Hello there! My name is Stephen Murray and I am the president of the Association for Graduate Student Diversity. I want to welcome you to another fine edition of our newsletter and tell you about some great articles therein. But first I want to tell you a bit about our organization. The Association for Graduate Student Diversity (AGSD) at BCM strives to increase diversity, to promote retention and graduation of graduate students in the biomedical sciences and foster professional and career development of our members. What does this mean to you? Well, it means we are an organization by the students, for the students. We try to provide a platform for leadership opportunities and networking and we hold many activities (both academic and for fun) and are always working to have more. This is where you can help out! Have a good idea or just want to get involved here at BCM? Send us an email at agsd.bcm@gmail.com and let us know!

So what is new and exciting with our organization? We held our annual candy gram sale and we were able to donate candy grams to Texas Children’s Hospital. For this issue, we interviewed Dr. Margaret Goodell who provided us some excellent tips on mentoring, an exciting member interview with Elicia Grace, who recently graduated and a fantastic article on mentoring by one of our officers Meagan Pitcher. Get details of BCM’s very own Social Dance Club and we even have a brand new column for you called “Ask T” where T answers questions for you! You can submit questions to T by sending an email to agsd.bcm@gmail.com. Enjoy the issue!

**AGSD Mission Statement**

We strive to increase the diversity of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at BCM, by involving students and post-docs of all cultural, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. If you are interested in joining AGSD, contact agsd.bcm@gmail.com.

Those interested in opportunities like writing articles, editing or designing of the newsletter, or suggesting names for the High Achieving Scientist column contact: agsd.bcm@gmail.com

**Your opinion matters!!**

Please fill out our 2 min. survey for feedback:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/V33KVJD

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Mentoring Opportunities for Graduate Students in a Medical College
Author: Meagan Pitcher

As graduate students at Baylor College of Medicine we are not required to spend time in traditional mentoring opportunities as our peers at other institutions. This is great as we can solely focus on research and lab work. However, if any of the more altruistic among us feel the itch to help a junior student, there are opportunities abound here.

Course TAs – Perhaps the closest to the traditional teacher’s assistant experience graduate students in undergraduate institutions receive. TAs for core curricula at BCM attends the classes they TA, lead review sessions, and answer student emails. See the class professor for more details/eligibility.

Tutoring - The Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity (IMSD) organizes large and small group of tutoring sessions for core classes offered at BCM. You may also want to organize sessions for program-specific courses, which may lack a TA or IMSD tutor.

Summer review courses - IMSD offers summer review courses for post-baccalaureate students visiting BCM. Course leaders are recruited in the spring and typically review 1-3 chapters from a textbook for the course. Previous courses include molecular and cell biology and genetics. This is a great way to get teaching experience with larger groups of students.

Qualifying exam help – Students in the 12 graduate programs have vastly different qualifying examination timelines and procedures. If writing is your strength, offer to critique the abstract/proposal draft for a junior student in your program or research area. If you have the gift of giving presentation with pizzazz, then attending practice talks to offer your expertise in presentation design or delivery is a great way to help to junior students.

Rotation student mentorship – Rotation students have diverse experience levels when they arrive at BCM. Some may need help learning to use basic laboratory equipment while others may be looking for help with more abstract skills such as learning how to think like scientists and form and explore hypothesis. This opportunity offers a lot of one-on-one time and hands-on instruction. There is also the possibility that a junior student may possess a skill set that enhances your project.

Enhancing English Speaking Skills – AGSD is always looking for more facilitators to lead English language discussion groups Mondays and Thursdays from 1-2pm to assist non-native speakers with mastering the complexities of American English. Bring your lunch!

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Like us on FB: facebook.com/bcm.agsd
Would you like to tell us about your educational background?
I took a bit of a circuitous route. I started my undergraduate degree in the United States and finished it in the UK. I did my Ph.D. at Cambridge. I was looking at embryonic stem cells and homologous recombination events in embryonic stem cells even before people were doing knockouts. Then I went to Boston for a postdoc at the Whitehead Institute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1996 we moved to Harvard Medical School, where I was for one year before I came to BCM.

What about your current research focus?
I was really interested in hematopoietic stem cells and there were not many labs working on it. Richard Mulligan's lab was one of the few and that's why I picked that lab and that research topic stuck with me.

What was your experience as a graduate student?
It was interesting because in the UK, they do not have the same structure as here. Students do not do rotations prior to joining a lab. You research the labs you are interested in, apply and join. It is kind of a sink or swim environment. Also, you do not have a committee to help or guide you, as is the case here. So it was challenging and I certainly learned a lot about research and about being independent.

