

COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

SOUTHWESTERN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER



THURSDAY, MAY 21

TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-SIX

SEVEN P.M.

TOM AND LULA GOOCH AUDITORIUM

DALLAS, TEXAS



THE VERNIE A. STEMBRIDGE, M.D. ACADEMIC MACE

UT Southwestern's Vernie A. Stembridge, M.D., Academic Mace is carried in processions and displayed on ceremonial occasions. This symbol of the authority of the faculty to grant degrees, like much of our current academic pageantry, dates from the Middle Ages. The Stembridge Mace was designed by a UT Southwestern alumnus in memory of Vernie A. Stembridge, M.D., a much admired and respected member of UT Southwestern's faculty from 1959 to 2000. The execution of the design was by the Wm. B. Schieffer Studio; the work was completed in 2003.

At the top of the Stembridge Mace sits a Grecian amethyst. The amethyst is traditionally associated with healing of mind, body, and spirit, and service and humility. Some of this amethyst's crystalline facets remain rough and natural while others are smooth and polished to suggest the effect of education upon human attributes.

The Stembridge Mace exhibits a head with seven *bas-relief* cameos: the Aesculapian staff represents the healing arts; the interwoven star indicates the close relationship of the health care professions, the health care team, and the Lone Star State; the dawn offers the promise of a new beginning, or "commencement;" the pyramid symbolizes the creative intellect; the silhouette of Texas (with Dallas indicated) stands for our State and city commitment to education, and the concurrent responsibility of students and faculty to serve our city and State; the double helix (DNA molecule) exemplifies modern biomedical discovery; and the scroll symbolizes the passing of knowledge from teacher to student over the generations.

The overall configuration of the Stembridge Mace suggests the torch of learning. The wooden shaft is made of American Black Walnut, turned and shaped to a classical fluted columnar form.

MACE BEARER

The Mace is carried by Jane E. Johnson, Ph.D., Professor of Neuroscience and Pharmacology. Dr. Johnson holds the Shirley and William S. McIntyre Distinguished Chair in Neuroscience. She has been active in graduate student education and training since she arrived at UT Southwestern as Assistant Professor in late 1992. She has served on over 120 student dissertation committees, and 17 students obtained their Ph.D. performing research under her mentorship studying transcriptional control mechanisms in nervous system development and neuroendocrine cancers. Dr. Johnson directed the Neuroscience Graduate Program from 2001 to 2008 and received the Excellence in Postdoctoral Mentoring Award in 2011. She has served on the committee that reviews and approves Graduate School faculty appointments since 2014.

ORDER OF EXERCISES

Presiding Andrew R. Zinn, M.D., Ph.D.
Dean
The University of Texas Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

ACADEMIC PROCESSION

Deans and Marshals

Leah Banks, Ph.D.
Deirdre L. Brekken, Ph.D.
Arnaldo Díaz Vázquez, Ph.D.
Lisa P. Gardner, Ph.D.
Prapti Mody, Ph.D.
Stuart E. Ravnik, Ph.D.
Joyce J. Repa, Ph.D.

Mace Bearer

Jane E. Johnson, Ph.D.

The audience is requested to stand as the procession enters and remain standing for the National Anthem.

Introduction of Speaker Andrew R. Zinn, M.D., Ph.D.

Commencement Address..... Eric N. Olson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair of Molecular Biology
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

Conferring of Degrees Daniel K. Podolsky, M.D.
President
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center

PRESENTATION OF GRADUATES AND HOODING

The audience is requested to delay applause until all candidates have received diplomas.

Closing Remarks..... Andrew R. Zinn, M.D., Ph.D.

RECESSIONAL

The audience is requested to stand during the Recessional and to remain standing in place until the graduates have exited.

