WELCOME TO THE M1 & M2 CLASSES

Regrettably, due to the pandemic, we were unable to publish The Medical Scientist Fall 2021 issue. Now that we’re back (Hallelujah!), we wish to use this space, as is our tradition, to welcome not only this year’s incoming M1 class but also the 2020 M1s who are now M2s.

The 2020 entrants—all 18 of them (a record number for the UIC MSTP!)—dutifully began their M1 year remotely, from the safety of their respective homes. Over the summer, they participated in the required first year MSTP lab rotations—via ZOOM. There was no welcome party to meet returning students, no white coat ceremony to formally initiate them into their medical studies, and no anatomy course lab among other things. Yet, being the superior students they have been all their lives, they hunkered down amid the stringent Covid protocols to learn everything they could in the standard first-year medical curriculum. Finally, in March, when vaccinations were at last in high-swing, they were able to come to Chicago and to campus to begin some in-person classes, including the delayed Anatomy Lab.

As they successfully completed their M1 studies in summer 2021, they were ready, willing and able to welcome this year’s 15 entrants in person and give them the traditional M2 to M1 pep talks. And so, we now proudly introduce these two groups of stellar students who, like their predecessors, bring prestige to our program as they distinguish themselves academically here. More information about them appears on pages 2-7.

**M2 Class**
- Katherine Alexander
- Marilyn Barragan
- Drew Burns
- Duncan Claypool
- Alyssa Debra
- Emily Hayes
- Elise Hu
- Deanna Keen
- Jacqueline Kielyka
- Brenna Kirkpatrick
- Katherine Knowles
- Victoria Marino
- Anish Nagpal
- Joseph Najjar
- Judy Wang
- Alia Welsh
- Reginald Woods
- Heidi Yuan

**M1 Class**
- Maigh Attre
- Bianca Bigit
- James Boyett
- R. Mason Clark
- Karis Gorak
- Shrinidhi Kadkol
- Christie Kang
- Jeong (Jeff) Kim
- Oreoluwa Omoba
- Anna Patterson
- Tanya Pulido
- Ashley Ross
- Timur Rusanov
- Itay Solomon
- Ainsley Tran

WELCOME NEW MSTP STAFF MEMBER

**JANINE SACCO, MA**

We are thrilled to have Janine Sacco, MA as the new MSTP Assistant Director for Admissions. Janine joins the MSTP from the Office of Student Affairs where many of you knew her as an academic advisor. Please stop by to welcome Janine and introduce yourself.
PRESENTING THE ENTERING CLASS OF 2020

Katherine Alexander  Home town: Beaumont, TX
Degree: BA, Biology & Biochemistry, Washington University-St.Louis, 2015
Research Interests: tumor microenvironment, metastasis, immunology, premetastatic niche, tumor metabolism, metabolic scavenging
2020 Rotation: Lab of Ekerem Emrah Er, PhD, Dept. of Physiology & Biophysics
Why MD/PhD? I hope to combine my curiosity and growing knowledge about the molecular underpinnings of aggressive disease with my desire to see recoveries in the patients who motivate my efforts in the lab. It is only through a combined MD/PhD program that I can receive the rigorous, sustained training in medicine and science to synergize these goals and achieve this dream.

Marilyn Barragan  Home town: Johnson, KS
Degree: BS, Molecular Biology, Cellular & Developmental Biology, Univ. of Kansas, 2018
Research Interests: Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine, Genetic Engineering, and Community-centered approaches to equitably distribute medical advances
2020 Rotation: Lab of Maria Argos, PhD Dept. of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, SPH
Why MD/PhD? When I discovered what a physician-scientist is while watching a TED talk, I embarked on a new chapter in my life. Thereafter I sought out opportunities relentlessly to explore a career in research, grew more committed to a career in biomedical research, and gradually learned that compared to a PhD or an MD, the dual degree best suits scientists who want to unravel what is unknown about diseases, target treatment limitations or even dare to explore cures.