What is your favorite thing about being a mentor?
Every trainee has his or her strengths and weaknesses. Mentoring gives you an opportunity to identify and develop somebody's strengths while also ameliorating his or her weaknesses. If somebody comes in, who is, let's say, not a great writer, then I work with them and help them improve their writing skills. I want everyone who leaves the lab to have gotten the best chance at learning to be independent or whatever it is they seek at that point. I find it very satisfying. Sometimes, it is a lot of work but it is a lot of fun too.
What do you find to be the most challenging part about mentoring?
Knowing everyone's response to different mentoring or coaching techniques. Figuring out how they will be motivated and bringing their best out when it is not very straightforward can be a little challenging at times.

What has been your greatest success?
My three kids. It is a constant challenge to balance everything and I think I do a reasonably good job at it and that is a great accomplishment.

What is your advice is for young scientists?
I think being a PI is not for everybody. People have to sort out preferably early what they want to do with their lives. If you want to become a PI, you have to work towards it starting early. But if not, that is ok too but then you need to be aware of the alternatives that might appeal to you and what other skills you are going to need for those alternative pathways.

What mentoring opportunities are out there for graduate students?
You can start by helping rotation students. Then, as a senior graduate student you can help mentor the junior graduate students. We also get undergraduate students from Rice University and some of my graduate students mentor them. It is a good opportunity for you to get involved and mentor younger students and teach them those skills that you have learned.

What skills do you look for graduate students wanting to join your lab?
Everybody comes with different skills; I find it difficult to select a handful of skills to look for. Also, people complement each other to maintain a good lab environment.

One of the things I do look for is passion about the subject. Science is hard and projects can be difficult. Sometimes days go by when your experiment does not work and still you need to be able to get up in the morning because you are excited about the project. If you are still excited about the project then you will able to do that. So I want someone who is really dedicated to his or her project!

What skills should graduate students develop for an academic career?
Having good communication skills is by far the most important thing and if you have oral and written skills, then you can apply them in any endeavor; whether it is staying in academic science or a company or maybe becoming scientific editor of a journal etc. I think too often, our students don't have those skills. I try to get mine to collaborate with each other and write review articles, thereby working on their writing skills. Student seminars are a great place to learn, providing avenues to improve. I think that is absolutely essential. In addition to that, like I mentioned before, dedication to the project is important. If you really want to do

“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates.
The great teacher inspires.”
— William Arthur Ward
**Baylor College of Medicine Social Dance Club**

**Author: María E. Terrón**

Let’s take a break from studying or de-stress after lab/work by participating in the BCM Social Dance Club activities! It is a great opportunity to network in a relaxed environment and to share common interests while learning how to dance or improving your dance moves. We welcome graduate students, med students, allied health students, technicians, staff, post-bacs, postdocs, faculty members and people from outside the institution to participate in our dance classes and events. In the past we have taught salsa, bachata, merengue, cha-cha, rumba, waltz, and swing. Some lessons are free and others may cost about $5 to cover instructor fees. We also keep our mailing list informed of exciting activities going on around the Houston area. Come and join us!

Want leadership opportunities? Here’s an idea… How about becoming an officer of the BCM Social Dance Club? Our schedule is flexible and time investment is minimal, a great fit for your hectic graduate student schedule! If you know how to dance and are willing to teach a class for free, or if you would like to be involved in running the club, please contact Gabriela David at gdavid@bcm.edu.

Shirley Chan-Ramirez, MD in 2007, founded the dance club while she was a medical student at BCM. She saw a need for a fun and low-key environment on campus to learn how to dance as well as mingle with fellow students and staff. She started off teaching basic salsa with her husband, and then recruited Christian Gutierrez from the Latin Dance Factory to teach more advanced salsa. Mariah Baker, Ph.D. who was a graduate student at that time, taught swing lessons. From there, the club grew and flourished to what it is today!

For more information, please visit our website: http://www.bcm.edu/osa/socialdance/

At the moment we are attending the Rice University’s Salsa Club until June 30th on Tuesdays at the Student Center in the Grand Hall at Rice University. Beginner lessons are at 5pm-6pm and intermediate lessons are at 6pm-7pm. Contact Sara Nizzero (sara.nizzero@gmail.com) for more information about the Rice University Salsa Club.

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**Social Activities/Fundraising 2012-2013**

**Author: Jaclyn Bravo**

Thank you to those that expressed interest in attending movie night. Unfortunately we encountered a logistic issue and had to cancel this event. We will host other free movie nights in the future.