BIOLOGICAL CHEMISTRY

Program Director: Glen P. Liszczak, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Ryan Loneil Beckner

B.S., 2017, University of Chicago

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Synthetic Mutagenesis of Self-Associating Disordered Protein Domains*"

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Glen P. Liszczak, Ph.D., Mentor

Aubrie Blevins

B.S., 2018, University of Denver

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Uncovering Regulatory Mechanisms of FICD Mediated AMPylation and deAMPylation*"

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Kim Orth, Ph.D., Mentor

Daniel Aaron Caballero

B.S., 2015, Yale University

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*The Yeast Mkt1/Pbp1 Complex Promotes Adaptive Responses to Respiratory Growth*"

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Benjamin P. Tu, Ph.D., Mentor

Holly Huizi Guo

B.S., 2019, Johns Hopkins University

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Drug Discovery Through Target Identification of Anti-Cancer Small Molecules*"

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Deepak Nijhawan, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Cristina Rae Hofman

B.S., 2019, Trinity University

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Recognition and Regulation of Endogenous Targets by Nuclear Argonaute: miRNA Complexes*"

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

David R. Corey, Ph.D., Mentor

Joshua Jordan Robinson

B.S., 2020, Baylor University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Reducing Complexity in Lipid Nanoparticles: Three-Component Zwitterionic Amino Lipids for Targeted Extrahepatic mRNA Delivery”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Daniel J. Siegwart, Ph.D., Mentor

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING

Program Director: Ian R. Corbin, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Kara Poole Acevedo

B.S., 2020, Trinity University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Characterizing the Transcriptional Response of Corneal Keratocytes to Biochemical and Biophysical Stimuli”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

W. Matthew Petroll, Ph.D., Mentor

Esther Oluwadamilola Alao

B.S., 2017, Wichita State University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Preclinical Studies of EPM2A and EPM2B Gene Replacement Therapy in Lafora Disease Reveal Paradoxical Effects”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Berge A. Minassian, M.D., Mentor

Woo Yong Chang

B.S. 2019, Konkuk University

M.S., 2021, Carnegie Mellon University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Multi-Modal Data Integration in Single-Cell Analysis: From B-Cell Receptor Function to Spatial Cellular Interactions”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Tao Wang, Ph.D. and Yang Xie, Ph.D., Mentors

Yan Dai

B.S., 2020, Nanjing University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Improving Reliability of Quantitative Diffusion MRI for Biology-Informed Adaptive Radiotherapy: Reconstruction, Identifiability, and Experimental Design”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Jie Deng, Ph.D., Mentor

Lixiang Guo

B.ENG., 2017, Lanzhou University

M.E., 2020, Tsinghua University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Mechanistic Modeling of FLASH Radiotherapy and Development of Ultra-High Dose Rate Dosimetry”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Kang-Hsin K. Wang, Ph.D., Mentor

Yunxiang Li

B.ENG., 2022, Hangzhou Dianzi University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Bridging Different Medical Imaging Modalities for Radiation Therapy”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

You Zhang, Ph.D., Mentor

Austen Matthew Maniscalco

B.S., 2017, State University of New York - Stonybrook

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Autonomous Radiotherapy Planning Via Agentic Orchestration Using a Multimodal TPS-Integrated Compound AI Platform”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Dan Nguyen, Ph.D., Mentor

Austin Thomas Marckx

B.A., 2018, Baylor University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Beyond Idealized Assumptions: Robust Casual Discovery and Hierarchical Mixed-Effects Deep Learning for Complex, Confounded Data”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Albert A. Montillo, Ph.D., Mentor

Roshan Ravishankar

B.A., 2018, University of Pennsylvania

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Delineation of Signaling Microdomains from Live Cell Movies”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Gaudenz Danuser, Ph.D., Mentor

Yehui Sun

B.S., 2018, Northeastern University

M.S., 2019, Northeastern University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Engineering Lipid Nanoparticles for Durable In Vivo Gene Editing in Extrahepatic Tissues”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Daniel J. Siegwart, Ph.D., Mentor

Amogh Atul Vaidya

M.S., 2019, Northeastern University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Development of Organ-Specific Lipid Nanoparticles for Delivery of Nucleic Acid Therapeutics”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Daniel J. Siegwart, Ph.D., Mentor

Hui-Ju Wang

B.A.S., 2021, Texas Tech University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Evolution of Deep Learning in Radiotherapy Dose Prediction: Transitioning from Site-Specific Models”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Dan Nguyen, Ph.D., Mentor

