

GSBS NEWS

GSBS connection to NASA Twins Study

Fall/Winter 2015


UTHealth
The University of Texas
Health Science Center at Houston

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
MDAnderson
Cancer Center

Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

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Alumna Brinda Rana, Ph.D., talks about her involvement with NASA's Twins Study and how her education at GSBS helped her develop experiments that are out of this world. Read complete story on page 18.

Photo taken at Space Center Houston.

Benefactor News



GSBS Deans Michael Blackburn, Ph.D. (left) and Michelle Barton, Ph.D. (far right) pose with Rick Schissler (second from the left) and Nancy R. Schissler in front of the dedication plaque honoring the legacy of Richard "Dick" P. Schissler, founder of the Schissler Foundation.

GSBS receives major gifts from Schissler, Gigli

The University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Houston offers more than 60 scholarships and fellowships that support students as they obtain their M.S., Ph.D. or M.D./Ph.D. degrees. These funds are provided through the philanthropic support of our generous donors.

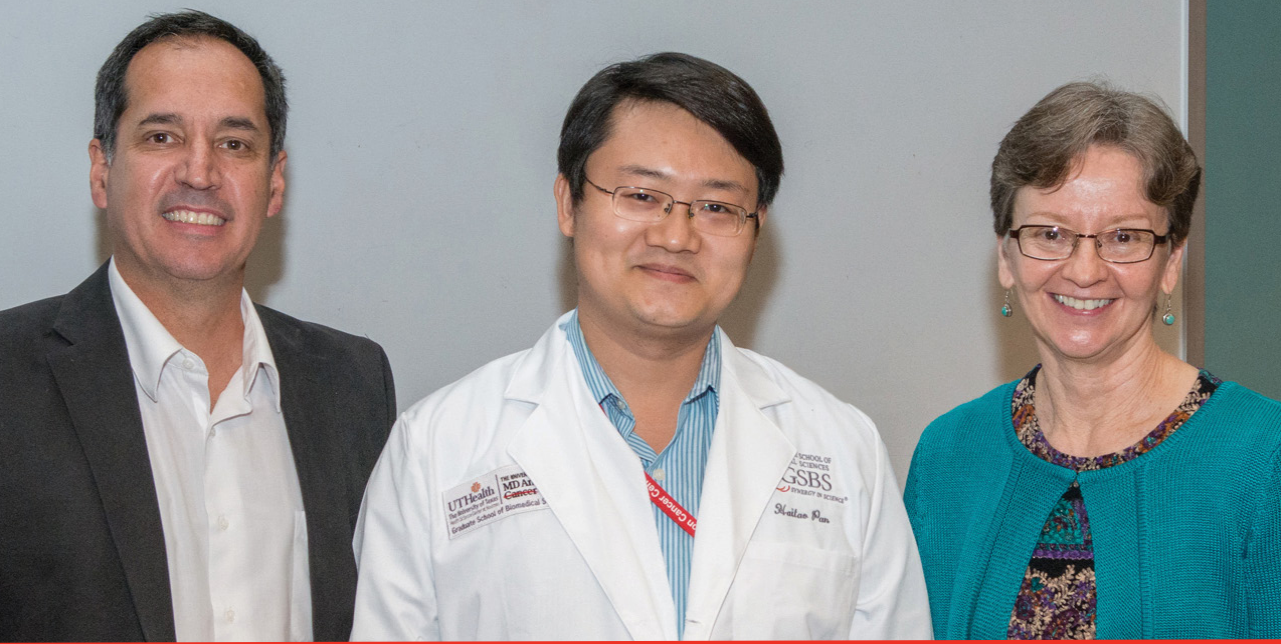
This year, GSBS received a \$1 million pledge from the Schissler Foundation—matched by UTHealth's Game Changers Initiative—to establish an endowment that will fully support two Schissler Fellows every year in perpetuity. The gift was to honor the organization's founder Richard "Dick" P. Schissler Jr., who passed away in September 2014. The 2015 Schissler Foundation luncheon held at the school in May also unveiled a plaque proclaiming the GSBS Library as the Schissler Foundation Library.

The foundation has provided support to more than 60 GSBS students since 1993. Schissler's wife, Nancy R. Schissler, and his son, Richard "Rick" P. Schissler III, were on hand for the unveiling.

"My husband (Dick) really enjoyed his connection with the students and he looked forward with great anticipation each year to meeting with the Schissler Fellows," said Nancy Schissler.

"I cannot think of a more appropriate way (than the dedication of the GSBS library) to honor my father due to his deep belief and dedication to the mission of GSBS," said Rick Schissler.

Benefactor News continues on page 22



Double Take

A
Message
from GSBS
Deans
Barton
& Blackburn

The journey from scholarly studies to a professional career can be a challenge, but we here at GSBS have laid down the groundwork and are instilling in our students the critical skills needed to become accomplished alumni.

As we kicked off the fall semester, we welcomed a new class of students and had them hit the ground running with Boot Camp and the Core Course. In September, we held our second Lab Coat Ceremony, an event that signifies a second-year student's, such as Haito Pan (pictured above with us), commitment to a new lab and the establishment of a mentor-mentee relationship. We have also been working with Associate Dean of Graduate Education Andrew Bean, Ph.D., and Assistant Dean Marena Wilson-Pham, Ph.D., to promote career development events, such as the Career Lunch coming in January, that will give our students the edge they need to compete in any job market.

All these things provide an added value to a GSBS degree, which more than 100 students received at our Commencement Ceremony held on May 23 (see the list of grads starting on page 7). And as stated above, the endgame is to make sure our students become accomplished alumni.

Such as Brinda Rana, Ph.D., this magazine's featured alumna—her story begins on page 18. Brinda's training at the GSBS helped her become part of an out-of-this-world (and we mean that literally) human genomics

experiment with the NASA-sponsored Twins Study featuring astronauts Scott and Mark Kelly. You may also read another genomics-related story on page 20 about our 2015 Distinguished Alumnus Paul Liu, M.D., Ph.D., a leader at the NIH's National Human Genome Research Institute.

We are proud of our graduates and are continuing to foster relationships between the school and our alumni.

We have been working with the Alumni Steering Committee to establish events (a.k.a. Takeovers) that allow alumni to network in a fun, social setting (one past takeover was held at Saint Arnold Brewery). The goals of these gatherings are to network, build pride in our school and develop camaraderie among our graduates.

We love to hear from our accomplished alumni; we are especially grateful when they pay tribute to their training at the GSBS and want to help other students.

We are very fortunate that alumnus Eric Goldin remembered GSBS as he donated \$50,000 to establish the Ellen Taylor Goldin Legacy Award. This award honors the memory of his beloved wife, whom he met while studying at GSBS. (You can read more about this touching tribute on page 22.)

From our students to our accomplished alumni, **#WeAreGSBS**.