**Candy Grams 2013**

In order to spread the Valentine’s cheer, we offered BCM students the opportunity to give non-edible candy grams to Texas Children’s Hospital patients. Due to dietary restrictions, these TCH-approved candy Grams consisted of pencils or stickers along with a Valentine’s themed card. This opportunity to reach out to TCH patients was a huge success, and we will be offering this option in addition to candy gram delivery to fellow students/classmates, etc. This year we provided delivery for additional TMC locations. In addition to delivery to main Baylor, we are including Feigin and TCH. In order to provide this service off-campus, we required phone numbers, email info, and floor/room number to make delivery efficient. In order to help this effort, one can use the BCM find-a-person search tool for future candy gram sales. We hope you enjoyed giving and receiving candy grams as we enjoyed distributing these candy grams to happy faces.
Featured Member Column:
Dr. Elicia D. Grace, Ph.D.
Author/Interviewer: Benu Atri

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I grew up in Northern Illinois in a tiny town with my parents and older brother. I knew I wanted to be a geneticist since the 8th grade because I thought Punnett squares were so awesome. Through Girl Scouts, I had the opportunity to shadow in a hospital cytogenetics lab and sit through genetic counseling sessions. I also took a ‘life skills’ course that required students to job shadow. My teacher had a friend at the University of Chicago, and I spent the day in the clinical genetics lab. Both of these opportunities convinced me that I would be a human geneticist. I went to college at Iowa State University for genetics. During my second semester I had the opportunity to work in a genetics lab on campus. I started out disappointed when I realized it was an _E. coli_ lab, but the experience was so amazing I added microbiology as a second degree and continued working in the lab until I graduated. The next summer, I was awarded the American Society for Microbiology Undergraduate Research Fellowship for my work. After presenting my research at the national meeting in Atlanta, I was even more motivated to become a scientist. When graduation started approaching, I realized that the opportunities in my area were all agriculture-related and didn’t interest me at all. I turned down a Quality Control position at an egg company for grad school. This is a decision I don’t regret at all.

Can you tell us a bit about your role as a mentor or teaching assistant? What did you really like about it?

Do you have any advice/suggestions as to how one should work towards mentoring others while pursuing their Ph.D.?

While an undergrad I introduced new lab members to aseptic technique and basic _E. coli_ genetics. At BCM, I mentored a high school student over a summer and a Rice undergrad for several years. I enjoy sharing science with people, and I love when I help someone to learn something new. The best opportunity I had was the GK-12 teaching fellowship. For two years I went to Westside High School 2-3 times/week to teach life science classes and bring labs to the students. I had a great time bringing real scientific experiments to the students. My advice to anyone who wants more mentoring experience is to talk to your PI and check out the programs that BCM’s Education Outreach offers. They have several opportunities available to work with people from nearly all age groups.

Were you involved in any extra curricular activities? What was your favorite one?

My favorite extracurricular activity was volunteering at the Children’s Museum in the Power Science lab. Teaching kids and their families about anatomy was a blast. You’d be surprised at how much explaining the GI tract to little kids improves your ability to talk about science.

How did you keep yourself motivated?

Motivation for everyone seems to die in the 5th year. When my experiments weren’t working, I would browse _Science_ and _Nature_ for the latest cool papers published. Reading about great and successful science would give me a little hope for my future and remind me that I actually did love science. Don’t let imposter syndrome get to you. You made it to grad school because you’re qualified and have survived this long because you are smart enough.
What are your thoughts on the training BCM provides to its graduate students?

I love how collegial people at BCM are. While not all of the professors are the best teachers, they all are willing to sit down and talk with you. A few minutes chatting with a colleague (student, post doc, etc.) can vastly change the direction/success of your research. There are also a ton of cores available. The people at the Flow Core were awesome when I was trying out some new experiments that had no promise of success. One weakness is the lack of career services. Offering seminars on careers is helpful, but when it comes down to it, having someone who specializes in helping people get jobs (resumes, etc.) is priceless. Thankfully, it looks like this in the works.

Once you got the permission to defend, how was the writing process? Any tips you would like to share with us to make the process any bit easier?

Getting permission is the easy part. Getting yourself to write is definitely a challenge. Make sure you have a timeline made and set firm deadlines for when different chapters will be done. Also hand out chapters to many people for edits. I found I was most productive sitting at home with Burn Notice playing in the background (explosions seem to be particularly conducive to writing about failed experiments).

What is your post doctorate plan?

I just started my postdoc at the beginning of February in the Petrosino lab. My ultimate goal is to teach and run a lab for undergrads at a small college.

Your favorite BCM moments...

Admittedly, the most satisfying experience was handing over the box containing my thesis copies. ‘We are the champions’ was playing in my head for the rest of the day. I also loved all the non-lab time I spent with my co-workers celebrating publications, grants or random French holidays.
Dr. DeBakey’s Legacy: From a Ph.D. Candidate’s Perspective
Author: María E. Terrón

As you enter Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) through the Albert B. Alkek building, you see a 12-foot statue of the College’s first president, Dr. Michael E. DeBakey that stands outside the library museum that honors him. Just inside the doors of the library museum is a glass-fenced full-sized replica of the operating theater in which he did his most prolific work. The museum, dedicated in May 2010, celebrates the achievements of one of BCM’s greatest leaders, Michael Ellis DeBakey, MS, MD, FACS.1 While the library delineates his most outstanding achievements, the buildings that house and surround BCM are brick-and-mortar embodiments of his relentless search for excellence and his dedication to providing the best in patient care.

