

Molecular & Translational Biology Newsletter

DEC 2025

From the directors' desk



Happy holidays to our MTB family!

We are thrilled to celebrate a successful and rewarding 2025 — highlighted by numerous student and faculty awards and the launch of our new methods course curriculum.

As we wrap up the year, we're looking ahead to an inspiring 2026, and we hope it is every bit as fulfilling for all MTBers as this year has been.

Wishing you a safe, joyful, and restorative holiday season!

MTB HIGHLIGHTS

Congratulations to **Peyton High**

for his many accomplishments this year!

- Dean's Research Scholarship Award
- President's Research Excellence Award
- Andrew Sowell-Wade Huggins Fellowship
- Renewal for the Training Interdisciplinary Pharmacology Scientists (TIPS) T32 grant
- Presenting his research in postdoctoral recruitment symposia:
 - The Moffitt Innovators of Tomorrow Symposium
 - The Salk Institute for Biological Studies Discover Symposium
 - Stanford Postdoctoral Recruitment Initiative in Sciences and Medicine
- Cell Reports Medicine 1st author publication with fellow labmates and MTB students, **Cara Biddle** and **Yueh-Ming (Camellia) Shyu** as co-authors (DOI: [10.1016/j.xcrm.2025.102363](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xcrm.2025.102363)).
- Dr. John J. Kopchick Fellowship

Read about Peyton's Kopchick Fellowship here:

<https://gsbs.uth.edu/news/story/peyton-high-dual-targeting-colorectal-cancer-therapies-kopchick-fellowship>

Congratulations to **Cara Biddle**

on receiving the GSBS Schissler Foundation Fellowship and successfully passing candidacy!

Cara also won 1st place post-candidacy at the 2025 TAP Retreat and 2nd place post-candidacy at the Kopchick Symposium for her poster presentation!



PEYTON HIGH (LEFT), CARA BIDDLE (RIGHT)

Congratulations to **Sophia Huang** on receiving the

pre-doctoral fellowship from the American Heart Association!

Sophia is a co-author (2nd) on a recently published paper (DOI: [10.1096/fj.202501764R](https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.202501764R)). She also won 2nd place post-candidacy at the 2025 TAP Retreat and 1st place post-candidacy at the Kopchick Symposium for her poster presentation!

Congratulations to **René Girard** on receiving a scholarship from the highly prestigious Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation! René will have the opportunity to pursue a collaborative research experience at the Medical University of Graz, Austria!

Congratulations to **Julia Zickus** on receiving the CCTS T32 Fellowship, focused on bench to bedside research and allows her to engage in more clinical research opportunities!

Congratulations to **Ester Lujan** who was one of the poster competition winners at the 2025 Endocrine Society Conference in San Francisco and received a renewal for the American Legion Auxiliary Fellowship in Cancer Research!

Congratulations to **Candise Tat** on winning 2nd place pre-candidacy at the Kopchick Symposium for her poster presentation!

Congratulations to **Paula Bender**, a neuroscience student in the laboratory of Dr. Eckel-Mahan for receiving a \$50,000 Kopchick prize, intended to support her experimental goals!

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR STUDENTS FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE YEARS! KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK!!

CELEBRATING OUR RECENT GRADUATES

DR. CAITLYNN BARROWS



June 11, 2025

Advisors: Mary Farach-Carson, PhD, and Simon Young, DDS, MD, PhD
Thesis Title: Human Salivary Gland Stem/Progenitor Cells for Tissue Engineering, SARS-CoV-2 Susceptibility, and Neurointegration

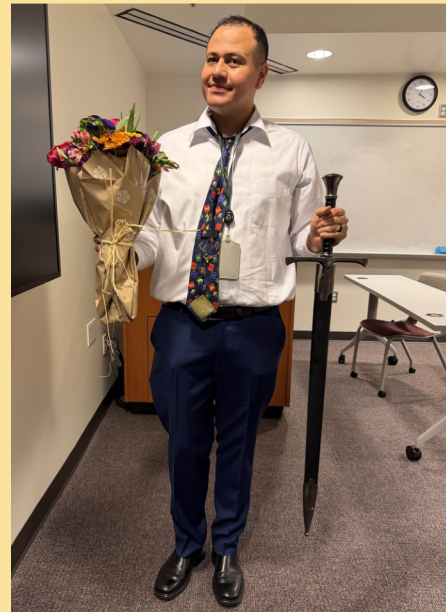
DR. ALEXANDER PAUL ANDERSON



October 21, 2025

Advisor: Sean Marrelli, PhD
Thesis Title: Capsinoids, Non-Pungent TRPV1 Agonists, Induce a Mild Hypothermia that Provides Short- and Long-Term Neuroprotection after Ischemic Stroke

DR. JOSE SANTIAGO ENRIQUEZ ORTIZ



November 18, 2025

Advisor: Pratip K. Bhattacharya, PhD
Thesis Title: Sensitivity and Specificity of Detecting Premalignant Pancreatic Lesions by Hyperpolarized Magnetic Resonance

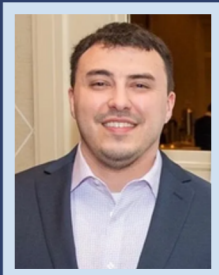
Fun Fact!