2015 Commencement Speaker:
Raymond Greenberg, M.D., Ph.D.
 Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs
 The University of Texas System

Presidents Colasurdo and DePinho, Deans Barton and Blackburn, members of the platform party, distinguished faculty, graduates, family and friends, it is a great pleasure for me to be with you today to join in celebrating the completion of your studies. A graduate degree is truly the pinnacle of higher education—one that requires years of intense and focused work. Your dedication to this task and your successful completion of the requirements for the degree signals that each of you is ready to embark upon a career in science. For some of you, there are additional studies or a postdoctoral position that await you. Others of you are headed to a position in government, industry, or academia. Regardless of your pathway, we wish you well and trust that you will find future success in all of your pursuits. We are very proud of what you have accomplished here and even more excited about what lies ahead for each of you.

While we are here to celebrate your individual achievements, we also are cognizant that nobody completes a graduate degree entirely on their own. Most of today's graduates have been supported—financially, emotionally, and otherwise—by family and friends. Please join me in taking a moment to express our collective appreciation to the many parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings, children and friends who are here today and who have been there all along for our graduates—well done!

There is another group that it is equally important for us to acknowledge today and that is the talented and dedicated faculty members who have taught, mentored, and advised today's degree candidates. In graduate school perhaps more than any other type of education, the personal relationship between a faculty member and a student is the bedrock of the learning process. Please join me in expressing our mutual admira-

tion for the many outstanding role models among the faculty who have guided these aspiring scientists.

Well, according to the standard guidebook for commencement addresses, I have now completed the three essential ingredients of a graduation speech—congratulate the candidates, acknowledge their loved ones, and salute the faculty. Arguably, the best move at this point would be to sit down. Then again, graduation speakers rarely ever show such good judgment, so I am going to follow in that time-honored tradition and say a few more words. I promise to remember, however, that it has been a long road for our graduates to get to this ceremony and now is not the time to extend that journey.

I suspect that most people in this audience are familiar with the famous opening lines of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . ." These lines have such power because they communicate crisply and clearly that life is often filled with apparent incongruities. There are many such examples, and one that probably is familiar to this audience is that while the United States ranks first in terms of health expenditures per capita, we rank 34th in terms of life expectancy. Another example is the fact that the U. S. spends the fourth highest amount per student on education, yet when our 15-year-olds are compared on standardized exams with their peers in other countries, they rank 17th in science and 25th in mathematics. In both of these examples, the national ambition is clear—Americans want to live long, healthy lives and they want to be well educated. We have the human, financial and institutional resources to make that possible. We have great health care and educational institutions, such as UTHealth and MD Anderson. The problem is that despite our societal ability and willingness to spend on health care and education, our systems are not faring very well against those of other countries.

Now, I did not come here to criticize either the U.S. health care or education systems. You probably expected as much since I am inescapably part of both of these systems. So, if it makes you feel any better, please feel free to blame me. I take full responsibility. But, what I actually came to talk about today is the state of science in this country. Here again, it is the best of times, it is the worst of times.

Why is it the best of times? Without question, science is moving at an unprecedented pace. We are witnessing breakthroughs that could not have been imagined even a few years ago. Just this past year, Dr. Jim Allison of this Graduate School faculty, was recognized internationally for his pioneering work in the immunology of cancer. Dr. Allison discovered how cancer cells evade destruction by the host's immune system by activating the CTLA-4 receptor. This led to the development of a therapy that targets the CTLA-4 receptor and has been shown to be effective in the treatment of metastatic melanoma and has the promise for even broader application.

Almost every day, we see reports of groundbreaking discoveries that will transform the way we care for patients. One such example is work presented this past year on the development of artificial platelets that can be used to stop bleeding in animals or people who have suffered life-threatening traumatic injuries. It also appears that these same artificial platelets can be used to deliver clot-busting drugs to the site of vascular blockages, such as strokes and heart attacks.

Another exciting development is the creation of stem cells that are genetically engineered to produce toxins that kill cancer cells but do not destroy themselves or normal cells. In mouse models, these cells have been encased within biodegradable gels and delivered to the site of brain tumors where they have attacked and destroyed malignancies.

This sounds like the stuff of science fiction, but it is not fantasy, it is reality. In areas such as genomics, regenerative medicine, and nanoscience, we are witnessing whole new paradigms in diagnosis and treatment that will revolutionize health care, and in the process, improve the quality and longevity of life. In brief, the promise of science has never been more apparent or exciting.

At such a heady moment, how can we say that it is also the worst of times? Here the issue is not so much about science per se, but rather the social, economic and political climate in which we find ourselves. No group is more acutely aware of these issues than our graduates today, for they enter the biomedical research workforce at a time of great uncertainty. Federal funding for scientific research, adjusted for inflation, has fallen about 25 percent over the past decade. As a consequence, many excellent grant proposals go unfunded, investigators spend more

time writing grant applications, independent investigators are older when they receive their first grants, new graduates are discouraged from pursuing careers as independent investigators, and many researchers leave the field because they find that the joy of science has been diminished by the demands of reporting, regulation, and compliance.

Boy, I didn't mean to be such a downer—maybe we should just hand out antidepressants with your diplomas! I suspect that one or two of you may have a mood elevator of your own which could come in handy as well—not that I am encouraging that sort of thing. No, I am here to tell you that despite the many challenges of a life in science—there is no greater calling than the one that you have chosen.

The thrill of scientific discovery is unmatched by just about any other human emotion that I can think of—well, just about! To play a role, whether large or small, in advancing the understanding of human health and disease, brings with it a sense of accomplishment and purpose that no paycheck or professional recognition can ever match.

Yes, you are launching your careers at a daunting time and the road ahead will not be easy. It must also be said, however, that your outstanding talents and the education that you have received here will place you at a distinct competitive advantage. Everyone assembled here has great confidence in you, and because of that, we have every expectation that you will make the world a better and healthier place. It is with that faith and trust in what lies ahead that we wish you heartfelt congratulations and every continued success.

Thank you very much.



2014-2015 John P. McGovern Award for Outstanding Teaching Recipient: Jill Schumacher, Ph.D.

Jill Schumacher, Ph.D., was an associate professor in the Department of Genetics, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and the director of the Foundations of Biomedical Research Course at the graduate school. She had been a GSBS faculty member since 1999. Schumacher left GSBS in 2015 to pursue a new position at the University of Pittsburgh.

During her tenure at GSBS, she had been major advisor to seven students and had taught over 240 lecture hours.

She obtained her Ph.D. in Genetics from the University of Washington in 1995. After graduation, she held a postdoctoral fellowship at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institutes of Health (NIH), in Maryland.



An excerpt from the address of GSBS Faculty President Vasanthi Jayaraman, Ph.D.

On behalf of the graduate faculty, I want to congratulate each and every one of you, and tell you how we are very proud of your accomplishments. You have now completed a chapter in your own story and are ready to move on to a new one. And I can see the excitement in your eyes and you are all looking forward to your bright futures. But just as we are looking forward, I want you to pause for a moment and think about what you have achieved during your time at GSBS.

