

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

GRADUATE FACULTY MEETING
September 20, 2007

MINUTES

Present: **Walters, Chair;** Actor, Adair, Angel, Balasubramanian, Bar-Eli, Barnhart, Barton, Blackburn, Boyd, Buja, Cabral, Cantor, Chamberlain, Shine Chang, Cote, Craig, Dafny, Dent, Douglas, Dubinsky, Fischer, Fuchs-Young, Gallick, Goka, Goldschmidt, Hasan, Hickson-Bick, Gimenez-Conti, Jackson, Johanning, Knutson, Koehler, Kulkarni, Lorenz, Q. Ma, Mattox, McCrea, Morano, Nehete, Noblin, O'Brien, Price, Rundhaug, Schroit, J. Schumacher, Sereno, Singletary, Judith Smith, Strobel, Tomasovic, van Dyke, Wang-Johanning, Watowich, Waxham, Wei, Wiener, Wong, Yu (Faculty members from Bastrop, Smithville, and South Campus attended by videoconference)

Student Rep: Dujka

Staff: Chappell, Cruz Bruesch, Gaughan, Porter, Spitzenberger, Theriot, Valladolid, Solberg, Williams

1. Dr. Dent, the 2006-2007 Faculty President, called the meeting to order and passed the gavel to Dr. Walters, the 2007-2008 Faculty President.

2. **Approval of the minutes of the meeting of February 8, 2007.**

Minutes were approved by acclamation.

3. **Approval of the notes of the Faculty Town Hall meeting on July 19, 2007.**

Minutes were approved by acclamation.

4. **Report of the Graduate Student Association by GSA President, Melanie Dujka**

5. **Report from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, M. D. Anderson Cancer Center**

Dr. Tomasovic reported:

a) The 60th Annual Symposium on Cancer Research will be held on October 11-13 at the JW Marriott Hotel. Dr. Tomasovic said the program will be great and encouraged everyone to attend.

b) On October 1 at 12:00 noon, Dr. Mendelsohn will give his annual address; he will talk

about the five most critical challenges facing MDACC. At 5:00 p.m. that day, Drs. Mendelsohn and DuBois will talk about research strategies for the next five years, including the centers and institutes associated with those strategies. And finally, on October 2 at 12:00 noon, writer Jonathan Alter will speak about health care and his experiences as a cancer survivor.

- c) Searches are still ongoing for new chairs for the departments of Molecular Genetics and Cancer Biology.
- d) MDACC continues to develop its global oncology plan and is searching for individuals to fill the following positions: Vice President for Global Business Development, Vice President for Global Medical Programs, and Vice President for Global Academic Programs.

6. **Report from the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Health Science Center**

Dr. Buja reported:

- a) The following leadership appointments and changes have been made at the HSC:
 - Kevin Dillon, who will continue as Executive Vice President for Finance, has been named Chief Operating Officer at the HSC;
 - Susan Coulter is the new Vice President for Institutional Advancement at the HSC, a position which is a reconstruction of previous Development and Public Affairs activities;
 - Dr. Giuseppe Colasurdo, former chair of the Pediatrics Department, has been named Dean of the Medical School; and
 - Dr. Brent King has been named Executive Vice Dean for Clinical Affairs at the Medical School.
- b) Construction has started on the nearly 400K square foot Research Park Complex on the South Campus. The complex will include the new home of the Dental Branch, the Neuroscience Building, and the Biomedical Research and Education Facility.

7. **Dean's Report**

Dr. Stancel reported:

- a) To follow-up on Dr. Tomasovic's remarks, Dr. Stancel noted that students may attend MDACC's Research Symposium for free; they should contact Dr. Wiener if they're interested. Although the Symposium has a clinical-sounding title, outstanding basic scientists are scheduled to speak and it should be a great event.
- b) With great pleasure, Dr. Stancel announced that the Board of Regents has approved the appointment of Dr. Randy Legerski as the Thomas S. Matney Professor of Cancer Genetics at the Graduate School and M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. We sincerely appreciate Dr. Matney's generous gift which made the award possible. Dr. Stancel thanked the faculty members who served on the award committee: Drs. Ellen Richie (chair), Stephen Daiger, Sharon Dent, Mien-Chie Hung and Michael Siciliano.