Drew Burns  Home town: Campbell, KY
Degree: BS, Chemistry, Centre College, 2018
Research Interests: Stem Cell Biology & Regenerative Medicine, Genetic Engineering,
2020 Rotation: Lab of Tom Gao, PhD, Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences, COP
Why MD/PhD? By having a MD's fuller understanding of the human body and a PhD's complete understanding of the power and limitations of MS omic studies, I will be able to fill an unmet need, integrating robust technologies into the clinic. I have found two parts of a career that give me a sense of purpose and vision. Motivated by the advances in the last decade, I envision a future where a complete molecular signature enables individualized dietary changes, therapeutics, diagnostics, and surgical enhancements.

Duncan Claypool  Home town: Minneapolis, MN
Degree BA, Chemistry, Macalester College, 2017
Research Interests: At the intersection of computation, experimental design and human health. Specific fields of interest: biochemistry, bioengineering, biophysics, computational biology genetics, health informatics, neuroscience, pharmacology, precision medicine, psychiatry, and public health.
2020 Rotation: Lab of Adam Oberstein, PhD, Dept. of Microbiology & Immunology
Why MD/PhD? For years I fluctuated between laboratory and hospital, unable to part with either scientific discovery or direct patient care. I then worked with a physician scientist and realized that these endeavors are synergistic and not exclusive. I saw how patient care can inspire and elevate laboratory work while scientific discovery simultaneously enhances patient care. I am pursuing an MD-PhD degree because it is the best means to prepare for my future as a physician scientist.

Alyssa Debra  Home town: Springfield, VA
Degree: BS, Biochemistry, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 2017
Research Interests: Infectious Disease, Global Health, Bioinformatics, Virology, Immunology
2020 Rotation: Lab of Lewis Hsu, MD, Dept. of Pediatrics
Why MD/PhD? I realized how public health is a bridge that truly connects the individual to the community. By combining my interest in medicine with my developing skills as a laboratorian I am continuously looking for ways to advance public health. By strengthening my understanding of the mechanisms of disease, the dual nature of public health, and maintaining a worldly view of patient care I believe I can better protect and heal those who will be in my care. I want to pursue a career as a physician scientist to engage in translational medicine, better my skills as a provider, and conduct research that will enhance the human condition.

Emily Hayes  Home town: Chicago, IL
Degree: BS Biochemistry, University of Rochester, 2017
Research Interests: Reproduction, women's health, developmental biology, endocrinology, signal transduction, cell biology
2020 Rotation: Lab of Irina Buhimschi, MD, Dept. of Ob-Gyn
Why MD/PhD? I realize that in order to have a more direct effect on patients, fundamental science must be translated back to the clinic. As a physician, I aim to interact with and make a positive difference for individual patients. As a researcher, I aspire to transform science in the service of a larger population.
Elise Hu  Home town: Lisle, IL
Degree BA, Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies and Biology, Washington Univ.- St. Louis, 2019
Research Interests: Health disparities, racial/ethnic/socioeconomic disparities, effects of incarceration, population health, community-based research
2020 Rotation: Lab of Caryn Peterson, PhD, Dept. of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, SPH
Why MD/PhD?: The desire for feminist research is to empower those being studied, especially those marginalized and often silenced voices. For me, in practicing medicine, personal relationships are formed and stories are heard, allowing me to stay grounded. In pursuing non-traditional research, those studied are empowered and communities are better equipped for the future. In seeking both as a physician-scientist I find fulfillment, passion, and adventure.

Deanna Keen  Home town: Brookfield, IL
Degree BS, Chemistry, University of South Carolina, 2019
Research Interests: Neuroscience, Developmental Neurobiology, Pharmacology, Mental Health and Psychiatric Disease.
2020 Rotation: Lab of Sarah Lutz, PhD, Dept. of Anatomy & Cell Biology
Why MD/PhD?: Scientists devote their careers to making discoveries to treat illnesses and advance healthcare, but they cannot use their discoveries to improve health outcomes by working alone. Collaboration with physicians will be necessary in order to determine the logistics of a new technology and to have a license to study patients. Since not all physicians are extensively trained in conducting research, MD/PhD training makes translational research happen. I believe it is the responsibility of MD/PhDs to facilitate collaboration between scientists and physicians so that more research obtains access to patient populations.