Maggie Wang

B.S., 2018, Western Washington University

M.S., 2020, Western Washington University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“STING as a Developmental and Therapeutic Switch for Conventional Dendritic Cells”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Jinming Gao, Ph.D., Mentor

Hengrui Zhao

B.ENG., 2018, University of Science and Technology of China

M.E., 2021, University of Science and Technology of China

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Improving the Accuracy of Intelligent Segmentation of Target Volumes for Radiation Therapy”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Steve B. Jiang, Ph.D., Mentor

Banghao Zhou

B.ENG., 2018, Xian Jiaotong University

M.S., 2021, Duke Kunshan University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Assessment of FLASH Radiotherapy to Spare Late-Responding Tissue Toxicity: A Critical Step Toward Clinical Translation”*

Date Awarded: May 8, 2026

Kang-Hsin K. Wang, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE**Junru Jin**

B.ENG., 2023, Shandong University

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Jian Zhou, Ph.D., Mentor

Shiqiu Yu

M.B.B.S, 2022, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

M.S., 2024, Carnegie Mellon University

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Gaudenz Danuser, Ph.D., Mentor

Yuchen Zhang

B.S., 2023, Peking University

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Jian Zhou, Ph.D., Mentor

CANCER BIOLOGY

Program Director: Rolf A. Brekken, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Sarah Catherine Elliott

B.S., 2019, McGill University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Modulating Pyruvate Metabolism to Overcome Radiation Induced Cardiac Dysfunction”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Prasanna G. Alluri M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Justin Engel

B.S., 2018, University of South Florida - Tampa

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Genetic Regulators of Chromothripsis from Micronuclei”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Peter Ly, Ph.D., Mentor

Julisa Gizelle Gonzalez

B.S., 2020, University of California - San Diego

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“NR2F1 Expression Increases the Metastatic Capacity of Prostate Cancer”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Ping Mu, Ph.D. and Maralice Conacci-Sorrell, Ph.D., Mentors

Meng-Hsiung Hsieh

B.S., 2014, National Tsing Hua University

M.S., 2018, The University of Texas at Dallas

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Regulation of Somatic Mutant Clone Evolution and Cancer Initiation in the Liver”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Hao Zhu, M.D., Mentor

Hai Cheng Huang

M.D., 2014, Chung Shan Medical and Dental College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Functional States and Biological Trajectories of KRAS-Driven Lung Cancer”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Esra A. Akbay, Ph.D., Mentor

Nicole Lyn McCuen

B.A., 2021, Washington University - St. Louis

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Radiation Therapy and Pharmacologic BET Inhibition as a Therapeutic In Situ Cancer Vaccine”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Prasanna G. Alluri, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Hari Shankar Sunil

M.S., 2019, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Transmembrane Serine Protease TMPRSS11B Promotes an Acidified Microenvironment and Immune Suppression in Lung Squamous Cell Carcinoma”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Kathryn O’Donnell, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Tina Andoh

B.S., 2020, University of Ghana

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Joshua J. Gruber, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

CELL AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Program Director: Angelique W. Whitehurst, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Hannes Buck

B.A.S., 2015, Amherst College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“The CCC Complex Directs Phagosomal Maturation and Bactericidal Activity in Macrophages Through PI(3)P Regulation”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Ezra Burstein, M.D., Ph.D. and Jen Liou, Ph.D., Mentors

Morgan Elaine Crewe

B.S., 2017, James Madison University

M.A., 2019, James Madison University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Investigating the Roles of DNA Repair and Chromatin Architecture for Neuronal Gene Expression”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Ram Madabhushi, Ph.D., Mentor

Priscilla Del Valle

B.S., 2018, The University of Texas at El Paso

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Investigating the Molecular Mechanisms by Which Gut Microbiota Enhance Immune Checkpoint Inhibitor Therapy”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Andrew Y. Koh, M.D., Mentor

Harshel C. Patel

B.A., 2018, Rutgers University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Analyzing the Function and Regulation of Mitochondrial Cancer-Testis Antigens in Cancer”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Angelique W. Whitehurst, Ph.D., Mentor

Sarah Amber Ware

B.S., 2019, University of Pittsburgh

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Cardiac Lymphatics in Health and Disease”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Dan Tong, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Luis Orlando Cabrera Hernandez