You have been an innovator. You have solved a significant piece of the biomedical science puzzle. Now, the researchers that come after will be able to build on this piece of puzzle. You have learned to think through problems, face adversities and not be faced by failure. Whether it was the lab experiment that never seemed to work, or the reviewers that never seem to be happy with the number of controls that you had performed, or overcoming that writer's block when you were writing your thesis or manuscripts; you have managed to overcome those hurdles and come out successful.

You have learned to work in a team. Remember the first day you went to the lab and had to work with a senior researcher? And how you worked very hard to learn all the techniques as fast as you could, and now that you are ready to leave, you have passed all the knowledge to the next generation of scientists in the lab. You have learned to cherish the value of working in a team.

You have learned to communicate. Through the times that you stood up to the experts in your field and defended your work, and proved to them that you know the most about the research. Or when you had to convince your parents, significant others as to why you are so passionate about what you did and why you spend such long hours in the lab. Or even when you had to sit down with your grandparents and nephews and in simple terms tell them what you have been doing. You have learned the art of communication. And yes, you have now earned your doctorate degrees. And yes, you are experts in molecular biology or neuroscience or cancer biology, but don't forget, you are much more than that. And the opportunities in front of you are limitless.

As much as I would like you to pursue scientific research, I'm confident you can pursue whichever area of science you choose whether it be lawyers, science writers, policymakers, I'm confident that you will be successful. You can now be innovators who can think through problems and not be faced by failure, work in teams, and communicate the importance of your work. I wish you success in whatever endeavors you chose.



GSBS Deans Michael Blackburn, Ph.D., left, and Michelle Barton, Ph.D., right, pose with GSBS faculty member Kevin Morano, Ph.D., before the 2015 Commencement Ceremony.

Elizabeth Baack
Rebecca Carter, M.S.

Arvind Bambhroliya
Wendy Woodward, M.D., Ph.D.

Trista Berry
Peter Christie, Ph.D.

Nabila Boukelmoune
Oleh Pochynyuk, Ph.D.

Sherille Bradley
Gregory Lizee, Ph.D.

Matthew Campbell
Padmanee Sharma, M.D., Ph.D.

Mei-Kuang Chen
Mien-Chie Hung, Ph.D.

Kimberly Cope
Kevin Morano, Ph.D.

Heather Dalton
Anil Sood, M.D.

Camille Graham
Patrick Zweidler-McKay, M.D., Ph.D.

Lixia Han
Xifeng Wu, M.D., Ph.D.

Dhwani Haria
Honami Naora, Ph.D.

Belinda Hernandez
Jichao Chen, Ph.D.

Laura Holman
Karen Lu, M.D.

Ming-Jung Hsieh
Laurence Court, Ph.D.

Jennifer Irwin
Geoffrey Ibbott, Ph.D.

Callie Jenevein
Jennifer Hoskovec, M.S.

Alyssa Kosturakis
Patrick Dougherty, Ph.D.

Dana Lewis
Stephen Kry, Ph.D.

Douglas Litwin
Heidi Kaplan, Ph.D.

Roxsan Manshoury
Don Gibbons, M.D., Ph.D.

Sarah Mayes
Jennifer Czerwinski, M.S.

Carla McGruder
Jacqueline Hecht, Ph.D.

Prexy Modi
Varsha Gandhi, Ph.D.

Xiaolu Pan
Ronald DePinho, M.D.

Fnu Preety Priya
Pralhad Ram, Ph.D.

Kari Ring
Karen Lu, M.D.

Nouara Sadaoui
Anil Sood, M.D.

Katelynn Sagaser
Claire Singletary, M.S.

Haley Streff
Jennifer Litton, M.D.

Kayla Vaughn
Myla Ashfaq, M.S.

Carlos Villamizar
Dianna Milewicz, M.D., Ph.D.

Jason Westin
Richard Davis, M.D.

Caiqian Wu
Molly Daniels, M.S.

Jian Xiong
John Hancock, Ph.D.

Chao Yang
John Heymach, M.D., Ph.D.

Daniel Calame
Rick Wetsel, Ph.D.

David Rushworth
Laurence Cooper, M.D., Ph.D.

<p>Germaine Agollah Eva Sevick, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Amanda Haltom Hamed Jafar-Nejad M.D.</p>
<p>Joseph Alcorn Scott Lane, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Naima Hammoudi Peng Huang M.D., Ph.D.</p>
<p>Burcu Aslan Gabriel Lopez-Berestein, M.D.</p>	<p>Jennifer Herricks William Margolin Ph.D.</p>
<p>Katelynn Bill Alexander Lazar, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Heather Highland Craig Hanis, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Samuel Brady Dihua Yu, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Le Huang Vicki Huff, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Cameron Brand Carmen Dessauer, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Natalie Jabbour Leung Khandan Keyomarsi, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Julianna Bronk George Calin, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Yun Seong Jeong Hui-Kuan Lin, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Wells Brown Bradley McIntyre, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Blake Johnson Joya Chandra, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Tanushree Chatterji Gary Gallick, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Sangbae Kim Ju-Seog Lee, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Lihe Chen Wenzheng Zhang, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Janani Krishnamurthy Laurence Cooper, M.D., Ph.D.</p>
<p>Lin Chen Yi Xu, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Heng-Huan Lee Mien-Chie Hung Ph.D.</p>
<p>Ying Xuan Chua Wei Zhang, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Hong-Jen Lee Mien-Chie Hung, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Nahir Cortes Santiago Candelaria Gomez-Manzano, M.D.</p>	<p>Moon Sup Lee Pierre McCrea, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Denise Crossland Laurence Cooper, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Szu-Wei Lee Hui-Kuan Lin, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Jorge Del-Aguila Eric Boerwinkle, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Sze Lee Cecilia Leung Samuel Mok, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Deepna Devkar Anthony Wright, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Kimberly Lucenay Khandan Keyomarsi, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Patty Dimarco Hewitt Andrew Gladden, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Marc Macaluso Kevin McBride, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Austin Faught David Followill, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Christa Manton Joya Chandra, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Alison Fitzgerald Jeffrey Myers, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Anantha Marisetty Sadhan Majumder, Ph.D.</p>
<p>Mayur Gadhikar Jeffrey Myers, M.D., Ph.D.</p>	<p>Caitlin May Keila Torres, M.D., Ph.D.</p>
<p>Sanchaika Gaur Gary Gallick, Ph.D.</p>	<p>Lindsey Minter Michelle Barton, Ph.D.</p>