Jacqueline Kieltyka  Home town: Los Alamos, NM
Degree: BS, Biology, Biochemistry, Chemistry, New Mexico State Univ., 2018
Research Interests: Cellular signaling modulation and molecular oncology with the goal of identifying novel treatment targets and diagnostic tools with particular interest in breast and gynecologic malignancies.
2020 Rotation: Lab of Bellur Prabhakar, PhD, Dept. of Microbiology & Immunology
Why MD/PhD?: I am motivated to become a physician-scientist, so I can explore clinically relevant questions while providing maximal impact by bringing innovative research directly to patients. The role of a physician-scientist offers a unique ability to utilize direct patient care to influence the direction of research, and vice versa, a duality I was able to appreciate in-depth as a post-baccalaureate trainee at the NIH

Brenna Kirkpatrick  Home town: Franklin, TN
BA, Chemistry, University of Kentucky, 2019
Research Interests: Reproductive Biology, Cancer Biology, Medicinal Chemistry
2020 Rotation: Lab of Joanna Burdette, PhD, Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Why MD/PhD?: As a student of the sciences and humanities who has both conducted biomedical research and cared for patients, I perceive an inextricable link between the molecular mechanisms of human illnesses and the human beings who live with those illnesses. My curiosity and inquisitive spirit extend from basic science to clinical methodologies to human communication. I deeply value scientific discovery, meticulously tailored care plans, and mutual trust between patient and provider, and receiving the rigorous training of an MD/PhD candidate will most effectively equip me to reach my goals as a doctor and a researcher.

Katherine Knowles  Home town: Berwyn, IL
Degree: BS, Biology, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018
Research Interests: Immunology & Tissue Regeneration/Healing; understanding the Physiological response to biomaterials used in medical implant
2020 Rotation: Lab of Jae Won Shin, PhD, Dept. of Pharmacology
Why MD/PhD?: To be able to uncover previously unknown and poorly understood biological phenomena forever feeds my curiosity and determination to be a physician-researcher. As I interact with patients, plagued by the very diseases I research, my studies grow closer to heart. I'm able to associate humanity with the cells staring back at me through the microscope. Over the years my medical interests have diffused across the walls of the clinic and into the lab. I feel that choosing between the two practices would be to forfeit half of my deepest passions. I desire to become a physician-scientist who understands and seeks to resolve the current shortcomings of medicine in an effort to improve healthcare as a whole.

Victoria Marino  Home town: Escondido, CA
BS, Engineering, Harvey Mudd College, 2020
Research Interests: Bioengineering
2020 Rotation: Lab of Dr. Finn & Dr. Perkins, Dept. of Medicine
Why MD/PhD?: I want to be able to improve and develop innovative medical devices specific to patient needs. Pursuing the dual degree provides the advantage of first hand patient interactions to identify questions that can then be explored in a lab setting. I want to combine my passion for the human side of medicine with the more technical approach of research, to improve the standards of healthcare and find answers to the many unanswered questions of human diseases. By seeking a dual degree I can increase my breadth and depth of knowledge.
Anisha Nagpal | Home town: Kalamazoo, MI 
Degree: BA, Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, 2020 
Research Interests: Reproductive epidemiology, adolescent health, women's health, community health, sexual health, the intersection of mental and reproductive health, implementation science 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Tory Eisenlohr-Moul, PhD Dept. of Psychiatry 
Why MD/PhD? Working with Zero TB in Tibetan Kids (ZTBTK) at a boarding school in India...has inspired me to pursue an MD and a PhD in epidemiology. As a physician-scientist, I want to bridge the gap between population and individual health by ensuring research goals align with real-world priorities. Through something as seemingly insignificant as a pimpel, I learned the importance of listening to individuals and designing interventions that target health issues important to the people living in a community.

Joseph Najjar | Home town: Santa Fe, NM 
Degree: BA, Chemistry Occidental College 2019 
Research Interests: Chemical biology, medical microbiology and pathology, protein engineering, biotechnology, bioengineering, and medical diagnostics. 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Dr. Finn and Dr. Perkins, Dept. of Medicine 
Why MD/PhD? I seek a career as a physician-scientist so that I may combine two passions—the desire to practice medicine in a clinical setting while also conducting research to attempt to improve the quality of health care through translational research. I am drawn to both the social aspects of patient care, as well as the self-sufficiency and creativity necessary for research. The training undertaken in an MD/PhD program will allow me as a physician-investigator to address medical issues by bridging the communication gap that often exists between researchers and patients.