B.S., 2022, University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedra

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Lorena Saelices Gomez, Ph.D., Mentor

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Program Director: Richard C. Robinson, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Adriana Cabrales

B.A., 2017, University of Southern California

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Exploring the Presence of a Bilingual Advantage for Children with Spina Bifida”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Veronica Bordes Edgar, Ph.D., ABPP and Beatriz MacDonald Wer, Ph.D., Mentors

Hudaisa Fatima

B.A., 2014, Dublin Business School

M.S., 2016, University College London

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Cognitive Dispersion and Early Detection of Alzheimer’s Disease: The Role of Biomarkers and Sociocultural Factors”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

C. Munro Cullum, Ph.D., Mentor

Briana Katja Horrocks

B.S., 2017, Purdue University

M.Ed., 2019, Vanderbilt University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Trajectories of Family Support and their Impact on the Mental Health of Transgender Youth”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Laura E. Kuper, Ph.D., ABPP and Sunita Stewart, Ph.D., Mentors

Alyssa Nicole Kaser

B.A., 2020, Baylor University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“The Impact of Sociodemographic and Informant Characteristics on Everyday Functioning in a Diverse, Cognitively Impaired Community Cohort using the Clinical Dementia Rating Scale”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Laura J. Lacritz, Ph.D., Mentor

Julia Rose Livingstone

B.A., 2013, The University of Texas at Arlington

M.A., 2015, Midwestern State University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Examining Patterns of Suicide Risk and Healthcare Utilization Across Healthcare Settings”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Kimberly D. Roaten, Ph.D., Mentor

Molly Mary Michaels

B.S., 2015, Yale University

M.A., 2015, Wheaton College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Resilience Factors in Suicidal Youth Entering an Intensive Outpatient Program for Suicide Prevention”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Kristin L. Wolfe, Ph.D. and Beth Kennard, Psy.D., Mentors

Emma Darnell-Turner Reutimann

B.A., 2015, University of Connecticut

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Measuring the Prevalence of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Factors in Burn Care Clinicians”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Kimberly D. Roaten, Ph.D., Mentor

Deborah Shear

B.A., 2018, Washington University - St. Louis

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Does the Integration of Point-of-Care Psychosocial Screening Facilitate the Patient-Oncologist Therapeutic Alliance with Young Adults with Cancer? A Within-Subject Repeated Measures Design”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Brittany C. Hall, Ph.D., Laura Howe-Martin, Ph.D., and Molin Shi, Ph.D., Mentors

GENETICS, DEVELOPMENT, AND DISEASE

Program Director: Ondine B. Cleaver, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mateusz Zbigniew Durbacz

B.S., 2018, Poznan University of Life Sciences

M.S., 2020, Poznan University of Life Sciences

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Safer Delivery: Characterization of an Engineered AAV9 Capsid and Gene Correction in a Novel Humanized DMD Mouse Model”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Eric N. Olson, Ph.D., and Ning Liu, Ph.D., Mentors

Mikayla Rose Eppert

B.A., 2021, University of Iowa

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“From Cell Lineage Specification to Gene Control: How Coactivator Condensates Regulate Gene Activation”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Benjamin R. Sabari, Ph.D., Mentor

Hyung Bum Kim

B.S., 2014, Brandeis University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Mechanisms of Estrogen Dose-Dependent Action in Estrogen Receptor Positive Breast Cancer Cells”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

W. Lee Kraus, Ph.D., Mentor

Kartik Neil Kulkarni

B.S., 2019, University of Houston - University Park

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Navigating Spatial Organization of the Genome During Cardiac Pacemaker Lineage Specification”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Nikhil V. Munshi, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Collette LaVigne

B.S., 2016, Southern Methodist University

M.S., 2017, Southern Methodist University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Regulation of Mammalian Development by Target-Directed microRNA Degradation”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Joshua T. Mendell, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Peter M. Luo

B.S., 2019, Duke University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Progenitor Potential and Differentiation Dynamics of Renal Endothelial and Stromal Lineages”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Ondine B. Cleaver, Ph.D., Mentor