Kalyan Nallaparaju Chen Dong, Ph.D.	Janice Santiago-O'Farrill Eugenie Kleinerman, M.D.
Giovanni Nitti David McConkey, Ph.D.	Jia Shen Mien-Chie Hung, Ph.D.
Jessica Nute Dianna Cody, Ph.D.	Einav Shoshan Menashe Bar-Eli, Ph.D.
William O'Brien Cheng Lee, Ph.D.	Rita Sirrieh Vasanthi Jayaraman, Ph.D.
Marcia Ogasawara Peng Huang, M.D., Ph.D.	Kin Man Suen John Ladbury, Ph.D.
Angelica Ortiz Sue-Hwa Lin, Ph.D.	Albert Teo Nami McCarty, Ph.D.
Jun Young Park Ju-Seog Lee, Ph.D.	Umadevi Thirumurthi Mien-Chie Hung, Ph.D.
Brittany Parker Kerrigan Wei Zhang, Ph.D.	George Tiller Danielle Garsin, Ph.D.
Yang Peng Shiaw-Yih Lin, Ph.D.	Christin Ungewiss Don Gibbons, M.D., Ph.D.
Swarna Ramaswamy Vasanthi Jayaraman, Ph.D.	Selina Vattathil Paul Scheet, Ph.D.
Stuart Red Anne Sereno, Ph.D.	Avinashnarayan Venkatanarayan Elsa Flores, Ph.D.
Jacquelyn Reuther Ann Killary, Ph.D.	Deeksha Vishwamitra Hesham Amin, M.Sc., M.B.
Monica Reyes Naoto Ueno, M.D., Ph.D.	Thuy T Vu Francois Claret, Ph.D.
Kausar Begam Riaz Ahmed Peng Huang, M.D., Ph.D.	Edward Wang Shiaw-Yih Lin, Ph.D.
Joan Ritho Edward Yeh, M.D.	Yanran Wang John O'Brien, Ph.D.
Daniel Robertson Sam Beddar, Ph.D.	Landon Wootton Sam Beddar, Ph.D.
Melissa Robinson Hung Ton-That, Ph.D.	Matthew Yousefzadeh Richard Wood, Ph.D.
Caleb Robinson Patrick Dougherty, Ph.D.	Joshua Yung John Hazle, Ph.D.
Meredith Rodriguez Heinrich Taegtmeier, D.Phil., M.D.	Fanmao Zhang Xifeng Wu, M.D., Ph.D.
Rajasha Rupaimoole Anil Sood, M.D.	Zhicheng Zhou Xin Lin, Ph.D.
Francis San Lucas Paul Scheet, Ph.D.	

Commencement 2015







GSBS Faculty President
Vasanthi Jayaraman, Ph.D.

NEW REGULAR MEMBERS

- Jun-ichi Abe, M.D., Ph.D.
- Ali Azhdarinia, Ph.D.
- Goo Jun, Ph.D.
- Kurt Kasper, Ph.D.
- Robert Orłowski, M.D., Ph.D.
- Kunal Rai, Ph.D.
- Cullen Taniguchi, M.D., Ph.D.

MEMBERS REAPPOINTED WITH COMMENDATION

- Swathi Arur, Ph.D.
- Jennifer Hoskovec, M.S.
- A. Kyle Jones, Ph.D.
- Lei Li, Ph.D.
- Mohammad Salehpour, Ph.D.

NEW ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

- Jinzhong Yang, Ph.D.

MEMBERS REAPPOINTED WITH HIGHEST COMMENDATION

- Vasanthi Jayaraman, Ph.D.
- Edgar T. Walters, Ph.D.

INCLUDES ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE GSBS MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE IN APRIL AND JUNE 2015



James Allison, Ph.D., received the 2015 Lasker Awards for clinical research in September. This prestigious award, also known as “America’s Nobel,” is presented by the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation and honors major achievements in basic science, clinical research and public service around the world. Allison was awarded for his discovery and development of a monoclonal antibody therapy that unleashes the immune system to combat cancer. He was also named a recipient of the Pezcoller Foundation-American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) International Award for Cancer Research in April and a recipient of the Science of Oncology Award from the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) in May. Allison is a professor in the Department of Immunology at MD Anderson.

Zhiqiang An, Ph.D., director of the Texas Therapeutics Institute of the Brown Foundation Institute of Molecular Medicine for the Prevention of Human Diseases and GSBS faculty member, received a \$5.3 million grant from the Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas (CPRI) to establish a fa-

cility to help scientists advance their research into anticancer antibodies.

Dean **Michelle Barton, Ph.D.**, was named one of the 2015 recipients of the Julie and Ben Rogers Award for Excellence in Education. She and four other finalists from The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center were recognized for their achievements in education at a ceremony on September 17. Barton received a \$15,000 award for her mentoring work and continuing research in Epigenetics and Molecular Carcinogenesis.

Dean **Michael Blackburn, Ph.D.**, received the 2015 distinguished alumni award from his alma mater, Jefferson Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, Thomas Jefferson University, in Philadelphia. Blackburn was presented the award and gave a lecture at the school’s annual Alumni Day on April 24. He is affiliated with the Program in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

Varsha Gandhi, Ph.D., a professor with the Department of Experimental Therapeutics at MD Anderson received the William Randolph Hearst Foundations Faculty Achievement Award. This award

recognizes faculty members for exemplary work in the major mission areas of MD Anderson.



Guillermina Lozano, Ph.D., was named the recipient of the 2014-15 Paul E. Darlington Mentor Award for GSBS Faculty. Lozano, a professor and chair in the Department of Genetics at MD Anderson, has been a GSBS faculty member since 1988. The Darlington award provides an honorarium of \$1,500 and was created to honor Paul Darlington, Ph.D., former GSBS Associate Dean. This award recognizes a current faculty member who has made an exceptional impact, as a mentor, on both students and faculty.



Nicholas Navin, Ph.D., was named one of the 2015 recipients of the AAAS Martin and Rose Wachtel Cancer Research Award. Navin, an assistant professor in the Department of Genetics and Department of Bioinformatics at MD Anderson Cancer Center, has been a GSBS faculty member since 2011. This \$25,000 cash award is presented by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and honors early-career investigators who have performed outstanding work in the field of cancer research.



Eric Swindell, Ph.D., joined the GSBS staff as assistant dean of Graduate Education and director of the Foundations of Biomedical Research and scientific writing courses.

Kevin Morano, Ph.D., was recognized for teaching excellence by the Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation, a San Antonio-based organization started by the Piper Professors Program in 1958 to recognize dedicated college teachers who have made a special impact on their students and the community. Morano, a professor with the McGovern Medical School at UTHealth, Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, was one of 10 Piper Professors for 2015.

Four GSBS faculty members were recently awarded The University of Texas System Board of Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award (ROTA) for 2015. This honor is among the most competitive in the nation and one of the largest monetary teaching recognition programs in higher education. The award recognizes faculty members at UT System institutions who have demonstrated dedication to innovation and advancing excellence.

GSBS faculty members receiving this distinction are:

Andrew Bean, Ph.D., professor of neurobiology and anatomy at John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Medical School, affiliated with the Program in Neuroscience and associate dean of graduate education, GSBS.

Michael Lorenz, Ph.D., associate professor of microbiology and molecular genetics at the medical school, affiliated with the Program in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics.

Paul Scheet, Ph.D., associate professor of epidemiology at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, affiliated with the Programs in Biostatistics, Bioinformatics and Systems Biology, and Human and Molecular Genetics.

