



# BGSA NEWSLETTER

JULY 2020



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- July.....Career Summer Seminar Series
- Every other Friday.....Social Justice Journal Club
- July 29th.....PMI Comprehensive Exam Help Session
- July 30th.....BGSA and HSLs Adobe Illustrator Workshop

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Michelle Lynskey

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Hello School of Medicine,

I hope this newsletter finds you safe and well. We are facing unprecedented times amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and growing social movements following the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and far too many other Black lives. The issues of racial inequality are certainly not new, particularly to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the continued racial disparities met by BIPOC. In contrast, racial inequalities commonly go unexperienced and unacknowledged by white peers. However, with the reported racial disparities in COVID-19 cases and growth of Black social movements, more and more people are making the personal and professional commitments to confront these injustices. Now is the time we can create real change in our own graduate programs and communities.

As a student run organization, the BGSA is dedicated to developing ourselves as students and the School of Medicine as a whole. In accordance with this, the BGSA has recently created the Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Committee, which will spearhead our new initiatives as well as serve as a liaison with the School of Medicine Office of Diversity Programs. To learn more, make sure to check out the letter from our inaugural D&I co-chairs, Sidney Lane and Anu Balogun, featured in this issue as well as the Anti-Racist Resource Guide, located in the D&I section of the BGSA website.

This edition of the newsletter also features incredible Student and Alumni spotlights. We are recognizing Atinuke "Oyin" Dosunmu-Ogunbi, an MD/PhD student in the Molecular Pharmacology Program, and alumna Kellsye Fabian, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the NIH Center for Cancer Research, for their outstanding work in their respective fields. Learn more about these remarkable women by reading their spotlights.

Even during quarantine, the BGSA is committed to bringing together graduate students in the School of Medicine. Virtual events such as "Whine Wednesdays" and Trivia Nights (as well as Zoom) have become a common occurrence and allow students to catch up with those they have not seen in a while and to let off some steam. We look forward to hosting more virtual events and look forward to seeing the new faces of the incoming students soon!

For more information about our D&I initiatives and future events, we encourage you to visit our website [www.bgsa.pitt.edu](http://www.bgsa.pitt.edu).

# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Sidney Lane and Anu Balogun



Sidney Lane, a 3rd year PMI student, and Anu Balogun, a 2nd year CMP student, were elected into the BGSA as co-chairs of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee recently. Sidney's goals revolve around establishing programs that work to improve URM's experience in STEM not only at the university but also in the greater Pittsburgh community. Meanwhile, Anu's goals centered on changing the narrative and implementing new policies within the SOM that foster diverse representation for both new and old students. Uniting together and interconnecting our goals as co-chairs, we aim to establish concrete plans of action that will be brought to fruition with the support of our diverse array of brilliant committee members:

**AARON JOHNSON**  
MPGP

**MORGAN RICCI**  
CBMP

**KELLEY PREMO**  
BIOMEDICAL MSC

**JONATHAN KLONOWSKI**  
NEUROSCIENCE

**NICHOLAS CHEHADE**  
NEUROSCIENCE

**YONG JOON KIM**  
MSTP (G1)

**MISCHE HOLLAND**  
ISB

**SANJANA THOSAR**  
MGDB

**YINGCI LIU**  
DENTIST-RESEARCHER

**BELLINA MUSHALA**  
MPGP

Several of our long-term and short-term goals are listed below:

- Developing the network of diversity within the SOM's student body by tracking all minority students.
- Setting up a D&I Alumni Association for the SOM.
- Increasing Pitt's SOM minority representation at events such as the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS).
- Creating a D&I social media presence where incoming and current students can find us.
- Establishing a presence at all interviews and/or orientations in the SOM (Master's & Ph.D.) to encourage visiting minority students to join while strengthening our connections with current students.
- Creating a loose mentorship program for Undergraduate Minority Students interested in research by liaising with undergraduate leadership.
- Working with the SOM higher authorities to increase the diversity of faculty representation.
- Creating D&I cookouts and display-of-culture days to introduce the greater Pitt community to a diverse array of cultures.
- Working with the SOM's D&I office to increase graduate student representation at the Annual Toast to Diversity Event.
- Creating a faculty body to assist graduate students experiencing racial discrimination.