Gianna Maggiore

B.S., 2019, The University of Texas at Dallas

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Protective Mechanisms for Liver Disease and Carcinogenesis”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Hao Zhu, M.D., Mentor

Madison Joy Martinez

B.S., 2020, University of Arkansas - Fayetteville

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“The Complexities Underlying Transcriptional Regulation of Ascl1 During Mammalian Neural Development”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Jane E. Johnson, Ph.D., Mentor

Elizabeth Grace Maurais

B.S., 2019, University of New Hampshire - Manchester

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Intercellular Transfer of Functional Genetic Material from the Human Cytoplasm”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Peter Ly, Ph.D., Mentor

Emily Rose Nettesheim

B.S., 2017, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Through Development and into Adulthood: How PRDM13 Dysregulation Alters Retinal Cell Fate Specification and Survival”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Katherine J. Wert, Ph.D., Mentor

Chase Arthur Pagani

B.A., 2018, Colgate University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Mechanisms Underlying Fibrosis and Heterotopic Ossification in Pathologic Musculoskeletal Repair”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Benjamin Levi, Ph.D., Mentor

Menaka Sanghvi

B.S., 2017, Northeastern University

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Hippo Pathway Involvement in Human Presomitic Mesoderm Differentiation*"

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Jun Wu, Ph.D., Mentor

Jordan McCall Wall

B.S., 2020, Louisiana State University - Baton Rouge

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Post-Transcriptional Regulation upon Lipid Depletion*"

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Peter M. Douglas, Ph.D., Mentor

Jane Nesbitt Warshaw

B.S., 2020 University of Notre Dame

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Regulation of Epithelial Structure and Function in the Loop of Henle*"

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Denise Marciano, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Yihe Zhang

B.S., 2020, Cornell University

B.A.S.C., 2020, Zhejiang University

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Unraveling Novel Mechanisms Underlying Neuron-Myelinating Glia Interactions*"

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Lu O. Sun, Ph.D., Mentor

IMMUNOLOGY

Program Director: Anne B. Satterthwaite, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Mridula Annaswamy Srinivas

B.E., 2018, M. S. Ramaiah Institute of Technology

Ph.D. Dissertation: "*Role of Trim7 in Norovirus Evolution and Pathogenesis*"

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Robert C. Orchard, II, Ph.D., Mentor

Gabrielle Marie Lessen

B.S., 2018, Texas A&M University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Examining the Role of IgG N-glycosylation in Modulating Human Macrophage Mycobacterium Tuberculosis Infection*”

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Lenette L. Lu, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Joshua Roy Miles

B.S., 2015, George Fox College

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*IgG-Mediated Protection and Disease in Tuberculosis and Diabetes*”

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Lenette L. Lu, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Zhen Tang

B.S., 2019, Duke University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Non-Canonical Functions of STING in Cellular Homeostasis and Neurodegenerative Diseases*”

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Nan Yan, Ph.D., Mentor

Cong Xing

B.S., 2020, Wuhan University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Modulating the cGAS-STING Pathway in Cancer: From TREX1 Inhibition to STING Proton Channel Blockade*”

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Nan Yan, Ph.D., Mentor

Ziang Zhu

B.E., 2017, East China University of Science and Technology

M.S., 2018, Georgetown University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Transcriptional Control of CD8+ T Cell Differentiation in Cancer, Infection, and Aging*”

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Chen Yao, Ph.D. and Tuoqi Wu, Ph.D., Mentors

MOLECULAR BIOPHYSICS

Program Director: Lukasz A. Joachimiak, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Matthew Cameron Amato

B.S., 2018, New Mexico State University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Molecular Determinants of Centrosome Viscoelasticity in Mitotic Function*”

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Jeffrey B. Woodruff, Ph.D., Mentor

Lifeng Chen

B.S., 2016, Boston College

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Emergent Properties of Chromatin Condensates and the Biophysical Basis of Genome Organization*”

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Michael K. Rosen, Ph.D., Mentor

Ilona Kamila Gaszek

B.S., 2015, Medical University of Gdansk

M.S., 2018, Medical University of Gdansk

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Evolution of TEM-1 into an Extended Spectrum β -lactamase*”

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Erdal Toprak, Ph.D. and Milo M. Lin, Ph.D., Mentors