Judy Wang | Home town: Raleigh, NC 
Degree: BS, Quantitative Biology, University of North Carolina, 2018 
Research Interests: Neurology (especially neurodegenerative diseases), metabolism, pathology, signal transduction, molecular biology genetics, 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Swetha Gowrishankar, PhD Dept. of Anatomy and Cell Biology 
Why MD/PhD? Dr. Blackshear’s signaling lab showed me the value of a medical background in guiding fruitful translational research, and Dr. Gospe’s lab at the Duke Eye Center showed me how patient interactions could directly motivate a research program designed to develop therapy for a rare, incurable disease. I discovered a unique world where logic and compassion came together to drive progress, and I wanted to be a part of it. Without subordinating either half of my brain, I will strive to become a clinician-scientist dedicated to delivering skilled care to my patients, while using my clinical experiences to inform research endeavors to do my part in bringing the bench closer to the bedside.

Alla Welsh | Home town: San Francisco, CA 
Degree BS, Microbiology, University of California, 2016 
Research Interests: Cancer Immunology, Cancer Biology, Translational Immunology, Immunotherapy 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Lijun Rong, PhD Dept. of Microbiology and Immunology 
Why MD/PhD: I have realized that science and medicine are seen as separate fields. However, I find it necessary to be active in both where my research findings provide background to cases in the clinic and where working with patients grants me insight into their specific challenges that feeds back into my research, which, in turn, will address those challenges. In solving the unknowns of human disease and health, it is essential that I gain a holistic understanding of how research and practice can both inform and improve one another.

Reginald Woods | Home town: Cleveland, OH 
Degree: BS, Microbiology, The Ohio Stat University, 2019 
Research Interests: Microbiology/Immunology, Integrative and Translational Sciences 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Mike Federle, PhD, Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences, COP 
Why MD/PhD? I want to be a physician-scientist because I want to apply my knowledge to diverse patient populations in an effort to bring about innovative treatment methods. I want to gain the skills and competencies to lead efforts that change the world for the better. I recognize that this path comes with uncertainty and hard work. I am ready to begin the journey of becoming a physician-scientist because I want to be at the forefront of science and medicine to advance society and life for all.

Heidi Yuan | Home town: San Mateo, CA 
Degree: BA, Molecular Biology, Pomona College, 2018 
Research Interests: Alzheimer’s Disease (APOE4 interactions with A-beta), Headache/Migraine (NAbotulinumtoxinA & CGRP monoclonal antibodies mechanisms of action in chronic migraine), Autoimmunune Neurology, Epilepsy, Aging, Depression 
2020 Rotation: Lab of Orly Lazarov, PhD, Dept. of Anatomy and Cell Biology 
Why MD/PhD? Ultimately, my desire to pursue research is to make me a more well-informed physician that can better support my patients. The way I see it, clinical practice is the water that keeps the river properly flowing, but scientific research is the riverbed that directs the water’s flow. Both are important to my career trajectory, and both contribute to my dream of leading the field of medicine with knowledge and integrity.
PRESENTING THE ENTERING CLASS OF 2021

**Maigh Attre**  
**Home town:** Stamford, CT  
**Degree:** BS, Biomedical Engineering, University of Connecticut, 2019  
**Research Interests:** Chromatin dynamics, epigenetics, molecular cellular biology, biomedical engineering, image analysis, molecular digital logic design, low-cost bioinstrumentation, nuclear environment, molecular epidemiology  
**2020 Rotation:** Lab of Dr. Bea Penalver Bernabe, Dept. of Bioengineering  
**Why MD/PhD?** Despite its clear clinical classifications, the administration of medicine is malleable by myriad factors like chemistry, economics, politics, physics, and environmental factors. Interventions could be too costly, too impractical, too out of touch. As an MD/PhD, I want to use research as a 'troubleshooting' tool to overcome these medical hurdles by generating data and helping develop innovative, next generation biomedical tools. As an MD/PhD, I seek to integrate the many dimensions of science and medicine to develop the innovative tools I will need to practice at the intersection of scientific understanding and accessible solutions.