Jill Schumacher, Ph.D., former associate professor of genetics at MD Anderson and associate dean of graduate education (GSBS), affiliated with the Program in Genes and Development. She was also the director of the Foundations of Biomedical Research course at GSBS, and recently received the 2015 John P. McGovern Award for Outstanding Teaching.

Graduate Student Association Officers



Thanks for your service: GSA Officers 2014-2015: From left: President Scott Ingram (Medical Physics); Vice President Aundrietta Duncan (Genes & Development); Secretary Michael Lehrer (Cancer Biology); and Treasurer/Student Inter-Council Representative Angie Torres-Adorno (Cancer Biology)

Welcome GSA Officers 2015-2016: President Aundrietta Duncan (Genes & Development); Vice President: Alexander Perakis (Immunology); GSA Secretary/Student Inter-Council Representative: Jillian Losh (Microbiology & Molecular Genetics); and Treasurer Caitlin Nurik (Biochemistry & Molecular Biology)



Neima Briggs was named one of the recipients of a Benjamin H. Kean Travel Fellowship in Tropical Medicine. This fellowship, provided by the American Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene (ASTMH), is designed to support medical students involved in clinical or research electives in tropical areas. Briggs is affiliated with the Program in Immunology and M.D./Ph.D.

Program. His advisor is Jagannadha Sastry, Ph.D.

Veronica Garcia was named the recipient of a Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award Individual Predoctoral Fellowship to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research from the National Institutes of Health. Her project, *defining the mechanism of substrate binding by the Hsp110 molecular chaperone*, will be supported by this fellowship for up to three years. Garcia is affiliated with the Program in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics. Her advisor is Kevin Morano, Ph.D.



Veronica Rowlett was named one of the 2015-2016 recipients of the Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Graduate Student Award from the Texas Branch of the American Society for Microbiology. This \$9,000 award recognizes female graduate students studying microorganisms. The award was established in 2011 by the branch through a generous donation by Millicent Goldschmidt, Ph.D., a former GSBS faculty member and a professor emerita at the University of Texas School of Dentistry, and was named after Goldschmidt and her late husband; Eugene Goldschmidt, M.D.

Rowlett is affiliated with the Program in Microbiology and

Molecular Genetics. Her advisor is William Margolin, Ph.D.

Aundrietta Duncan, Dennis Ruder and **Kaushik Thakkar** were named the recipients of the GSBS Endowment in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Research. The \$5,000 award recognizes excellence in and unique contribution to a donor-specified area of study, practice or research at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Duncan is affiliated with the Program in Genes & Development and is the current GSA president. Her advisor is GSBS Dean Michelle Barton, Ph.D.

Ruder is affiliated with the Program in Human and Molecular Genetics. He is also a coordinator with the GSBS Community Outreach Program. His advisor is Ignacio Wistuba, M.D.

Thakkar is affiliated with the Program in Genes & Development. His advisor is GSBS Dean Michelle Barton, Ph.D.

A study by researchers from GSBS and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center was published in October's *Nature*. GSBS student **Lin Zhang** is one of the first authors of the publication. Other GSBS contributors to this study include faculty members **Dihua Yu, M.D., Ph.D.** (Zhang's advisor and a GSBS alumna) and **Joseph McCarty, Ph.D.**; and student **Frank Lowery**. Their work revealed why the tumor suppressor gene PTEN causes tumor growth in the brain but not in other organs. This discovery could lead to the development of effective new anti-metastasis therapies for advanced-stage brain cancer patients.

Harry S. and Isabel C. Cameron Foundation Fellowship



Veronica Garcia

Kaiqi Sun

Advisor: Kevin Morano, Ph.D. Advisor: Yang Xia, M.D., Ph.D.

This fellowship provides \$20,000 for one year and is awarded to an exceptional post-candidacy student working in research fields related to Alzheimer's or cardiovascular diseases.

Rosalie B. Hite Fellowships

In 1946 Houstonian Rosalie B. Hite left her entire estate to establish a fellowship program for cancer research. This fund provides full fellowships to students who demonstrate excellence in research, have a commitment to a career in biomedical research, and make a professional contribution to the community. The 2014-2015 recipients are:

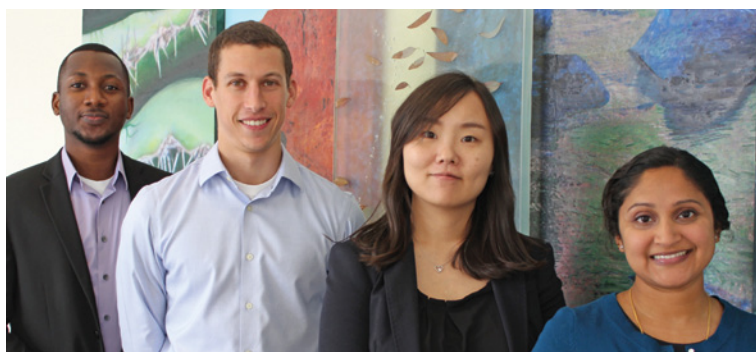
Student

Lawrence Bronk
Shane Krafft
Maitri Shah
Veronika te Boekhorst
Anna Unruh Casasent
Xian Zhang

Advisor

David Grosshans, M.D., Ph.D.
Mary Martel, Ph.D.
George Calin, M.D., Ph.D
Peter Friedl, M.D., Ph.D.
Nicholas Navin, Ph.D.
Hui-Kuan Lin, Ph.D.

Schissler Foundation Fellowships



Student

Felix Nwajei
David Fried
Juyeon Jo
Kemly Philip

Advisor

Tomasz Zal, Ph.D.
Laurence Court, Ph.D.
Michael Galko, Ph.D.
Michael Blackburn, Ph.D.

These fellowships emphasize basic science projects with the greatest likelihood of translational application to human health, and require that all students receive a broad exposure to the biomedical sciences. These prestigious awards give significant help to research studies that will most likely make major contributions to the therapies and cures of common human disease through genetics. For 2014-2015, the Schissler Foundation provided \$25,000 stipend funding for four Schissler Foundation Fellowships with at least one expressly designated for a student working on cancer research with faculty at MD Anderson.

George M. Stancel, Ph.D., Fellowship in the Biomedical Sciences



Camila Montealegre-Ortiz

Advisor: Barbara Murray, M.D.

This \$4,000 award of excellence honors former GSBS Dean George Stancel, Ph.D., (1999-2012) and was established by members of the school's Advisory Council, 2010-2011.



**Andrew Sowell-Wade Huggins Endowed Scholars, Professor and Fellow,
Cancer Answers/Sylvan Rodriguez Scholar,
Sylvan Rodriguez Foundation Scholarship honoring George M. Stancel, Ph.D.**

These awards represent the culmination of more than 20 years of determined support and growth of the Cancer Answers charitable organization through two founding mothers, Joann Sowell and Marcia Huggins Jahncke, their families, cancer survivors and contributing foundations including the Vivian L. Smith Foundation, Sylvan Rodriguez Charities, and especially Bo and Amy Huggins. Since 1991, over 90 scholars and eight professor/fellow teams (renewable up to three years) have been honored with awards ranging from \$2,500 scholarships up to full stipend support.