Jaime Eduardo Guerrero

B.S., 2018, University of California - San Diego

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Quantitative Characterization of VEGFR2 Dimerization in Live Cells Through the Integration of Single-Molecule Imaging and Mathematical Modeling*”

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Khuloud Jaqaman, Ph.D., Mentor

Elisia Ariana Paiz

B.S.A., 2017, The University of Texas at Austin

M.S., 2019, Texas State University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Regulation of Secreted Effector Trafficking in *Toxoplasma gondii**”

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Michael L. Reese, Ph.D., Mentor

William Michael Trenfield

B.S., 2014, University of North Texas

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Predictive Models of Protein Conformational Entropy*”

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Milo M. Lin, Ph.D., Mentor

Pawel Mariusz Wydorski

M.S., 2019, Jagiellonian University

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Molecular Interactions in Different Contexts of Protein Homeostasis: From Viral Effectors to Chaperones*”

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Lukasz Joachimiak, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Jerry Cooper Dinan

B.S., 2019, University of Connecticut

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Kimberly A. Reynolds, Ph.D., Mentor

Ashley Vu

B.S., 2017, The University of Texas at Austin

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Kenneth Westover, M.D., Ph.D. and Ralf Kittler, Ph.D., Mentors

MOLECULAR MICROBIOLOGY

Program Director: Don B. Gammon, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Stacey L. Crockett

B.S., 2017, Belmont College

Ph.D. Dissertation: “*Trim47 Inhibits Murine Norovirus Replication in a Strain-Dependent Manner*”

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Robert C. Orchard, II, Ph.D., Mentor

Aaron Jason Embry

B.A.S.C., 2017, Millersville University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Exploiting Bacterial Effector Proteins to Uncover Evolutionarily Conserved Antiviral Host Machinery”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Don B. Gammon, Ph.D. and Neal M. Alto, Ph.D., Mentors

Mehmet Ali Hoşkan

B.S., 2020, Bilkent University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Virulence Regulation in Enteric Pathogens by Combinatorial Sensing of Tryptophan Derivatives Serotonin and Indole”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Vanessa Sperandio, Ph.D., Mentor

Valerie Joan Rodriguez Irizarry

B.S., 2019, University of Puerto Rico - Ponce

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Egress-Enhancing Mutation Reveals Inefficiency of Non-Enveloped Virus Cell Exit”*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Julie K. Pfeiffer, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Elizabeth Murguia

B.S., 2023, California State University

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Tamia Harris-Tryon, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

NEUROSCIENCE

Program Director: Maria H. Chahrour, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Daniela Barbosa

B.S., 2018, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“The Cellular and Molecular Mechanisms Underlying the Establishment of Myelination”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Lu O. Sun, Ph.D., Mentor

Srijani Biswas

B.E., 2018, Birla Institute of Technology

M.S., 2018, Birla Institute of Technology

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Pessimism Modifies Mesolimbic Dopaminergic Activity”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Steven J. Shabel, Ph.D., Mentor

Andrea Rose Boitnott

B.S., 2018, Bates College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Adeno-Associated Virus Mediated Gene Supplementation for the Treatment of the Neurodevelopmental Disorder, DDX3X Syndrome”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Steven J. Gray, Ph.D., Mentor

Meghan Marie Eller

B.S., 2020, Wilkes College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Pathophysiology and Therapeutic Development for ECHS1 Deficiency”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Rachel M. Bailey, Ph.D., Mentor

Gulhumay Gardashova

B.S., 2017, University of Kansas

Ph. Dissertation: *“Dissecting Social Homeostasis Circuits in Drosophila”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Daisuke Hattori, Ph.D., Mentor

Caitlin Elizabeth Leedy

B.S., 2016, Northeastern University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"The Role of Striatal Cholinergic Interneurons in the Pathophysiology of Dystonia"*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

William T. Dauer, M.D., Mentor

Haley DeAnne Moore

B.S., 2018, Texas Christian University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"Cell Type-Specific Mechanisms of Neuromodulation in the Human Temporal Cortex Ex Vivo"*

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Genevieve Konopka, Ph.D. and Bradley C. Lega, M.D., Mentors