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**Bianca Bigit**  
**Home town:** Lynbrook, NY  
**Degree:** BS, Biology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2017  
**Research Interests:** Characterizing molecular pathways involved in retinal and corneal disease states, vascular dysfunction in disease state including diabetes, metabolic disorders and cancer  
**2020 Rotation:** Lab of Dr. Ali Djalian, Dept. of Ophthalmology  
**Why MD/PhD?** When I was 18, my mother was diagnosed with stage II adrenal cancer and entered a Phase I clinical trial for an adrenal cancer drug. The idea of her disease aiding others through research gave my mom, and myself, new resolve. My desire to pursue a career as a clinician-scientist intensified as I witnessed the necessity of research and medicine here. As an MD/PhD, I want to be well-equipped to pioneer solutions in the face of the unknown and to provide hope for patients. With the spirit of an MD/PhD, I know treating patients will inspire within me the questions to be researched and the novel medical discoveries that follow benefitting patient care.

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**James Boyett**  
**Home town:** Bradenton, FL  
**Degree:** BS, Biomedical Science, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2020  
**Research Interests:** Cellular metabolism, Inflammation, Metabolic dysfunction, Innate immunology, Cell signaling  
**2020 Rotation:** Lab of Michael Federle, PhD, Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences  
**Why MD/PhD?** The sensation of pain is unavoidable, and the management thereof is an important part of medicine. A crucial question remains: how do we objectively measure pain? It will take clinical and basic scientists alike, as the mechanisms behind pain and the full impact on quality of life are still not understood. It will also take someone who is formally trained in clinical practice to avoid the pitfalls behind testing techniques and implementation, while also maintaining the focus on patient care. I plan to use this training to answer this type of question.

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**R. Mason Clark**  
**Home town:** Owensboro, KY  
**Degree BS, Molecular and Cell Biology, Vanderbilt, University, 2021**  
**Research Interests:** Chemical biology, microbial pathogenesis, host-microbe interactions, virology, and drug discovery and development  
**2020 Rotation:** Lab of Lauren Palmer, PhD Dept. of Microbiology and Immunology  
**Why MD/PhD?** As an aspiring physician-scientist, I will apply chemical biological techniques to infectious diseases in order to address the problems of globalization and antibiotic resistance that are plaguing medicine. Identifying new targets for antimicrobial drugs will be a massive priority in the coming decades. My education will equip me to use the interdisciplinary approach of translational science not only to provide me with a career where I can employ my passions for problem solving, innovation, and caring for others, but also to allow me to make a beneficial impact on humanity that reaches beyond my own patients.

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**Karis Gorak**  
**Home town:** Rockford, IL  
**Degree:** BS, Biological Sciences, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018  
**Research Interests:** Neurobiology and psychiatry including research topics related to neurodevelopment, neurogenesis, neuropsychiatric disorders, brain plasticity  
**2021 Rotation:** Lab of Sarah Lutz, PhD Dept. of Anatomy and Cell Biology  
**Why MD/PhD?** Working at the University of Illinois Cancer Center, I trained in numerous professional skills, while also witnessing a tangible union of scientific research and medicine. The thrilling reality that research I was conducting had the potential to contribute to a greater understanding of cancer progression, and potential treatment avenues, fueled my ambition. I dreamed of one day having the privilege of treating patients, even dissecting the tumors myself, while concurrently researching a cure or novel therapeutic avenue.

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**Shrinidhi Kadkol**  
**Home town:** Aurora, IL  
**Degree:** BS, Biology, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020  
**Research Interests:** Cancer biology, Gene regulation, Genomics  
**2021 Rotation:** Bradley Merrill, PhD, Dept. of Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics  
**Why MD/PhD?** I believe the complementarity of both degrees will allow me to pursue a wide array of research areas. The dual-degree is requisite to my transformation into a physician-scientist because it affords me the time to specialize in a particular research field. The constant ebb-and-flow between hypothesizing and testing will greatly enhance my problem solving and communication abilities which, in turn, will further my clinical aptitude. Striving to better the understanding of disease in the research lab through small, incremental breakthroughs and translating those findings into clinical care are fundamental aspects of medicine that satiate my curiosity.
Christie Kang  Home town: Buffalo Grove, IL  
Degree: BS, Art, Life Sciences Visualization, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2021  
Research Interests: Cancer Biology, Tumor microenvironment, Pharmacogenomics, Epigenetics  
Why MD/PhD? At UIC, I have attacked the problem of antibiotic resistance in two different labs. Using both pharmacology and human factors methods has opened my eyes to the great need for interdisciplinary answers for multidimensional healthcare problems. Similarly, as a physician-scientist, I will aim to unify the two approaches of lab research and clinical practice to tackle cancer. While a scientifically trained eye will help me better analyze the slippery nature of cancer in my clinic, the relationships I build with my patients will ultimately guide my research. I strive to promote health equity in cancer—a field where health disparities are fatal. I intend to use what I witness in the clinic to study how these socioeconomic factors affect biological mechanisms in cancer patients.

