

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
February 10, 2011

MINUTES

Present: **Gandhi, Chair;** Aldaz, Balakrishnan, Barnhart, Bean, Bedford, Benavides, Blackburn, Broaddus, Cameron, Carlin, Chandra, S. Chang, Chiao, Cho, Davies, Finch, Freireich, Fuchs-Young, Galko, Goka, Goldschmidt, Hasan, Hickson-Bick, Johannning, D. Johnson, Johnston, Keyomarsi, S. Kim, Knutson, Koehler, Krasnykh, Kry, Kusewitt, H. Liang, Lorenz, L. Ma, Marshak, Mattox, McArthur, Morano, Pate, Phan [GSA President], Plunkett, Ram, Richie, Sadagopan, Sampath, Scheet, Schumacher, Stancel, Strobel, Taegtmeier, Taylor, Tomasovic, Tyler, Uray, Walters, Wang-Johanning, Waymire, Wei, Wendt

Staff: Cruz Bruesch, Gaughan, Lane, Porter, Solberg, Spitzenberger, Valladolid, Weinberg, Williams

1. Approval of the minutes of the September 16, 2010 meeting

The Faculty voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

2. Report from the President of the Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Mr. Liem Phan reported on the GSA-sponsored [blood drive](#) for MD Anderson that will take place on March 3, 2011. Click [here](#) for a report of the GSA's activities since the last Faculty Meeting.

3. Report from the Provost, UTHealth

Dr. Davies reported:

- UTHealth is working to navigate through this complicated time of great changes, challenges (especially financial), and opportunities, and will rely on a real partnership with the faculty to do so.
- Dr. Larry Kaiser, President of UTHealth, has announced that he will step down effective April 1, 2011, to join Temple University. Dr. Giuseppe Colasurdo, Dean of the Medical School, will serve as the Interim President for at least one year.
- This is also a time of transition for GSBS since Dr. Stancel is stepping down as Dean this academic year to join the Provost's Office. The search committee to find the new GSBS Dean is being led by Drs. DuBois and Davies.

4. Report from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, MD Anderson Cancer Center

Dr. Tomasovic reported:

- Dr. John Mendelsohn, President of MD Anderson, is also stepping down and the presidential search is operating on a tight timeline. The effort is led by Dr. Kenneth Shine, Executive Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs for UT System, and it is anticipated that a finalist will be identified by the first part of May.
- Dr. Tomasovic will retire August 31, 2011. A committee is being formed to find his replacement, but the search probably won't move quickly until the President's position has been filled.
- Like UTHealth, MD Anderson is also dealing with changes and budget cuts. An Expense Analysis Steering Committee has been formed and charged with finding ways to increase revenue and reduce expenses. These efforts will focus on areas outside graduate education.

As this was Dr. Tomasovic's last Faculty Meeting, Dr. Stancel took the opportunity to thank him for his many years of dedicated and outstanding service to GSBS. He's been a faculty member for 30 years, was instrumental in the development of the Cancer Biology Program and important GSBS courses, served on student committees and standing committees, and was President of the Faculty. Dr. Stancel said that's all a matter of record -- what faculty may not realize is that since 1999 Dr. Tomasovic has served as the Associate Dean for MDACC Affairs at GSBS. In that role he has worked behind the scenes with the administration to solve problems and make things better for GSBS. Dr. Stancel said he deserves special thanks from all of us for the many times he helped us deal with issues that ranged from our new office space and classrooms to stipends and accreditation. And he's never been parochial -- when we needed something, he stepped up to help us. It didn't matter if it was an Anderson issue or not, he was there to support GSBS as a whole. His dedication and loyalty to GSBS are very much appreciated.

5. Dean's Report

Dr. Stancel reported:

- On a sad note, Dr. Stancel asked for a moment of silence to honor Dr. Thomas Matney, emeritus faculty member, who died on November 28, 2010. Dr. Matney was one of a handful of pioneer GSBS faculty members back in the 60's and served as Associate Dean for many years. He was a strong supporter of ours and in recent years gave wonderful gifts to the Graduate School that established two endowed professorships. We will host a memorial to celebrate Dr. Matney's life on March 2 in the Onstead Auditorium and all are invited to attend.
- Dr. Stancel encouraged faculty to review two documents posted on the GSBS web site: (1) a [report](#) that gives the results of the National Research Council's recent assessment and ranking

of U.S. graduate programs in which GSBS fared very well, and (2) our 2010 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [report](#) which provides statistics on a number of metrics, e.g., student/faculty publications, faculty funding, time-to-degree, etc. These reports contain a lot of good information about GSBS that can be used to our advantage during this recruitment season.