Carlos Giovanni Orozco

B.A.S., 2018, The University of Texas at Austin

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"Evolution of Songbird Vocal Imitation Involved Multiple Cellular Innovations"*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Todd F. Roberts, Ph.D., Mentor

Harshida Pancholi

B.S., 2015, Denison University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"Testing the Functional Encoding of Zebra Finch Song Production in Heterogenous Motor Circuits"*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Todd F. Roberts, Ph.D., Mentor

Lupita Jassmin Rios

B.S., 2017, Brown University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"GPR151 as a Mediator of Inflammation-Induced Depression"*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Steven J. Shabel, Ph.D., Mentor

Shayal Sunita Vashisth

B.S., 2019, Duke University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *"Mechanisms and Mitigation: The Role of the E3 Ubiquitin Ligase UBE3B in Autism Spectrum Disorder"*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Maria H. Chahrour, Ph.D., Mentor

Yoheilly E. Velázquez Gonzalez

B.S., 2018, University of Puerto Rico - Ponce

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“The Cerebellum’s Emerging Role in Cognitive Behaviors and Alzheimer’s Disease”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Peter T. Tsai, M.D., Ph.D., Mentor

Mahak Virley

B.S., 2019, Mount Saint Mary’s College

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Somatosensory Gating Across Cognitive and Pathological Aging: A Multimodal MEG–MRI Study”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Amy L. Proskovec, Ph.D. and Joseph A. Maldjian, M.D., Mentors

Rachael Marie Vollmer

B.S., 2017, Samford University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Foxp1 as a Regional and Subtype-Specific Regulator of Postnatal Forebrain Development”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Genevieve Konopka, Ph.D., Mentor

Xinke Wen

B.S., 2019, Wuhan University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Locomotor Regulation in Drosophila”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Daisuke Hattori, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Alyssa Megan Garner Ross

B.S., 2011, Texas A&M University

Master’s Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Jane Foster, Ph.D., Mentor

ORGANIC CHEMISTRY

Program Director: Uttam K. Tambar, Ph.D.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Tiffany Ann Brisco

B.S., 2021, University of Central Arkansas

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Photocatalytic Synthesis of Substituted 2-Aryl Morpholines via Diastereoselective Annulation”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Uttam K. Tambar, Ph.D., Mentor

Cecilia Catherine Morgenstern

B.S., 2020, Michigan State University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Optimization of Phenyl Pyrazoles that Bind RPS23 and Activate the Integrated Stress Response for the Treatment of Cancer”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Joseph M. Ready, Ph.D., Mentor

Andrew Patrick Morrow

B.S., 2021, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Synthetic Investigations Towards Structurally Intriguing Natural Products”*

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Myles W. Smith, Ph.D., Mentor

Nathan Schmitt

B.S., 2020, Texas Christian University

Ph.D. Dissertation: *“Natural Product-Inspired Chemistry: From De Novo Synthesis and Enantioselective Catalysis to Isolation and Mechanism of Action Investigation”*

Degree Awarded: December 12, 2025

Uttam K. Tambar, Ph.D., Mentor

MASTER OF SCIENCE

John Parker Frank

B.A., 2014, Hamilton College

Master's Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Joseph M. Ready, Ph.D., Mentor

Kristiana Kasper

B.S., 2024, Baylor University

Master's Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: May 8, 2026

Myles W. Smith, Ph.D., Mentor

Vaidehi Deepakkumar Patel

B.P., 2018, Saraswathi Vidya Bhavan's College of Pharmacy

Master's Degree Awarded by Examination

Degree Awarded: August 8, 2025

Daniel J. Siegwart, Ph.D., Mentor

**HONORS AND AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH
AND SERVICE RECEIVED BY 2025-2026 GRADUATES
SOUTHWESTERN GRADUATE SCHOOL**

American Heart Association Predoctoral Fellowship

Sarah Amber Ware (2023)

Carmen Miller Michael Award for Scholarship and Service

Emma Darnell-Turner Reutimann (2025)

Carol & Robert Eberhart Endowed Scholarship

Yehui Sun (2024)

Maggie Wang (2024)

Esther Oluwadamilola Alao (2025)