Jeong (Jeff) Kim  Home town: Baltimore, MD  
Degree: BS, Electrical Engineering & Neuroscience, Johns Hopkins University, 2019  
Research Interests: Medical devices, Wearable devices, Microfluidics, Ophthalmology, Robotics  
2021 Rotation: Lab of Ian Papautsky, PhD Dept. of Bioengineering

Oreoluwa Omoba  Home town: Oak Park, IL/LaCrosse, WI  
Degree: BS, Biology-Neurobiology Track, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018  
Research Interests: Virology  
2021 Rotation: Dr. Omar Perez, Dept. of Pathology  
Why MD/PhD? Acquiring an MD/PhD degree will offer invaluable opportunities and give me the skills necessary to become a strong independent researcher. Using the training gained as a physician scientist I will not only be a passionate researcher but also gain the skills to effectively lead and manage a team of those interested in filling the knowledge gaps that plague the medical-scientific community. I am eager to use my MD/PhD training to merge the skills I develop as a scientific researcher with the medical knowledge gained in medical school to translate my research into novel therapies used to treat patients.

Anna Patterson  Home town: Greenbay, WI  
Degree: BS, Neurobiology, University of Wisconsin, 2020  
Research Interests: Neuroscience/Genetics: particularly molecular genetics and gene environment interactions  
2021 Rotation: In the lab of Elizabeth Glover, PhD Dept. of Psychiatry  
Why MD/PhD? The words, “We don’t know,” though scary and uncomfortable for patients and providers, can mobilize those with the correct research expertise to new discovery. As I traded my scrubs for a lab coat, I had an extra drive to uncover more about why epilepsy develops so that people won’t have to resort to invasive surgeries. Other physician-scientists, along with my clinical and research backgrounds, have proved to me that an MD/PhD training will provide me the necessary tools to reach my career goals.

Tanya Pulido  Home town: Petaluma, CA  
Degree: BS, Biological Sciences, University of California-Davis, 2018  
Research Interests: Cellular & molecular mechanisms underlying the development and progression of cancer  
2021 Rotation: In the lab of Jan Kitajewski, PhD, Dept. of Physiology and Biophysics  
Why MD/PhD? One of the major links between senescence and cancer development is inflammation - the same process that drives the progression of ankylosing spondylitis. This connection fueled my passion for research. My research also showed me how science and medicine, when combined, have the potential to improve patient care on a larger scale. As a physician-scientist, I want to lead studies with translational significance, bridging the gap between scientific research and clinical practice. I also hope that my future research will make an impact on the lives of others who may also be suffering from a chronic disease like mine.

Ashley Ross  Home town: Weston, FL (born Buenos Aires, Argentina)  
Degree: BS, Microbiology & Cell Science, 2018  
Research Interests: Neurobiology, neurodegenerative diseases, and elucidating mechanisms through which pathology occurs. I am very interested in mechanisms of regeneration in the nervous system and developing therapeutics to combat injury and disease progression  
2021 Rotation: In the lab of Dr. Jeffrey Loeb, Dept. of Neurology and Rehabilitative Medicine  
Why MD/PhD? The ability to translate bench work to the bedside and back inspires me. My ultimate goal is to collaborate between fields by applying novel scientific findings directly to patients and returning that feedback to further design therapies, improving quality of life. I believe that earning an MD/PhD will allow me to seamlessly combine my interests in science and medicine, while weaving my passion for working creatively to address unmet medical challenges with new clinical therapies.
Timur Rusanov  Home town: Philadelphia, PA  
Degree: BS, Neuroscience, Temple University, 2018  
Research Interests: Exploring the mechanisms behind DNA repair and maintaining genome stability in the context of tumorigenesis. More broadly interested in cancer biology and translational research  
2021 Rotation: Yang Dai, PhD, Dept. of Bioengineering  
Why MD/PhD? The experience of problem solving on a molecular level has been crucial in pushing me towards the MD/PhD path. As a physician-scientist, I wish to employ the theory learned at the bench towards precise and personalized treatment at the bed-side. Identifying weaknesses or targets in the aberrant mechanisms behind cancer through research can guide me in offering the most proficient possible care for my patients. The most invaluable opportunity offered by pursuing a career as a physician-scientist is to learn directly from patients and their unique experiences. Rather than solely relying on in-vitro and in-vivo exploration, I will take guidance from my patients’ encounters with disease in helping steer my research goals. This collaboration between the patient and physician is incredibly compelling and draws me towards MD/PhD dual-degree programs for my future.