**Andrew Sowell-Wade Huggins Endowed Scholars:
Student**

Monica Gireud
Deng Pan
Rongqing (Aaron) Pan
Atanu Paul

Advisor

Andrew Bean, Ph.D.
Xin Lin, Ph.D.
Michael Andreeff, M.D., Ph.D.
Bin Wang, Ph.D.

Andrew Sowell-Wade Huggins Professor/Fellow teams:

David McConkey, Ph.D./Andrea Ochoa
Dihua Yu, M.D., Ph.D./Lin Zhang

The Cancer Answers/Sylvan Rodriguez Scholar:

John Morrow Shuxing Zhang, Ph.D.

**Sylvan Rodriguez Foundation Scholar honoring
George M. Stancel, Ph.D.:**

Erin Williams Andrew Gladden, Ph.D.



2015 John P. McGovern Award for Presentation Skills Contest

Five GSBS students participated in The John P. McGovern Award for Presentation Skills Contest on June 25. The event is part of an oral presentation competition based on the students' current research project. This year's finalists were (from left to right): Jaeil Han, Kelsey Maxwell, Randi Stewart, Erin Williams and Hong Liu. Competition winners were: 1st place (\$1,000 award) & People's Choice (\$250): Erin Williams, 2nd place (\$750): Jaeil Han and 3rd place (\$250): Randi Stewart.

The creative side of GSBS



People 1st place: Ching On Wong



Abstract 1st place: Tina Chang

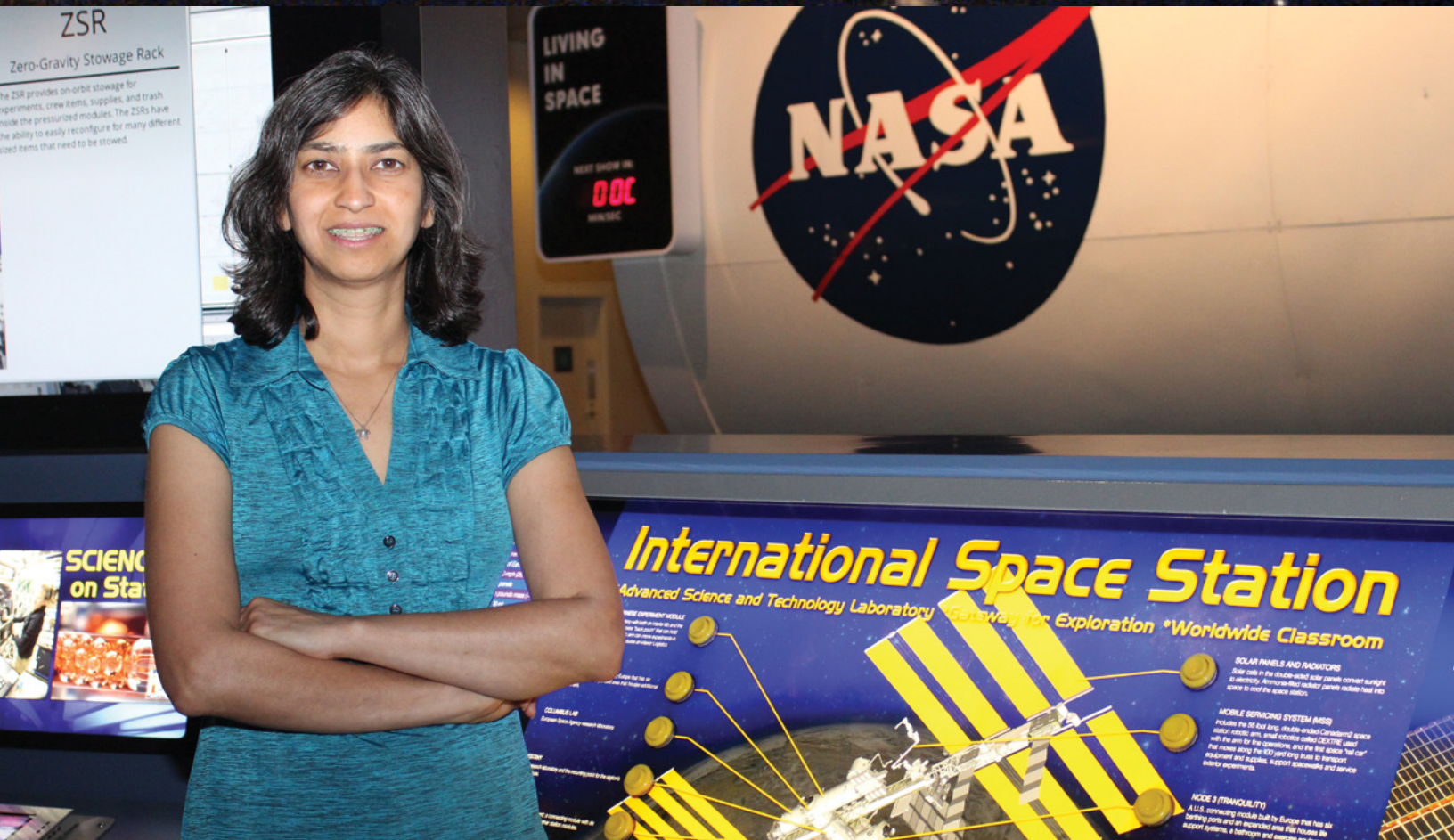
These award-winning images from the Graduate Student Association's 2015 photography contest held in June reflect a different side of GSBS' creativity. This annual competition was open to students, postdocs and faculty members of UTHealth and MD Anderson. Prizes were awarded in three categories: nature, abstract and people. These artworks, along with all the winning art from previous contests, are on display at the graduate school.

Did you know that all the artworks from the past competitions hang on the wall of the GSBS administrative offices? Stop by the school during regular business hours (Monday-Friday, 8a.m.-5p.m.) to view the collection.

Nature 1st place: Behrouz Zand



One small step...



Leap from math to biomedical sciences gave GSBS alumna Brinda Rana the skillset needed to develop experiments that are out of this world

Before she could become part of space exploration history, Brinda Rana, Ph.D., needed a training ground to explore an array of fields within the biomedical sciences. That place—The University of Texas Graduate of Biomedical Sciences at Houston.

“I was in a Ph.D. program for mathematics in Illinois when I decided to change my field of study to the biomedical sciences,” said Rana. “Because I had limited experience in the biological sciences, it was important for me to be able to explore, through coursework and tutorials, to find a field that fit my interest and mathematics training. The GSBS program was unique among the schools I looked at in that it gave me the opportunity to explore.”

Rana earned her Ph.D. in Human and Molecular Genetics in 1999. Her advisor was Wen-Hsiung Li, Ph.D. After GSBS, she went to University of California-San Diego for her postdoctoral research. Today, she is an associate professor at the UC San Diego School of Medicine and an investigator on two projects that are part of NASA’s Twins Study which focus on understanding the effects of space on the human body.