Eliot Goldings Award in Immunology

Ziang Zhu (2025)

Cong Xing (2026)

Ida M. Green Award

Maggie Wang (2024)

Yehui Sun (2025)

Jess Hay Chancellor's Fellowship (UT System)

Alyssa Nicole Kaser (2024)

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship

Joshua Jordan Robinson (2022)

NIH Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award

Shayal Sunita Vashisth (2022)

Elizabeth Grace Maurais (2023)

Carlos Giovanni Orozco (2023)

Justin Engel (2024)

Haley DeAnne Moore (2024)

Rachael Marie Vollmer (2024)

Mikayla Rose Eppert (2025)

Peter M. Luo (2025)

Nominata Award

Justin Engel (2025)

Philanthropic and Educational Organization Scholar Award

Gabrielle Marie Lessen (2024)

Rush C. Williams Award for Scholarship and Service

Briana Katja Horrocks (2024)

Sandra L. Warshak Outstanding Dissertation Award

Emma Darnell-Turner Reutimann (2025)

William F. and Grace Kirkpatrick Award

Justin Engel (2025)

**PEROT FAMILY SCHOLARS
MEDICAL SCIENTIST TRAINING PROGRAM**

The Perot Family Scholars Medical Scientist Training Program is a program leading to both the Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. The University is pleased to note this significant achievement.

August 8, 2025

Daniel Aaron Caballero

Lifeng Chen

Holly Huizi Guo

Kartik Neil Kulkarni

Caitlin Elizabeth Leedy

Gabrielle Marie Lessen

Peter M. Luo

Gianna Maggiore

Haley DeAnne Moore

Roshan Ravishankar

December 12, 2025

Ryan Loneil Beckner

May 8, 2026

Chase Arthur Pagani

ACADEMIC HERALDRY AND REGALIA

Although the people, the places and the styles have changed, you are about to participate in a reenactment of a ceremony, which has existed for nearly nine centuries: the recognition of academic achievement.

The tradition of recognizing academic accomplishment with ceremony, bright color and distinctive dress is an exercise that has existed through the ages. Although the commencement ceremony and academic costume of most colleges and universities in the United States are guided by a twentieth century standard, their roots are found in the development of the universities during the Middle Ages. The medieval universities of Western Europe, such as Paris, Bologna, Cambridge and Oxford, have provided us with an institutional format -- the university structure; a measure of progress -- degrees; and a ceremony of achievement -- commencement.

The academic hood is derived from the cloak, which in medieval times was worn over the gown. Attached to the cloak, at the back of the neck, was a cowl hood that hung down or could be pulled over the head for warmth. After time, this hood became a separate article, worn over the shoulders and hanging down the wearer's back. With the coming into fashion of caps and hats during the fifteenth century, the hoods soon became more ornamental than functional.

Whereas it is generally understood that in Europe gowns were necessary for warmth and hoods covered the academic clerics' tonsured heads, today the American tradition has evolved toward individual expression of the institution. Although the style of the hood is not unique to each institution, the combinations of colors and chevrons have been standardized in the United States for nearly 100 years. The satin colors of the hood lining represent the institution conferring the degree. The academic colors for all components of The University of Texas System are orange and white. The color of the academic hood's velvet trim is distinctive of the degree earned, as is the tassel on the cap. Historical associations of color continue to signify the various faculties and generally carry the traditions established by their early English counterparts. The green of medicinal herbs immediately identifies a medical degree. Philosophy is signified by dark blue, the traditional color of truth and wisdom. The wealth of information earned through research in science is represented by golden yellow. The arts, letters and humanity are represented by the purity of white.

Cords worn with academic regalia:

Green and gold - Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society

Red, white, and blue - US Armed Forces, Active Duty and Veterans

Solid color - Medical School Academic College

Light blue stoles - Southwestern Academy of Teachers

Medals - The University of Texas Academy of Health Science Educators and

UT System Regents' Outstanding Teacher Award

Degrees will be officially conferred to Candidates for Graduation identified in this Commencement Booklet who have met all requirements on the recommendation of the Faculty of the Graduate School for Biomedical Sciences and by virtue of the authority vested in the Faculty and Dean by the Regents of The University of Texas.