- c) Another gift accepted by the Board of Regents is the largest ever for GSBS: \$1.2M from the Cullen Trust for Higher Education to support the M.D./Ph.D. Program. It will provide funds for additional stipends and an annual research symposium. Dr. Stancel thanked Linda Carter, Director of the GSBS Development Office, who worked very hard to lead this development effort which really is a milestone for GSBS.
- d) At the request of Dr. Mendelsohn, Dr. Stancel will now serve on MDACC's Promotion and Tenure Committee. He has served on the HSC's P & T Committee for years and he is very happy to have this opportunity to speak personally on behalf of our great faculty members when they are being considered for promotion and tenure.
- e) Dr. Darlington is away on family business and could not attend today's Faculty Meeting. If he had, however, it would have been his last meeting because he will retire in December. Dr. Stancel asked that everyone plan to attend Dr. Darlington's farewell reception which will be held on Thursday, November 15 from 3:00-6:00 p.m. in the BSRB Forum (the foyer outside the Onstead Auditorium). Dr. Darlington has been the heart and soul of GSBS for twenty-five years and we don't know what we will do without him, and we want to make sure we send him out with all of our best wishes.

8. **Reports of the Standing Committees**

Academic Standards Committee
 Admissions Committee
 Curriculum Committee
 Membership Committee
 Program Coordinating Committee
 Student Affairs Committee

9. **Report of the Executive Committee**

10. **Report of the Office of Academic Affairs**

Dr. Wiener reported:

- a) The 2007-2009 Catalog is currently undergoing review by the legal departments of the HSC, MDACC and UT System. Once approved, it will be available online.
- b) Orientation was very successful this year and Dr. Wiener appreciated the efforts of everyone involved. We had 136 new degree-seeking students: 94 Ph.D., 5 M.D./Ph.D., 25 Individual M.S., and 12 Specialized M.S. Other statistics: 79 females, 57 males; 57 from Texas, 36 from other states and 43 international students.
- c) Dr. Wiener has taken over as Course Coordinator of *The Ethical Dimensions of the Biomedical Sciences* (GS210051) following Dr. Stanley Reiser's move to Washington, D.C. Dr. Wiener did not change the course format this year but he plans to form a committee to consider how the course might be restructured in the future.

- d) Pilot online course evaluations were successfully completed in the spring and summer terms, so all evaluations will be done online beginning this fall. That means course coordinators will no longer have to distribute evaluation forms to their students. The results will be summarized automatically and made available to instructors a few weeks after the end of the term.
- e) Students are often placed on academic probation for not having timely committee meetings when, in fact, they did meet with their committees but their advisors didn't complete the necessary report form. Dr. Stancel recently suggested an idea that he heard about at another school: the student writes the report. The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) is currently considering whether GSBS should take a similar approach. The advantages would be that students get writing experience and they acknowledge that they know what happened at the meeting and what they're expected to do next, and it also would relieve some of the advisor's burden. Dr. Wiener has drafted a form with places for both student and faculty input and though a final decision has not been made, the ASC seems to be favorably inclined.

11. **Old Business**

Vote on [Revised Faculty Membership Categories](#) and [Resultant Bylaws Changes](#)

Dr. Goka gave a brief explanation of the proposed changes to the Faculty membership categories and the Faculty Bylaws, which were announced at the February Faculty meeting. The motion to approve these changes was passed by a unanimous vote.

12. **New Business**

A. **Vote on chairs and new members of 2007/2008 Standing Committees**

[Slate of Candidates](#)

Motion was made and seconded to accept the slate as presented.

Motion passed unanimously.