The MTB program has a tradition of presenting doctoral students with a ceremonial sword (or a very large letter opener) after successfully defending their thesis! This PhD sword tradition originated in Finland around the 1800s and has made its way to our program!

RECOGNIZING OUR MTBERS

FOR THEIR ACADEMIC SERVICE DURING THE 2025-2026 YEAR!

STEVE FARMER



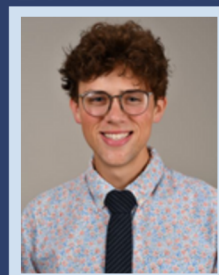
GSBS Curriculum Committee
Kopchick Planning Committee
TA for GS21 1232
(Translational Sciences: From
Bedside to Bench and Back)

RENÉ GIRARD



GSA President
GSBS Executive Committee
GSBS Ambassador
TA for GS21 1017
(Foundations of Biomedical Research)

PEYTON HIGH



Student InterCouncil
Kopchick Planning Committee

CANDISE TAT



GSBS Ambassador

CARA BIDDLE



GSBS Ambassador

MIRRAH BASHIR



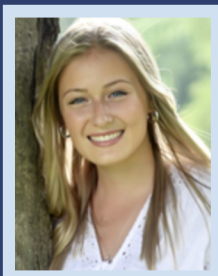
GSBS Ambassador

SOPHIA HUANG



GSBS Ambassador

JULIA ZICKUS



Student InterCouncil
GSBS Ambassador

**YUEH-MING
(CAMELLIA) SHYU**



GSEC Committee

**CHRISTINE
GALLEGOS**

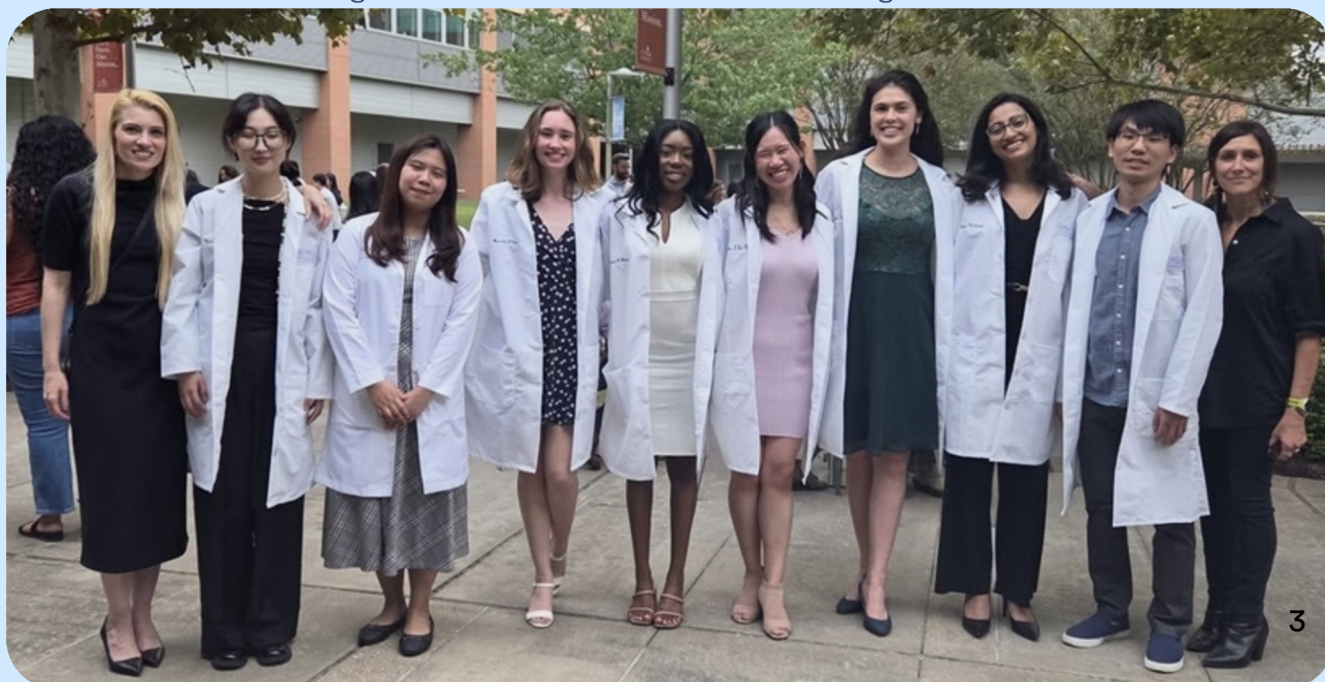


Kopchick Planning Committee

We encourage all students to participate in serving on academic committees and teaching assistant positions!

LAB COAT CEREMONY

On October 17, 2025, second-year students received their lab coats!
Congratulations to our students on this exciting milestone!