Early Years
Dr. DeBakey (September 7, 1908 - July 11, 2008) received a Bachelor of Science from the Tulane University College of Arts and Sciences in 1930 and his medical degree from the same institution in 1932. He entered medical school early, but elected to continue his undergraduate studies while a medical student. He received a master’s of science degree for research on peptic ulcers in 1935, again from New Orleans’ Tulane University. It was common for young surgeons of his era to study in Europe and learn from many of the maestros of surgery. Following completion of his general surgery residency at Trinity Hospital, he expressed interest in the circulatory field, and with encouragement from Rudolf Matas, MD, he spent a year in Strasburg, France. In France, he worked under Professor René Leriche who was promoting sympathectomies for vascular diseases. In 1936, he studied with Professor Martin Kirshner in Heidelberg, Germany.1

After his specialization, he returned to New Orleans and worked with his mentor Alton Ochsner Sr., MD. In 1939, the two published their famous research that linked tobacco and lung cancer – a seminal paper that stated:

“In our opinion the increase in smoking with the universal custom of inhaling is probably a responsible factor, as the inhaled smoke, constantly repeated over a long period of time, undoubtedly is a source of chronic irritation to the bronchial mucosa.”1

To continue reading: http://issuu.com/agsdatbcm/docs/debakey_agsd_vol2_iss2

Acknowledgements

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As we hand over the charge of this newsletter to the new AGSD committee for 2013-2014, on behalf of the whole committee I would like to thank Dr. Gayle Slaughter for her insights and immense help making AGSD and this newsletter a success. Many thanks to Ms. Dipali Pathak, Senior Communications Specialist, Baylor College of Medicine, for her much appreciated suggestions and edits for our newsletters throughout the year.
I really need a break! What is the best way to approach my PI and ask for a short vacation?

Honesty is the best policy. Often times, emailing a PI can be intimidating but remember that they want you to be productive. To do that, you need a break every once in a while! I would talk to them in person and ask for a few days off after a milestone (perhaps good news for the lab) or some good data. Tell them if you've not taken time off for a while and indicate how you will achieve your work when you get back. Additionally, make sure to get assistance from people in the lab to maintain your mouse and cell lines. It is good practice to let lab members know in advance if you plan on taking time off and provide the lab with a phone number or email that you can be reached at in case of emergencies. Good luck!

What are some repair tips for a rebellious pipette?

Pipettes can be a real pain if they get clogged or jammed. I've found this resource to be very helpful, particularly for the Eppendorf brand. You can just open them up and unclog them easily with ethanol for the most part. However, there are lots of good tips on here: http://www.eppendorf.com/img/au/lhsc/care_maintenance_pipettes_eag.pdf

How should I manage my reading, do you recommend a reading software or tips for filing papers?

Reading is always a daunting task! The important step is finding the method that works for you - are you someone who needs to print everything out and highlight/take notes on the paper? What about reading on a computer, iPad, or Kindle? I would start reading the more general background topics about your research first, and then as you do experiments and progress in your studies, you will get more specific in terms of what you are looking for. At that point, you may read a paper specifically for a detail about a particular method or cell line. As for software and filing, I have found Zotero is a free reference library that syncs with both Microsoft Word and also with Mozilla Firefox to file and organize papers into subject headings.

I am having trouble staying organized - especially my time in lab and life outside of it - how should I prioritize?

Staying organized is the key to success as your demands increase both inside and outside lab. I would highly recommend getting a calendar (maybe even one electronic and one on paper) with lots of space to write down three categories of things: 1) Lab work/experiments each day, 2) important seminars, presentations, or meetings with PIs, 3) Program specific seminars and requirements. As for life outside the lab, that is always a challenge, but I would say for your first few years and through your qualifying exam, classes and lab should be about 75% of your time and any organizations or extra-curricular activities should be about 25% of your time. This may seem harsh, but the first year and a half or so is critical to your success, and without passing classes and your exam, you really don't have a solid foundation to continue onwards at BCM.

I am an International student and will need help working on my writing skills- who can I approach outside lab (my PI is not very hands on about this) and how?

Luckily, for you we have a perfect outlet outside of lab. AGSD has free classes every Monday and Thursday from 1-2 pm working on English conversation, grammar, and writing skills specifically designed for international students. We meet in room N310, email scmurray@bcm.edu for more details and to sign up!