B. **Nomination of candidate(s) for 2007-2008 Vice President/President-Elect of the Graduate Faculty**

Dr. Guillermina "Gigi" Lozano: [Curriculum Vitae](#) and GSBS [Educational Activities](#)

Dr. Walters called for nominations from the floor.

There were no nominations from the floor.

Motion was made and seconded to close nominations and approve Dr. Lozano as Graduate Faculty Vice President/President-Elect for 2007-2008.

Motion passed unanimously.

C. 2007-2008 GSBS Representatives on the HSC Interfaculty Council

Dr. Walters announced that Dr. Fernando Cabral (HSC) and Dr. Dianna Cody (MDACC) will be the GSBS representatives on the HSC Interfaculty Council in 2007-2008.

D. GSBS Certificate Programs

Dr. Wiener explained the GSBS Guidelines for Certificate Programs and the proposed TRIUMPH Certificate Program for Postdoctoral Fellows, both of which have been approved by the Executive Committee and were discussed at the Faculty Town Hall meeting on July 19, 2007. Following a brief discussion, votes were taken on the two proposals as follows:

[GSBS Guidelines for Certificate Programs](#) -- With the exception of one vote, approved unanimously.

[TRIUMPH Certificate Program for Postdoctoral Fellows](#) -- Approved unanimously.

E. Discussion of GSBS Student Stipends

Dr. Stancel led a discussion concerning the GSBS stipend level based on the results of a recent survey of stipends at other schools in Texas and across the nation. As explained by Dr. Stancel, the dean's office annually reviews the stipends given by other schools to make sure we are competitive. What we found this year is that a number of other schools, including Baylor College of Medicine and other UTHSC schools, will provide a stipend of \$26K in 2008. The current GSBS stipend is \$23K. The Executive Committee (EC) discussed this issue at its meeting in August and recommended that it be brought to the Faculty. Dr. Stancel said that although the EC did not make a specific recommendation, the consensus was that if we are falling behind, we need to think about a stipend increase. He emphasized that a stipend increase would have to be a faculty decision because the faculty are responsible for stipends after the first year, so the bulk of the overall stipend dollars comes from faculty grants. Following discussion, the motion was made and approved that a special Faculty Meeting be held before October 15 to discuss the possibility of a stipend increase. While the vote was not unanimous, the motion passed by a substantial majority. The dean's office will arrange the meeting and do its best to collect additional stipend and benefit information prior to the meeting.

Major comments made by members of the Faculty during the discussion included the following:

- It is critical that we set a stipend level that is comparable to those of UT Southwestern, UT San Antonio and Baylor College of Medicine. The Faculty is strongly urged to consider raising the stipend to \$26K per year.
- This issue is complicated because while some schools appear to provide higher stipends, their students have to pay their own tuition and/or insurance. In response, Dr. Stancel said that it is very difficult to get clear answers to questions

about stipends and benefits because often various sources at the same school provide conflicting information. Nonetheless, it is his sense that for all practical purposes, most schools provide tuition and health insurance benefits more or less comparable to ours. Also, while some schools are not allowed to pay tuition, they give students scholarships in addition to their stipends to offset tuition costs -- so even though it may appear (e.g., on their Websites) that they do not provide tuition, they may do so *de facto* by various mechanisms.