- Our annual alumni reunion took place in November and [Ms. Cathy Wicklund](#) was honored as our Distinguished Alumnus. Our 2011 Distinguished Alumnus will be [Dr. Ennio Antonio Chiocca](#), a 1988 M.D./Ph.D. graduate, who is chair of Neurological Surgery at Ohio State University College of Medicine.
- At a [Town Hall Meeting](#) in December, the Faculty voted in favor of keeping our stipend at \$26K/year. For the sake of comparison, Baylor College of Medicine is raising its stipend to \$29K/year this summer and UT Southwestern's stipend was recently increased to \$28K/year. Dr. Stancel said that while it's true that our stipend level will be less than theirs, we should make it clear to visiting applicants that we've chosen to provide two-years of guaranteed support from the School at a time when institutional and grant funds are decreasing. In other words, we've chosen stability of support over the amount of support. It's also important to note that our stipend, which includes full employee benefits, is competitive nationally, especially given Houston's low cost of living.
- President Kaiser has approved the proposed GSBS tuition increase of ~\$1,200/year effective this fall, pending approval by UT System. The increase will generate much needed revenue for GSBS so that we can continue to provide services to our students and faculty. Dr. Stancel said GSBS emergency funds are available for faculty who need assistance to pay the increased cost (ideally such requests will come from faculty members who have more than just one or two students).
- As mentioned previously, the dean's search committee will be led by Drs. DuBois and Davies. Dr. Stancel said the committee includes a fantastic group of GSBS faculty – from UTHealth: Drs. Blackburn, Byrne, Morano, Schonbrunn, Walters and Wetsel; from MDACC: Drs. Barton, Dent, Gallick, Klein, Travis and Watowich. Dr. Stancel said that if faculty members know of good candidates, either internal or external, they should encourage them to apply.
- [Graduation](#) is a great event which brings everyone together and this year's ceremony will occur on Saturday, May 7. Dr. Stancel encouraged faculty members and their graduating students to attend. The commencement speaker will be [Dr. Neal Lane](#) who is a fellow at the Baker Institute at Rice University.
- [Summer research programs](#) for undergraduate students will take place again this year at GSBS, MDACC and the Medical School. These programs are a great way to get students in the lab and eventually try to recruit them to GSBS. Dr. Stancel encouraged faculty members to consider taking summer students if they're able.
- In closing, Dr. Stancel noted that this was also his last Faculty Meeting as Dean and he had two messages to give:

- He hopes the Faculty will continue its tradition of having Faculty Meetings. Faculty at institutions around the country are always amazed and impressed when he tells them that we have regular meetings to which all faculty members are invited and encouraged to express their views, and that that's how we make major policy decisions. He said many schools have lost that and he thinks it's very important.
- Stimulated by comments made by Drs. Davies and Tomasovic concerning the challenges we face, Dr. Stancel said that at the risk of sounding like Pollyanna, we shouldn't despair. He pointed out that when he joined the Faculty in 1972, GSBS was located in the Hermann Professional Building garage, MD Anderson had only one building, and the Medical School wasn't yet built. He said then we had third-rate laboratory facilities that we were trying to upgrade to second-rate lab facilities, but just look at us now! Collectively, the Faculty figured out how to get from there to where we are today, and while he doesn't want to minimize the challenges we face, he's confident that if we keep working together, good things will happen. We'll eventually get to where we want to go even though realistically there will be some very difficult times ahead in the short run.

Following Dr. Stancel's remarks, Dr. Gandhi led the faculty in a round of applause for him and Dr. Tomasovic and thanked them both for all they have done for the Graduate School.