Left to Right: Dr. Kendra Carmon, Wanqing Cheng, Yueh-Ming (Camellia) Shyu, Alexandria Williams, Jasmine Bledsoe, Candise Tat, Elissa Bloom, Sohritri Mukherjee, Hsiang-Ching (Adam) Tseng, and Dr. Kristin Eckel-Mahan

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Features open lab positions, upcoming conferences, fellowships, and more!

The Cox Lab is recruiting a graduate student to start next spring/summer and is accepting rotation students!

The Cox Lab focuses on pancreatic islet biology, utilizing mouse, human, and stem cell models, as well as innovative tools, to study metabolic diseases.

Please contact Richard.A.Cox@uth.tmc.edu for more information.

CONFERENCES

AACR SPECIAL CONFERENCE IN CANCER RESEARCH: INNOVATIONS IN PROSTATE CANCER RESEARCH AND TREATMENT

January 20-22, 2026. Boston, Massachusetts

Advance Registration Deadline: December 15, 2025

2ND ANNUAL UTHealth HOUSTON MOVEMENT DISORDERS SYMPOSIUM

February 21, 2026. TMC3

AKAP 2026, THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON ANCHORED CAMP SIGNALING PATHWAYS

February 27 - March 1, 2026. Brown Foundation Institute for Molecular Medicine

(Co-organized by Dr. Carmen Dessauer)

ANNUAL MEDICAL SCHOOL RESEARCH RETREAT

March 3, 2026. Brown Foundation Institute for Molecular Medicine

15TH ANNUAL GCC TRANSLATIONAL PAIN RESEARCH CONFERENCE

March 3-4, 2026. Bioscience Research Collaborative

Abstract Submission: January 6, 2026

AACR SPECIAL CONFERENCE IN CANCER RESEARCH: RAS ONCOGENESIS AND THERAPEUTICS

March 5-8, 2026. Los Angeles, California

Abstract Deadline: December 8, 2025

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY (ASBMB)

March 7-10, 2026. National Harbor D.C. Metro Area

16TH INTERNATIONAL INTRINSIC CAPACITY, FRAILTY AND SARCOPENIA RESEARCH (ICFSR) CONFERENCE FOR HEALTH LONGEVITY

March 10-12, 2026. Washington, DC

AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY SPRING MEETING

March 22-26, 2026. Atlanta, Georgia.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR CANCER RESEARCH (AACR), ANNUAL MEETING

April 17-22, 2026. San Diego, California

Clinical Trials/Late-Breaking Abstract Submission Deadline: January 12, 2026

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

RUTH L. KIRSCHSTEIN NATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE AWARD INDIVIDUAL PREDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP (F31)

Deadlines: December 8, 2025 and April 8, 2026

AMERICAN AGING ASSOCIATION (AGE) EARLY CAREER SCHOLAR'S PROGRAM

Deadline: December 10, 2025

Provides 2-year society membership, presentation opportunity and travel award for their annual conference

AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY SCHOLARSHIP

Deadline: December 15, 2025

For students who recently defended their PhD (within 12 months)

AACR EARLY-CAREER HILL DAY 2026

Deadline: December 15, 2025

For current AACR associate member, Science advocacy opportunity in Washington, DC (travel paid)

L'ORÉAL USA FELLOWSHIPS FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE (POSTDOC FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY)⁴

Deadline: February 13, 2026

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.

"Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.
You have to try new things and enter new areas to learn."

Dr. Daniel Frigo

Questions we asked Dr. Frigo:

- What would you title your autobiography as a scientist?
"Adventures of a Cautious Optimist."



UPCOMING EVENTS

MTB ROTATION TALKS

(Followed by a Winter Wind-Down for a student debrief and semester wrap up!)

Tuesday, December 9.
Rotation talks start at 1 PM! Hear from our first-year students rotating in MTB labs about their research! Join us in room B100.

Join us afterwards for a Winter Wind-Down from 5-7 PM to celebrate the end of the semester in MSB 5.001.



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

Follow us on Instagram and X (Twitter)

@MTBATGSBS



UNIVERSITY MATTERS & OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dec. 12: End of Fall Semester

Nov. 19 - Dec. 19: Open Registration

Jan. 12: Spring Semester Begins
+ Spring I Tutorial

Jan 12-28: Late Registration

Jan. 19: Martin Luther King Holiday (University closed)

March 6: Spring I Tutorial Ends

March 9 - 13: Spring Break

March 16: Spring II Tutorial Begins

MTB COURSES OFFERED
THIS SPRING!

GS12 1011: MTB Seminar Series (1 credit)

GS13 1024: Molecular basis of Cell Signaling (4 Credits)

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!



<https://forms.gle/S1bZYYmGyRfpksvs8>

MTB RETREAT HIGHLIGHTS

Thank you to all who joined us at the 2025 MTB Fall Retreat! The day was filled with exciting flash talks from our pre- and post-candidacy students about their research, along with faculty talks aimed at recruiting prospective students! Students and faculty got to engage in interactive breakout groups and heard an inspiring keynote from Dr. Vihang Narkar about his research journey.

We ended the retreat socializing and playing a fun game of kickball!

It was wonderful to see everyone connecting and having a great time. We look forward to seeing everyone at the upcoming MTB Spring Symposium and at next year's retreat!