- At the University of Houston advisors reportedly pay less than GSBS advisors because the institution pays some of the expenses related to having a graduate student, specifically tuition and health insurance. Would it be possible to get more assistance from our two parent institutions to cover a stipend increase or the cost of tuition? Dr. Stancel said he would ask for more funding from Presidents Willerson and Mendelsohn, but right now he is working to get support for students' first two years of training and he was not optimistic that funds in addition to that would be available. Another faculty member said that targeting support for the 2nd year would have a bigger impact on faculty budgets than just having tuition paid -- support for the 2nd year should be our top priority. Dr. Stancel agreed and said that if the good schools are providing 2-5 years of support, we can't compete if we're providing only 9 months of support.
- We have a fabulous faculty and a wonderful cancer institute -- that's why students should come here. Do we really want a student who decides where to go to school based on a difference of a few thousand dollars?
- If we increase the stipend, won't that cut into the number of students GSBS can admit? Dr. Stancel said that although he can't guarantee what will happen this time, in the past the Presidents have given us additional funds for the increases needed to maintain the number of slots for incoming students. While there are no guarantees, if the Faculty decided to increase stipends, GSBS would approach the Presidents and request funds to increase stipends for first-year students without reducing the number of slots.
- The last time we increased stipends (September 1, 2005), GSBS provided emergency funds for one year to help faculty members with 3 or more students who were unable to pay the increased amount. Would that be available this time? Dr. Stancel said he was hopeful that that would be the case.
- Dr. Tomasovic said that while he cannot guarantee what Drs. DuBois and Mendelsohn would say about the need for additional funds to cover the increase, they are very supportive of GSBS and determined to improve the Graduate School's overall level of excellence. He said if an increase is approved, he would put the request for additional funds in his budget and defend it to them.
- With NIH funding harder to secure these days, do students have more trouble getting funded? Dr. Stancel said there has not been a noticeable increase in students asking for emergency support over the past year. In fact, the number has been about the same for the past 3-4 years.
- Dr. Tomasovic mentioned a recent survey done by the GSBS dean's office which found that approximately 95% of our students' advisors have significant extramural funding, so they seem to be competing very effectively for grants. While it's true that we hope students will choose a graduate school based on the quality of the program and not worry about a difference of a few thousand dollars, it's also true that there are some great programs around the country and

any differential in salary and benefits will be taken into consideration by prospective students when they decide where to apply and matriculate. If we want to compete against the best programs in the world, we have to struggle with these issues and remain competitive.

- While it makes sense that we have to stay competitive, this puts some faculty in a difficult situation. A lot of faculty want students to receive a higher stipend but in reality they can't afford to pay them. It would be great if the institution would pick up some of the additional cost.
- Last year only 3 applicants reported that they declined our offer of admission because they got an offer of more money from another school. Another faculty member commented that while relatively few said that stipend levels were a factor in declining admission to GSBS, last year our stipend was identical to Baylor's and similar to those at other Texas graduate schools that have either raised or are planning to raise their stipends; if there is a difference in stipends in the future there might or might not be more students declining our offers on this basis.
- Unfortunately, applicants aren't always sophisticated enough to appreciate the advantages of Houston's relatively low cost of living (i.e., the cost of renting an apartment in Houston versus one in San Francisco) -- they just compare the total dollar amount of stipends.
- While it might be easier to vote on this issue by e-mail, it's important that only those faculty who participate in the discussion get to vote.

F. Admissions Office Update

Due to lack of time, discussion of the [GSBS Undergraduate Advisory Board](#) and GSBS Summer Research Program was tabled until a future meeting.

G. Introduction of New Staff Members

Dr. Stancel introduced two terrific recent additions to the GSBS staff:

- Eric Solberg, Associate Dean for Management, will take over for Dr. Darlington when he retires. Mr. Solberg has an excellent background, including having worked at Baylor and MDACC, and in his short time at GSBS he has already helped us a lot.
- Patricia Cruz Bruesch will help Dr. Stancel with the Center for Clinical and Translational Sciences (CCTS) T32 training program and other training programs' activities at GSBS.

H. Appreciation Award to 2006-2007 Faculty President: Dr. Sharon Dent

Dr. Stancel gave an appreciation award to Dr. Dent and thanked her for everything she's done as Vice President and President of the Faculty. She has been an inspiration to us all and done a great job.

I. Appreciation Award to Outgoing Program Director: Dr. Michelle Barton

Dr. Stancel also gave an appreciation award to Dr. Barton to acknowledge her hard work on behalf of the Genes and Development Program. He thanked her for her many excellent contributions both to the G&D Program and to GSBS.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 1:20 p.m.

Edgar T. Walters, PhD.
2007-2008 President, GSBS Faculty