Lastly, we strongly believe that D&I are measures of excellence that renowned institutions like Pitt should embody and we are here to enforce these measures.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Atinuke "Oyin" Dosunmu-Ogunbi

I am honored to be recognized by the BGSA for my work involving the mitochondria localized antioxidant superoxide dismutase 2 (SOD2) and its role in maintaining endothelial barrier function. I would first like to thank my research mentor Adam Straub, PhD for his nomination as well as my clinical mentor Enrico Novelli, MD, MS and the rest of my thesis committee including Bruce Freeman, PhD, Cheryl Hillery, MD, and Cameron Dezifulian, MD.

Sickle Cell Anemia (SCA) is an inherited disorder which causes the red blood cells' (RBC) shape to deform. The deformation of RBCs can increase the fragility of the membrane which would cause them to burst. The contents of RBCs can lead to an increase in the formation of reactive oxygen species (ROS). ROS are damaging to the blood vessels, more so to the endothelium which are the cells that line the blood vessels. Antioxidants, such as SOD2, are proteins or molecules which neutralize ROS. I have found that SCA patients have a decrease in SOD2. I have also shown that a decrease in SOD2 results in an increase in permeability in endothelial cells. This increase in permeability results in an increased leakage of macromolecules from the blood vessel into organ tissue which may be a mechanism by which organ damage occurs in SCA

My work on this project has resulted in an abstract achievement award at the American Society of Hematology (ASH) conference in 2019 as well as the Minority Hematology Graduate Award from ASH (2020-2022). I have also published a review in Blood Advances summarizing what we know about SOD2 in SCA.

## TRAVEL AWARDS

UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS THERE HAVE BEEN NO TRAVEL GRANTS AWARDED FOR THE MONTHS OF JUNE AND JULY. AS SOON AS UNIVERSITY TRAVEL IS PERMITTED THE BGSA TRAVEL GRANT AWARDS WILL RESUME.



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Kellsye Fabian, PhD

I earned my PhD in Immunology in May 2017. My short-term career goal at that time was to get more research experience to be able to work in industry and, for me, that meant doing a postdoc that is geared more towards translational science. I really enjoyed my grad school work on cancer vaccines at the Storkus lab, so I wanted to stay in the cancer immunotherapy research area. Because of my husband, I had to narrow my job search to the DC metro area, which wasn't a limitation at all because the NIH main campus is located in Bethesda, MD.

Currently, I'm a postdoc at the Laboratory of Tumor Immunology and Biology at the NCI, NIH. Our lab is focused on translational research with the goal of developing novel immunotherapies for cancer. Our lab is composed of several research groups and a clinical trials group, and we collaborate with our industry partners to bring experimental cancer therapies to the clinic. My role in the lab is to design, perform, and interpret pre-clinical studies and relay the findings to our clinical investigators and industry counterparts, who would then apply that knowledge in a clinical setting. I find it quite exciting to see my data being used as a rationale for a clinical trial and even more exhilarating (and at the same time, humbling) to meet cancer patients who have benefited from the trials that our lab has implemented.

In addition to the incredible research training, the NIH also provides its trainees with a lot of opportunities to explore and pursue other science-related (but non-bench) interests. I have joined a science policy interest group, attended management and leadership workshops for scientists, taken FDA drug evaluation classes, and so forth. These activities allowed me to identify the type of work I want (and, more importantly, not want!) to do in the future.

My career plans have changed slightly since I started my postdoc. And with the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of plans had to be put on hold. But certainly, the opportunity to work at the NIH and be a part of a lab that helps bring therapies from bench to bedside in the most literal way possible has been very rewarding and will be a valuable for my next career step.

*\*This essay was written by Kellsye Fabian in her personal capacity. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the National Institutes of Health.*

*\*\*If you have any questions for Kellsye, you can email her at [kellsye@gmail.com](mailto:kellsye@gmail.com).*

# JULY 2020 RAFFLE

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER, THE BGSA IS RAFFLING OFF A \$15 GIFT CARD TO A LOCAL PITTSBURGH BUSINESS OF YOUR CHOICE!

RAFFLE: [HTTPS://FORMS.GLE/GSHN5GNBMDUGKCDA](https://forms.gle/GSHN5GNBMDUGKCDA)

## NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE



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