7. Report of the Office of Academic Affairs

Dr. Knutson reported:

- We began using a new tutorial evaluation [form](#) in the fall term. The new form provides explicit feedback to students on their performance and so far the results have been very positive. In a similar vein, we now have a new evaluation [form](#) for candidacy exams that will be used starting this term.
- In 2007 the Faculty approved general guidelines for awarding certificates through GSBS. Recently Dr. Stancel has had inquiries about starting similar programs and so he developed a template that would give interested individuals a more specific idea of one way they might do so. The [template](#) has been now approved by the Academic Standards, Curriculum and Executive Committees. The dean's office wants faculty members to know that the template exists in case they're interested in developing a certificate program.
- To reiterate what Dr. Stancel said about commencement, we invite you to join us if you have a student who's graduating or if you served on the committee of a graduating student, and we also ask that you encourage your graduating students to participate. Our ceremony is warm and friendly and it's always an enjoyable occasion for students and their families, faculty and staff. GSBS will pay the cost to rent regalia for faculty who wish to attend.

8. Report of the Office of Admissions

Dr. Lane reported:

- Dr. Lane began by thanking faculty members for their great responsiveness to the changes she's put in place and for their engagement in the recruitment process. Faculty involvement has a major impact on our ability to recruit top students and she hopes it continues.
- Money is a major challenge and so even though we've cut costs as much as we can, we are inviting fewer students to visit and spending less on each student. We also decided not to take new GSBS-funded students in the spring term and that will continue for the foreseeable future. That means we will have just one major admission cycle each year at which time we'll admit students for August. M.S. students or Ph.D. students funded by faculty or Programs may be admitted each term but the general call for applications will only be made for the fall term.
- In the spirit of doing more with less, we're taking a close look at our admission process to find ways to increase our efficiency. A major overhaul of our admission process should be completed by the next admission cycle.
- One procedural change we've put into place is to not admit any students regardless of funding mechanism unless they've been interviewed. This may result in fewer offers but we can be more confident that the students we admit will succeed.
- And finally, click [here](#) for our admission statistics so far this year. We'll be making offers throughout the next several months.

9. Old Business

No Old Business was discussed.

10. New Business

A. Sigma Xi Thesis Awards

Dr. Millicent Goldschmidt encouraged faculty members to have their graduating students apply for the annual Sigma Xi Thesis Awards. Two awards are given each year and GSBS students have won in the past.

B. Dr. Michael Blackburn Awarded the 2010 Paul E. Darlington Mentor Award

As background, Dr. Stancel explained that the Darlington Mentor Award was established when long-time and beloved Associate Dean Paul Darlington retired a few years ago. When asked what we could do to honor him, Dr. Darlington noted that we have awards for teaching and research, so he suggested that we create an award for faculty mentoring since it is so important to the success of our students. This is the second year of the award and it provides an honorarium of \$1,000.

Dr. Stancel said he was honored to give this year's award to Dr. Michael R. Blackburn, Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at UTHealth Medical School. Dr. Blackburn has been a GSBS faculty member for 13 years and during that time he's been very active: he was the Biochemistry/Molecular Biology Program's Director for five years, he coordinates and/or lectures in several courses every year, he's been the major advisor to 11 students and served on a total of 181 student committees. In addition, he's been a member of several GSBS standing committees and was President of the Faculty in 2009-10. He's always willing to help us at the Graduate School and he always does it with a smile. Dr. Stancel said it's vital to have faculty that students and junior faculty can look up to and Dr. Blackburn is a perfect role model. He is most deserving of this prestigious award.

In accepting the award, Dr. Blackburn said that Dr. Darlington had called from Colorado where he lives now to congratulate him and he was honored by that. He also said that looking out at the faculty members in the audience, he realized that he had interacted with many of them as they mentored students and were excellent at it, so he was humbled to be singled out in this manner. And finally, he thanked the awards committee as well as Drs. Visanthi Jayaraman and Rod Kellems who nominated him.

The following reports were not presented at the meeting but were available on the GSBS Website prior to the meeting:

11. [Report of the Standing Committees](#)
12. [Report of the Executive Committee](#)
13. [Report of the Graduate Student Association](#)

MEETING ADJOURNED at 1:00 p.m.

Varsha Gandhi, Ph.D.
2010-2011 President, GSBS Faculty