



BGSA NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2021



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Fall Career Seminar Series.....September & October
- BGSA Happy Hour.....TBD

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

ANU BALOGUN

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Dear School of Medicine,

Congratulations on starting another school year! We proudly welcome all new students. As part of the recently elected BGSA executive board, I must reiterate the BGSA's commitment to developing ourselves as students and the School of Medicine as a whole.

In this edition, newly elected co-chair Sam Herron reiterates the D&I committee's continued commitment to creating an environment that fosters diversity and inclusion for SOM grad students. We also feature two incredible women as our spotlights. Our student spotlight is the current 4RS CEO, Nicole Martucci; Nicole writes about the importance of identifying your passion and channeling it towards impacting the world. We also have the pleasure of featuring Karis Kosar, Ph.D., a recent CMP graduate. Karis writes about the courting process for her current job and the importance of networking while in graduate school.

This edition also features Claire Weckerly as she recaps the successes of the BGSA Buddy Program. Becca Kritschil explores the city of Pittsburgh and presents us with new and exciting places to explore; look out for the Halloween cruise. Lastly, please enjoy the BGSA's image gallery from the past few months.

Take care of yourselves,
Anu Balogun

TRAVEL AWARDS

CONGRATULATIONS TO MITCHELL MEYER (PMI) WINNER OF THE BGSA TRAVEL AWARD FOR SEPTEMBER.

PAST WINNERS

MAY: DEVANSHI NAYAK (PMI) & KEIN TRAN (MGDB)

JUNE: ALLISON WELP (PMI)

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

SAM HERRON

The newest iteration of the diversity and inclusion committee is excited to welcome everyone to the fall semester and to our first edition of the newsletter! The new co-chairs, Tiffany Taylor (4th year in the PMI program) and Sam Herron (5th year in the CMP program) and the rest of the D&I committee are looking forward to the upcoming academic year and the opportunities it brings to further the goals and initiatives of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the University of Pittsburgh. Building on the success of last year's efforts, a major focus of the committee this year will be to help foster a diverse community using a ground up, grass roots approach that emphasizes student interactions. We intend to use the committee as a platform to provide students with the space, support, and resources to promote the diverse experiences and cultures of the SOM grad students. For us, this will take the form of anything from cultural events, discussion opportunities, advocacy initiatives to social events, all aimed at promoting networking, building relationships, and sharing our diverse experiences and backgrounds with each other.

Furthermore, the committee is committed to serving as a platform that any student can build from, in any way they choose. Be it a cultural holiday you want to celebrate, a certain topic you would like to discuss or tackle with the help of others, or an event opportunity that you would like to extend to other grad students, the committee intends to be a place to help bring these ideas to fruition without placing the burden of planning, funding, or logistics on the student (we're all here to get degrees as well after all). In addition to our own programming and initiatives, we encourage anyone who wants to get involved in any capacity, from passing along an idea to joining the committee itself, to reach out to the co-chairs.

SEPTEMBER 2021 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)

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

NICOLE MARTUCCI



I am a current fifth year PhD candidate in the Cellular and Molecular Pathology Program in the Michalopoulos Lab. I'm also the current CEO of Fourth River Solutions (4RS) and you may recognize my name as I used to spam many of you with emails as the past BGSA Vice President of Programming from 2018-2020. The majority of my friends know I don't like talking about science outside of lab; so, on that note, I'll keep the science talk short and instead focus on my experiences outside of my thesis work.

When it came to applying to graduate school, all I knew was that I wanted to study the liver, so it's no surprise to how I ended up here in Pittsburgh. In the Michalopoulos lab, we extensively study the molecular mechanisms behind many liver pathologies. My thesis work focuses on a specific protein, PIK3CD, and the role it plays in the regeneration of the liver (spoiler alert: it helps hepatocytes proliferate after partial hepatectomies!!).

When I first started grad school, I had the goal of staying in academia as a professor. I wanted to be a liver expert, top of the field. That goal was very quickly pushed aside once I realized I simply did not want to deal with the politics of academia my entire life; it was a difficult reality to accept and something that I internally struggled with for a while. That realization eventually led me to discover 4RS, a student led non-profit consulting company with the goal of educating and providing graduate students with experience outside of academia with consulting as the main avenue.

We work with a lot of local life-science startups on problems they encounter such as who their customers may be or how they should go about entering the market. It's a really unique way to utilize the skills you've learned throughout your education.

It has been a struggle to balance the workload of being a PhD student but also the CEO for a 60+ person company. However, I personally see more value in my extracurriculars than I do in my thesis work, something I'm sure my advisor would not like to hear. In my opinion, I'm not going to find a job because I have a certain number of publications in high ranked journals. But being part of a student-led company, working directly with life-science startups... that is the experience I find value in.

