoys cooking! She also really likes to watch history documentaries, and she has recently taken up painting as a new hobby.

## MIRRAH BASHIR

Chair



When Mirrah is not in the lab she enjoys cooking, going to the gym and trying out new crafts. Her latest projects include a mosaic-tile serving tray and no-stitch tie blankets!

## CARA BIDDLE

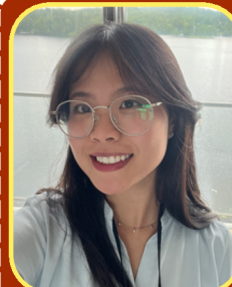
Chair



Cara's hobbies including cooking, gardening, and adventuring in the outdoors. She and her husband are also beginning an aquarium hobby, as they recently got a pet fish named Wanda!

## SOPHIA HUANG

Chair



Outside the lab, Sophia enjoys writing, video gaming, and pottery. Her goal is to throw 5lbs of clay! She has a pet hamster and they enjoy snacking on cucumbers together.

# MEET THE NEW MTB STUDENTS



## Adam Tseng

Advisor: Kuang-Lei Tsai, PhD

Research: I study how the Mediator complex regulates gene transcription using biochemical and biophysical approaches.

In my free time, I enjoy jogging and listening to music.

## Boxuan Yang



Advisor: Burton Dickey M.D.

Research: We study the mechanism of airway mucin secretion.

Hobbies: Traveling, exploring new restaurants, hanging out with my cats.



## Candise Tat

Advisor: Vincent Bernard-Pagán, MD, PhD

Research: I will be studying the combination of radiation therapy and KRAS inhibitors against pancreatic cancer, with a focus on the impacts on the tumor microenvironment

Outside the lab, I enjoy reading, listening to music, and swimming!

## David Molkentine



Advisor: John Heymach, MD, PhD

My master's thesis is on "Identify novel EML4-ALK fusion mutations arising from 3rd and 4th generation ALK tyrosine kinase inhibitors (TKI) in vitro. Validate novel therapeutic strategies to overcome clinically observed on-target ALK TKI resistance.

Hobbies: Dog fostering, weight training, swimming, hiking, playing music and retro gaming



## Andy Escalante

Lab advisor: Dr. Kristin L. Mahan, PhD

My research focuses on circadian rhythm-driven gene expression in hepatocytes and how this rhythmicity is disrupted by obesity am also investigating potential links between gender-affirming hormone therapy and the development of liver disease.

Hobbies and interests: Writing, MMA, and TTRPGs.

## Alexandria Gatton



My research involves the development and utilization of novel biological approaches to study cell-cell interactions.

Some of my hobbies include running, long walks, biking, and gardening.

Want to be featured in the next newsletter?  
Scan the QR code or click the link to share any news!

We would particularly love to hear about any internal or external trainings, volunteer events, fellowship opportunities, lab accomplishments, publications, awards, grants, student successes, faculty promotions, open positions, or even personal milestones!



Contact us if there if you want to share a meme, share an opinion, etc.

<https://forms.gle/S1bZYYmGyRfpksvs8>



# TRAVEL, TALKS & TRIUMPHS!