Itay Solomon  Home town: Los Angeles, CA/Evanston, IL  
Degree: BS, Microbiology, Immunology & Molecular Genetics, UCLA, 2020  
Research Interests: Bioengineering, Medical microbiology, Oncology, Microbiome, Neurobiology, Bioinformatics  
2021 Rotation: Dr. Jae-Won Shi, Departments of Pharmacology & Bioengineering  
Why MD/PhD? At UCLA, my interests in research and medicine merged to inform my career goals today: to study diseases of the brain that produce outcomes as seemingly disparate as brain cancers and psychological distress, and to apply this understanding to patient care. Beyond fulfilling my academic and professional passions, pursuing an MD-PhD would provide me with the sense of community that made UCLA home, and that I know is personally important to me. As a physician, I hope to contribute to the production of novel knowledge and mentoring aspiring researchers. I hope to harness my wonder about the natural world by cultivating a career at the intersection of research, technology and healthcare as a future physician-scientist.

Ainsley Tran  Home town: Oak Park, IL  
Degree: BA, Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology, Washington University-St. Louis, 2020  
Research Interests: Translational neurodegeneration  
2021 Rotation: Orly Lazarov, PhD Dept. of Anatomy and Cell Biology  
Why MD/PhD? Seeing patients and their families helplessly absorb the news of their devastating diagnosis intensified my desire to pursue a scientific career. I hope to use medical knowledge and research tools to make discoveries that can one day ease their suffering. While my experiences in the laboratory and the clinic inspired me to continue pursuing research, my aspirations to provide direct care for patients never waned. A medical training would allow me to alleviate some of his suffering of those currently afflicted, better understand the gaps in medical care, and thus better target people’s needs in the laboratory. The combined MD/PhD training will empower me to have the greatest impact on patients as I investigate mechanisms and consider interventions to target disease in novel, patient-focused way.

MSTP SPORTS CORNER

The Volleyball Team –2nd place winners (l.to r)  
Jacob Neethling-G1, Elise Hu-M2, Drew Burns-M2, Ainsley Tran-M1, Luis Aponte Cofresi-G1  

Chicago Marathon 2021  
Joseph Geraghty –M3
Adam Szmilter-G5 and wife Cathy at their wedding on September 24, 2021. They were married in Urbana IL.

Senalidé Maley, daughter of Bani Medegan Fagia-G2, born May 17, 2021

Atticus, son of Rachel Smith-G5, born May 30, 2021

Left Maggie Schulz (G2) and husband Sam Weiss at their wedding on June 6, 2021

Right Cody Schott- (2021) introducing his and wife Sophie’s daughter, Breanne Riley Schott born on May 6, 2021 to friend Benjamin Turturice-(2021) during a summer trip to Colorado

ENGAGEMENT CONGRATULATIONS

LEFT Cory Reiter (M4) “We got together right before the start of my 2nd year of medical school and are getting married the weekend after my graduation, so I can be introduced as Dr. Cory Reiter. I am very excited to marry Andrew, honestly more so than any of the exciting things happening this year.”

RIGHT Hannah Pennington (G5) became engaged to Alex Klug on August 7, 2021. They are planning a November 2021 wedding.
Alumni News

On October 25, the UIC MSTP proudly welcomed its distinguished alumna, Uzma Samadani, MD, PhD 1999, as guest speaker at the 3rd Annual Building the Bridge From Bench to Bedside Lecture.