Now, as I get ready to (hopefully) defend in the next year or so, I often think about just how much my goals have changed in the past years. I would never have imagined myself on the path I'm currently on. But I've also learned the past few years that things don't always work out the way you thought they would. I struggled with my research the first 3 years, continuously getting negative data. I realized I wasn't built to stay in academia, and I realized that studying the liver my entire career wouldn't be enough to satisfy my desire to make an impact on the world. There were times I thought I would never be graduating, and that a PhD was completely the wrong choice for me. But here I am, confident in where I am in life and excited to see what the future holds for me.

A few years back I received some advice from a mentor that I now have written on a piece of paper hung up on the wall in lab and I'd like to end this statement sharing that advice with you all. "Ever notice how when someone dreams of happiness, abundance, health, romance, or friendship, they never have to wonder if it's in their best interests? But when someone dreams of a specific house, employer, love interest, deadline, dollar amount, they often end up contradicting themselves? Keep your "end results" general. Everything else is just a how."



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

KARIS KOSAR, PhD

I graduated from the Cellular and Molecular Pathology department with my PhD in August of 2021 and have been working as a post-doc in the lab of Dr. Jorge Bezerra at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center since. However, having just started my new position, I feel it is most important to tell the process of getting this position.

The most helpful thing I did was network. I am not a people person and even though every time I had to introduce myself to someone new it felt like a tiny bit of my soul was dying, I did it.

I was also lucky enough my PI at Pitt, Dr. Kari Nejak-Bowen, felt it was important I attended at least one conference a year, so I had ample opportunities to network. After interesting presentations, I tried to talk to the presenter or if Kari knew someone well-known in our field, I would ask her to introduce me to them. So, overtime I slowly put myself onto potential employers' radar.

Next, I had to decide my plan post-graduation. I joined grad school thinking research would be fun and wanting a career in academia, but by the end I was jaded, disenchanted with research, and at a loss what to do next. After some sagely wisdom from all available mentors I decided to apply for a post-doc.

I talked to Kari about people she knew were hiring, since PI's can be bad about posting positions, and made a list of potential labs. I started this process in waves to not overwhelm myself, and initially reached out to two labs. I heard back from both and went through the courting process that accompanied: presentations about my research, attending virtual lab meetings, and even managed to visit one in person.

I was very transparent during interviews. If the PI's asked, I told them who else I was interviewing with. I told them what I was bringing experience- and knowledge-wise to their lab and what I wanted out of their lab. I let them know I was iffy about academia and asked how they would help me if I chose an alternate path. I even pushed one of them to make me an offer earlier than they intended to, because the other lab was waiting for me.

My goal was not to come Cincinnati Children's Hospital as a post-doc, it was to find a lab that kindled my passion for research. Dr. Bezerra is an incredibly clever man, because I could not visit, he enrolled me in a mini conference about organoids, a major interest of mine, and zoomed with me after. Without lifting a finger, he got me science drunk on everything I could do with this amazing model. He then dangled the irresistible bait of how his lab uses organoids to study bile ducts (my #1 research love) and all the potential directions I could go, and I was hooked. I met with my mentors one more time to discuss the pros and cons of each lab, in case they knew something I did not, and accepted Dr. Bezerra's offer.

I'm now working as a post-doc in his lab actively planning 2 projects, with another project on the back burner, and loving every second. Getting a "big kid" job is scary and anxiety inducing, but it does not have to be hard, just take baby steps. Network a little each conference. Tap into mentors old and new, they have been in your position and will help you. Send out your CV and applications in waves so you're not juggling five interviews, while also writing your thesis. Do not take a job if the interviewer is not as enthusiastic about you as you are about them. Finally follow your gut, mine has yet to lead me astray. Even if you do not actively feel it, you're more prepared than you expect, will be fine, and will get a job after graduating.

If you have any questions, I am more than happy to answer via kariskosare@gmail.com.



THE BGSA BUDDY PROGRAM

CLAIRE WECKERLY

This year marks the 3rd year of the BGSA Buddy Program, which aims to aid first-year graduate students within the School of Medicine as they begin their graduate careers. The Buddy Program assigns two “big buddies” to a group of 4-5 “little buddies” that are entering one of the participating programs: IBGP, PMI, MBSB, ISB, or Bioinformatics. The big buddies wear many hats depending on what the first-year students may need.