The scientists at Johnson Space Center and the NASA Human Research Program developed the twins astronaut study. Genomics on human astronauts is a new field for NASA and the yearlong mission aboard the International Space Station by astronaut Scott Kelly, who has a twin brother, Mark Kelly (an astronaut as well), was the perfect opportunity for NASA to kick start their genomic studies. In September 2013, the space administration put out a call for grant proposals.

“This was exciting because I had been conducting twin genomic studies on Earth since I was a postdoc and the NASA study was aligned with my research program,” said Rana. “For the twin astronauts, I wanted to study everything—from the effects of spaceflight on epigenetics to the microbiome. However, funding was limited, so my colleagues and I submitted three proposals on different topics. Ten genomics projects were chosen by NASA, and two of our three projects were chosen. The two projects that I am involved in are metabolomic and proteomic extensions of ongoing physiological studies being conducted by my colleagues at the JSC Cardiovascular Laboratory and the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at UCSD.”

“The GSBS program was unique among the schools I looked at in that it gave me the opportunity to explore.”

When the projects were initially awarded in 2014, NASA invited the 10 principal investigators to Houston.

“We spent the next year working together over weekly telecons and meetings in Houston to develop a sample collection and sharing protocol that would enable us to conduct a longitudinal systems level study of the effect of long term spaceflight on humans,” said Rana.

Scott Kelly will return to Earth in March 2016 and Rana’s studies will be completed in 2017.

And while GSBS provided her a testing ground to make the jump into biomedical sciences, Rana’s passion for space arose later in her career.

“I remember being fascinated by space as a child, but my interest in the biomedical sciences was truly sparked by my personal interest in wildlife on Earth and genetic diversity,” said Rana. “I did not have a clear plan when I started graduate school outside wanting to pursue a career in academic research and teach. When I applied to GSBS I had taken very few courses in biology. From those courses, I knew that I was interested in pharmacology of receptors and that my math background helped me excel in undergraduate genetics. Working with Wen-Hsiung Li, Richard Clark, and their collaborators enabled me to conduct research in all the topics I enjoyed.”

Rana’s research at UC San Diego focuses on the interface between the environment and the genome.

“Specifically, I am investigating how acute stress (e.g. first time skydive) and other environmental factors (e.g. diet, sleep, smoking) drive longitudinal changes in the molecular machinery (e.g. microRNA, epigenetic) regulating gene expression and how these changes contribute to age-related decline and disease. Microgravity and space travel is a unique environmental factor that few have the opportunity to study.”

To learn more about the NASA Twins Study visit nasa.gov/twins-study.



Liu honored as 2015 Distinguished Alumnus

Paul Liu, M.D., Ph.D., received his medical degree and residency training in internal medicine in Beijing, China. He then earned his Ph.D. in Human and Molecular Genetics from GSBS in 1991. His advisor was Michael Siciliano, Ph.D. He received his postdoctoral research training at the University of Michigan before moving in 1993 to NIH's National Center for Human Genome Research, renamed the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) in 1995.

He has remained at NHGRI - appointed initially as a senior staff fellow, then as a tenure track investigator and since 2001 as a tenured senior investigator. Liu has been the head of the Oncogenesis and Development Section in NHGRI since 1995. In May 2011, Liu was appointed as the deputy scientific director of NHGRI. The main focus of Liu's research over the years has been the mechanism of leukemia development at the molecular level, using genetic and genomic approaches.

Liu discovered that a CFBF-MYH11 fusion gene is the product of chromosome 16 inversion, a common chromosome abnormality in human acute myeloid leukemia. Using animal models, Dr. Liu has illustrated the importance of CFBF-MYH11 for leukemia development, and how this fusion gene works. His group has also made important discoveries regarding the normal functions of several important leukemia genes.

More recently, Liu's lab has focused on developing targeted treatments for leukemia. He has received several honors for his achievements, including NIH Director's Award and elections to the American Society for Clinical Investigation and the Association of American Physicians.

Jennifer Abrams, Ph.D., (Morano/2014) has received an UNCF-Merck Postdoctoral Science Research Fellowship. Abrams is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, San Francisco Sandler Neuroscience Center.

Charles Darkoh, Ph.D., (DuPont/2012) a GSBS alumnus and a researcher at UTHHealth School of Public Health, was recently awarded a five-year, \$1.9 million R01 grant by The National Institutes of Health (NIH) to develop a non-antibiotic treatment for *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff) infections.

Dan Graur, Ph.D., (Masatoshi/1985) was named one of the recipients of the University of Houston's 2014-2015 Awards for Excellence in Research, Scholarship or Creative Activity. This UH award recognizes faculty who have a continuing record of outstanding research, scholarship or creative activities. Graur is a professor in the Department of Biology & Biochemistry at UH.

John Kopchick, Ph.D., (Arlinghaus/1980) received an honorary doctoral degree in medicine from Aarhus University in Denmark on September 9. Kopchick is a distinguished professor of Molecular Biology and the Goll-Ohio Eminent Scholar in the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine and at the Edison Biotechnology Institute at Ohio University. In 2006, he was honored by GSBS as the Distinguished Alumnus.

Jessica Nute, Ph.D. (Cody/2015) was the 2015 recipient of the Alfred G. Knudson, Jr., M.D., Ph.D., Outstanding Dissertation Award.

Russell Tarver, M.S., (Hazle/1998) was elected a fellow of The American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM). He received the award at the group's annual meeting held in Anaheim, California, in July. Tarver is a specialist at The Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders in Fort Worth.

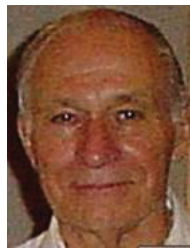


The GSBS Alumni Steering Committee hosted two social events (Takeovers) in 2015: one at Saint Arnold Brewery and another at Constellation Field in Sugar Land. The goal of these gatherings is to give our alums an opportunity to network and build camaraderie. To see photos from the Takeovers, please visit the GSBS Alumni web page at gsbs.uth.edu/alumni or our Facebook page ([facebook.com/UTGSBS](https://www.facebook.com/UTGSBS)). For more information about alumni events, please contact Assistant Dean, Diversity and Alumni Affairs, Marena Wilson-Pham, Ph.D. (Marena.A.Wilson@uth.tmc.edu).

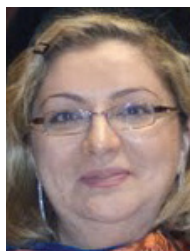
In Memoriam



Doris Ross, Ph.D. (1926-2015), GSBS alumna, founder and first dean of the UTHealth School of Biomedical Informatics. Ross advanced her career at a time when few women held positions of leadership in academia. She graduated from GSBS in 1967. Her advisor was Bruno Jirgensons, Ph.D. She retired from UTHealth in 2002 after 27 years of service. During her career, Ross served UTHealth as a faculty member, department chair, associate dean, dean pro tempore and professor. Throughout her career, Ross served on dozens of committees and boards. She also received a number of awards in acknowledgement of her contributions including the Professional Achievement in Education Award she earned from the American Society for Medical Technology in 1981. In 1995, UTHealth's Committee on Status of Women awarded Ross with the Distinguished Professional Women Award.