Dr. Samadani is a private practice neurosurgeon in Minneapolis, MN and brain injury researcher at the University of Minnesota when she is a Associate Professor in the Department of Biornormatics and Computational Biology with a graduate faculty appointment in Neuroscience. She is also an attending neurosurgeon at the Minneapolis Veterans Administration Medical Center and founder of the neodiagnostics start-up Oculongica Inc., which developed the first baseline free concussion diagnostic cleared for marketing approval by the FDA. Her talk described how she recently completed her multi-year venture to develop her start-up company, Oculongica.

Dr. Samadani previously returned to her alma mater before to speak to our students in 2014 at our Graduation Banquet at La Luce Restaurant. On that occasion her topic was: "Development of an Eye Tracking Biomarker for Concussion." Although, unfortunately, this time she wasn't able to be with us in person, we all greatly enjoyed her warm virtual presence via Zoom in which she described her launch of a private company to continue her long-time research on the eye tracking biomarker for concusion. As she concluded her talk, the Chat quickly filled with accolades, thanks and questions. One person asked if she would share her PPT slides specific to the start-up process, which she has done. Hopefully, as restrictions decrease, she will make a real trip to visit us in person soon.

In the Alumni Mailbag

Tiffani Berkel <tberkel2@gmail.com> Tue 9/14/2021 12:27 PM

Thanks so much, Julie! You're right, intern year was nothing like I imagined. It was definitely a struggle as an intern so isolated from my peers. For the first 6 months we were working in individual offices on the psych ward and it was a disaster for learning and for mental health, but things are much better now as the program learns how to adapt. My cohort were all in the same room for the first time in July 2021! I just finished my perinatal psychiatry rotation and it really solidified for me that it's what I want to do when I grow up :) But now I have to wait 3 more years to do it again haha. I'm trying to fill the void by doing research in perinatal psychiatry as well. Dan and I are looking forward to a trip to Chicago in October for a wedding! I'm hoping one day I will enjoy STL at least half as much as I loved living in Chicago... lol.

So good to hear from you! Tell Roberta I said hi. Tiffani Berkel

Note to all alumni: Please keep the updates on your news coming. If you're going to be in Chicago, please stop by for an informal visit or to give a formal presentation on your work.

The purpose of the UIC MSTP Alumni Association is to encourage networking among alumni and to support current medical scientist trainees at UIC. Since 2009, the Alumni Association has also sponsored the "Dr. Edward P. Cohen Medical Scientist Training Award" given each year to an outstanding student who has completed his or her PhD and is returning to the 3rd year of medical school. Please email David Ramsey, MD, PhD (2008) dram800@gmail.com to inquire or to support the annual UIC MSTP Alumni Fellowship. The award is currently sponsored by anonymous donors.

AWARDS, HONORS & PUBLICATIONS

Congratulations to

Allison Kirchner Ellis-M4 and Artemis Gogos-M43 who were inducted into AOA.
Cory Reiter-M4 who was inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society
Jane Ivakhnitskaia-M3 on receiving the Alumni Association Dr. Edward Cohen Award for a Rising M3
Casey Blaha-M4 on receiving the Dr. Larry Tobacman Travel Award for a Rising M4
Terilyn Stephen-G4 and Samuel Eallonardo-G3 for winning F-30 Grants
Joseph Geraghty-M3 for three publications:
Book: Khan AR and Geraghty JR. Firs Aid Clinical Pattern Recognition for the USMLE Step 1 and Beyone. 1st Ed/ McGraw Hill LLC
MSTP Retreat—Field Day—September 11, 2021

After making do with merely a zoom experience in 2020, a real in-person retreat took place on Saturday, September 11, 2021. The morning portion was dedicated to science with student presentations, a state of the program from Dean Rosenblatt and a research presentation by Dr. Nissim Hay. This was followed by a field day event where our four advising houses: Adenine, Cytosine, Thymine and Guanine committed against each other in various field activities and games. It was a great opportunity for fresh air, fun and lots of team bonding!

Above members of Cytosine House build the tallest structure.
Below Guanine House members work to pass the ball

Thymine House—2021 Field Day Champions!

Adenine House working to lift the hula-hoop as a team