A GROUP OF FIRST-YEARS HOLD AN IMPROMPTU HAPPY HOUR DURING ORIENTATION WEEK

We advise students as they chose their rotations, we assist with classwork, we act as tour guides and give recommendations about what to do in Pittsburgh, and we can even help you figure out how to do your taxes!

While the small buddy groups meet up about once a month, usually at a coffee shop or a bar, we also plan large events for all of the first-years to attend together. Throughout the pandemic, we've had virtual events such as Zoom Happy Hours, online cooking classes, talks from mental health professionals, and a March Madness competition. Our most successful virtual event last year was Trivia Night, complete with contact-less delivery of treat bags full of snacks and drinks. The trivia questions were things like "what flavor salsa is this?" or "can you tell the name brand cereal from the generic brand," where the participants ate from their snack bags to determine the answers.

So far this semester, we held a pre-orientation happy hour at The Porch in August. Additionally, the BGSA Welcome Picnic at Schenley served as an opportunity for the first-years to meet their big buddies for the first time. Our plans for the rest of the fall include happy hours, treats to help the students celebrate the end of their first exam, a Halloween party, and a Friendsgiving event. We are excited for this upcoming semester, and overall are thrilled to be able to continue to serve the BGSA by building a strong community starting with its newest members!



PMI CLASS AT THE FIRST-YEAR WELCOME CEREMONY



A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

BECCA KRITSCHIL

Welcome! Glad to have you here. Are you looking for some new hobbies to do in Pittsburgh? Have a date but not sure where to take them? Or just looking for a good hangout spot with your friends this weekend? You're in the right place! This is a new column to the newsletter that focuses on this great city we are in and why we love it- or at least some things we love about it- if you aren't quite sold on this Yinzer nation! Maybe checking out a few of these spots will help change your mind. At the very least you'll have a fun time! Let's get exploring:

BIKE THE BURG TOURS: EVERY DAY AT 10AM FOR 3 HRS

Bike the burgh tours: every day at 10am for 3 hrs
Are you an avid bike rider? Or are you like me and purchased a bike during COVID thinking you'd get into it but have only gone out a few times on it? No matter how serious your bike skills are, you can experience Pittsburgh in a unique way through a "Bike the Burgh tour". These tours begin every day of the week at 10am and last for 3 hours. In the beauty of the burgh tour, you will see the most interesting spots of Pittsburgh from downtown to the strip district and back over to the North Shore. This tour is perfect if you are new to the city!



DOWNTOWN



There is also a bridges of the burgh tour if you are more interested in learning more about the city of bridges and how it came to be. This tour is the longest distance and visits the most neighborhoods as well! The cost of a bike tour per person is \$34.00. Soak up the sunshine while you can before winter comes and learn more about this beautiful city we live in on a bike tour!

GATEWAY CLIPPER CRUISE

If you would rather go to the dentist and get a root canal than ride around on a bike for three hours, I got you! There is more than one way to explore this beautiful city we live in. Rather than riding over the rivers on a tour of Pittsburgh's bridges, why not take a ride on the river in the Gateway clipper cruise?? If you love being on the water or prefer a more stationary activity to enjoy on a weekend, this may be a great option for you to get out and explore Pittsburgh! Gateway clipper has many events year-round on their cruise ship:



STATION SQUARE

GATEWAY CLIPPER CRUISE: WINE TASTING OCTOBER 28TH

If you enjoy boating and also a good wine, then their upcoming wine tasting October 28th 6-9pm may be for you! Included in the \$75 price is a selection of 8 wines and deliciously prepared hors d'oeuvres buffet. If you have never had the chance to enjoy the city lights at night, this cruise is for you! The city is beautiful in the daytime, but when the sun goes down and the lights from downtown shine on the river it is a show stopping view.



STATION SQUARE



GATEWAY CLIPPER CRUISE: HAUNTED PITTSBURGH CRUISE FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAYS IN OCTOBER

With Halloween fast approaching, what better way to learn about Pittsburgh than hearing true haunted tales of Pittsburgh as you sail around the three rivers? Climb on board to see if you can handle the hair raising, heart pumping, mind twisting stories of who haunts the Allegheny county jail and the history of the Monongahela monster. The tours start at 6:30pm or 8pm and lasts for one hour. Tickets are \$32 each and there is a full snack bar and bar on board for purchase



STATION SQUARE



BGSA'S YOGA IN THE PARK



BGSA'S PRESIDENT SIGNS THE BEAM ON BEHALF OF THE GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE WEST WING TOPPING OFF CEREMONY



OUR FABULOUS CHEFS AND STUDENTS ENJOYING THEIR MEALS AT THE BGSA'S ORIENTATION PICNIC



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