Robert Shalek, Ph.D. (1922-2015), GSBS faculty emeritus who shaped the field of medical physics. His career has encompassed both basic research and the application of physics to clinical problems. His research included studies of oxygen reactions following radiation interactions and the proportion of direct and indirect radiation action in living cells. His clinically-related work included the dosimetry of external treatment beams, brachytherapy dosimetry, and quality assurance in radiotherapy physics. Shalek published over 100 scientific papers, received several awards, served in various editorial capacities, and served as President of the American Association of Physicists in Medicine.



Sonia Javan Moghaddam, Ph.D. (1973-2015), GSBS alumna, adjunct biology professor with the Lone Star College System and Houston Community College District. She graduated from GSBS in 2011. Her advisor was Khandan Keyomarsi, Ph.D.

Elmer Scheltgen, Ph.D. (1930-2015), GSBS alumnus, retired professor at the University of Saskatchewan, College of Medicine. He graduated from GSBS in 1968. His advisor was Felix Haas, Ph.D.

GSBS staff members retire

The summer of 2015 saw the retirement of three GSBS staffers: Linda Carter, Carol Helton and Alice Hatcher



Linda Carter retired July 31 and was the school's director of Development and Public Affairs. She worked for GSBS for 16 years and during her tenure managed several events including

the alumni reunion, the American Legion Auxiliary Luncheon and the Evening of Discovery. She also worked with donors to secure fellowship and scholarship funding for GSBS students.



Carol Helton retired August 31. She served 27 years with UT System. She was employed at the UTHealth McGovern Medical School before joining GSBS in 1988 where she served

as part of the finance team and coordinated student appointments. In 2012, she transferred to MD Anderson where she coordinated student appointments as part of Academic and Visa Administration.



Alice Hatcher retired September 30 and worked with the school's finance team. In her position, Hatcher arranged travel for students and managed procurement for the graduate

school. She worked for GSBS for 26 years.

For GSBS administration contact information, visit go.uth.edu/GSBS_staff

Benefactor News (cont.)



In addition to the Schissler's generosity, GSBS also received an estate commitment of \$2 million from former GSBS faculty member Irma Gigli, M.D., to establish The Luis Gigli and Irma Gigli, M.D., Fellowship in Immunology at GSBS. Gigli also gave \$50,000 to the Gigli Family Endowed Scholarship at GSBS, which assists students who—like her—are the first in their families to attend graduate school.

These endowments are a symbol of her commitment to advance the medical profession that she helped shape—and others will shape after her.

Both donors will be featured in the UTHealth's 2015 Philanthropy Journal.

Ellen Taylor Goldin Legacy Award

Alumnus Eric Goldin, Ph.D., honors the memory of his wife and former UTHealth employee, Ellen Taylor Goldin, with a \$50,000 gift to GSBS. In his gift establishment letter, he shared his story about why donating to the graduate school was important for her legacy.

Eric, recipient of a Rosalie B. Hite Fellowship in Cancer Research, met Ellen while studying at GSBS.

"While at MD Anderson, I frequently donated platelets in the blood bank because it was a means of really helping people while escaping, if only for a couple of hours, from the stress of graduate school and research. At the time, Ellen was donating whole blood for the young daughter of friends, who was battling leukemia. We struck up a conversation about Texas country music and agreed to go to a concert downtown. I was smitten and soon afterward, proposed," wrote Eric.



They married in March 1975 in Houston. During this time, Eric was finishing up his doctorate while Ellen began working in the human resources department of UTHealth. Once he was done with his degree, the couple moved to Colorado so that he could start his post-doctoral research. Nearly 30 years later, Taylor was diagnosed with uterine leiomyosarcoma and Eric had to use his expertise to help manage her care. Taylor succumbed to the disease in 2014.

"I was extraordinarily fortunate through the years to have Ellen by my side, raising two wonderful children, moving across the country, enjoying and sharing life," wrote Eric. "From the time her disease was diagnosed, I can only remember tremendous courage. The basis for establishing this scholarship is a small reflection of her stamina and her love of family and friends and is a tribute to one whose courage was indomitable."

Eric graduated from GSBS in 1976 with a Ph.D. in Biophysics. His advisor was Peter Corry, Ph.D.

Special Thanks and Gratitude

April 16, 2015 - Oct. 2, 2015

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GSBS welcomes new Associate Director of Development



GSBS is pleased to announce the newest member of the school's administrative team, Associate Director of Development Susan M. Simon. Susan joined UTHealth in October, and will work closely with the deans and leadership. Her focus will be to pursue and develop major gift relationships that support GSBS' growth and continued success.

To learn more about giving opportunities, please contact Susan at 713.500.3118 or Susan.M.Simon@uth.tmc.edu

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Message to Alumni

From GSBS
Alumni
President
Christopher
Singh, Ph.D.

Greetings Alumni,

Hope you had an amazing summer filled with fun, family and friends. Fall is in full bloom and we kicked off the season with the 2015 Alumni Reunion on October 2 at the McGovern Centennial Gardens. (Photos from the event can be seen on the GSBS Facebook page and Alumni webpage.)

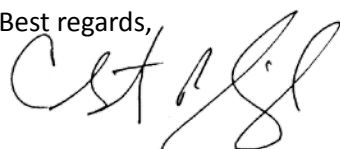
This year we honored Paul Liu, M.D., Ph.D. (1991/Siciliano) as the Distinguished Alumnus. Liu is the deputy scientific director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at the National Institutes of Health. His research focuses on developing targeted treatments for leukemia. Liu's work includes discovering that a CBFMYH11 fusion gene is the product of chromosome 16 inversion, a common chromosome abnormality in human acute myeloid leukemia. Thank you to the nominees for participating, and to their nominators—there's always next year. Congratulations to Dr. Liu!



On September 25, GSBS held its 2nd annual Lab Coat Ceremony. This event was created by the GSBS Deans to celebrate new second-year students as they officially move into an advisor's lab. I addressed the students on behalf of the Alumni Steering Committee and congratulated them on this milestone, one of many they will achieve on their way to becoming GSBS alumni.

Finally, it is with joy and sadness that I announce the retirement of Linda Carter, who worked with the steering committee for the past 16 years. Taking over her alumni duties will be GSBS alumna Marendra Wilson-Pham, Ph.D., assistant dean, Diversity and Alumni Affairs. I think I speak for all of us when I say thank you Linda for all your hard work and support of our committee. And Marendra, we look forward to working with a fellow alum to continue our goals of developing an active alumni group.

Best regards,



Christopher Singh, Ph.D. (2011/Jagannath)
GSBS Alumni Association President, 2014-2015