

Nurturing Relationships:

Updates from the JHU/NIH Genetic Counseling Training Program

Newsletter

February 2020

Welcome to the Johns Hopkins University/National Institutes of Health Genetic Counseling Training Program Newsletter. This newsletter is intended for individuals affiliated with the program, including faculty, rotation supervisors, alumni, support staff, Executive Committee members and current and prospective students. We hope it will keep you up-to-date about the program.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Earlier this year, the program entered a new partnership with the National Cancer Institute (NCI). This partnership has allowed us to expand and begin accepting 6 students per year (see later in the newsletter for information about our newest cohort)! Additionally, we have changed the name of our program to the JHU/NIH GCTP to reflect the involvement beyond NHGRI. We are excited to work with our collaborators at NCI on cancer and other training initiatives!

In August, the program welcomed **Susan Truitt** as our new program coordinator at Johns Hopkins! She has already been a great help and we look forward to continuing to get to know her.

We've moved! In late December, we moved from our long-standing home in building 31 over to building 10, known to some as the clinical center. We are excited to be in a newly renovated space and also being located together with the genetics fellows and alumni **Julie Sapp** and **Katie Lewis**. If you are already on campus or ever visiting, please check in for our new address and directions for which new maze of hallways to walk through!

FACULTY NEWS

Last Spring, **Ellen MacNamara ('14)** began teaching the Facilitating Adaptation to Loss and Disability course. We are very thankful to have Ellen join the team and also grateful to **Morgan Similuk** for her previous time teaching the course!

Class of 2022



Ben Akman

Ben Akman is a native of Towson, Maryland. He graduated from University of Maryland College Park in 2017 with a B.S. in Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics. Throughout his undergrad career, Ben worked as a research assistant. First in a lab at Johns Hopkins studying the connection between epigenetics and ovarian cancer. Then in a lab at UMD studying the use of entomopathogenic fungi

as a biopesticide targeting stinkbugs. After graduation, he conducted a two-year post-baccalaureate research fellowship with Dinah Singer at the National Cancer Institute studying interactions between the transcriptional regulation protein BRD4 and the oncoprotein C-MYC. Outside of the lab, Ben was an officer for the service group Vintage Voices, which brought oldies music and good company to seniors in assisted living and nursing homes. He was also part of the Nerds in Harmony, an a cappella made up of fellows and other scientists who work at the NIH. Ben enjoys birdwatching, going on hikes, playing video games, and singing in choral groups.



JaLisa Decker

JaLisa Decker studied Biology at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina as a Hollingsworth Scholar, receiving her B.S. in 2019 with honors. As an undergraduate, JaLisa contributed to research at Furman on transcription factors in cancer cells as well as research at Samford University on vitamin transport in the human gut microbiota. She volunteered for Mental Health America's crisis and suicide

hotline for three years while also connecting others to crisis center volunteer opportunities through Furman University's Heller Service Corps. In pursuing her passion for working with children, she served as a summer counselor to help children with various medical conditions have a fun and safe experience at Camp Rise Above. JaLisa shadowed genetic counselors and geneticists for several weeks at Greenwood Genetic Center and interned for four months with genetic counselors at the Cancer Institute of Greenville Health

System. In addition to her professional pursuits, JaLisa enjoys exploring farmer's markets, planning embroidery projects, and trying out new recipes whenever she can!



Jada Pugh

Jada Pugh graduated from Auburn University in May of 2019 with a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies with emphases in Biology and Psychology. She spent her summers in basic research, as a Genetic Counseling Intern at HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, and as an NSF Bioinformatics Fellow working with Dr. Nancy Merner to engage local minority communities in Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer research in

Alabama. In addition to these immersive summers, Jada has served as a Client Advocate at Women's Hope Medical Center, shadowed genetic counselors, and attended NSGC to prepare for matriculation. In her free time, she enjoys coaching and playing volleyball, running through Patterson Park, petting dogs, and days at the beach.



Nadjalisse Reynolds-Lallement

Nadjalisse Reynolds-Lallement

received her B.S. in biochemistry and molecular biology from Oregon State University in 2018. At OSU, she completed an undergraduate thesis on age-related differences in brain activations during spatial memory formation. Outside of class, Nadjalisse was a STEM tutor for high school and undergraduate students and a student social media writer for OSU's science

department. She has also volunteered as an advocate for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. After graduating, she worked as a faculty research assistant investigating the effects of multivitamin use and military service on cognitive aging. In her free time, Nadjalisse enjoys cooking, hiking, and exploring the Baltimore-DC area.



Margaret Sidor

Margaret Sidor grew up in a small town in the Hudson Valley region of New York. She received her B.S. from the University of Rochester in 2006; she went on to earn her PhD in Genetics also from the University of Rochester in 2013. Her thesis explored novel roles for a conserved guanylate kinase in development and neuron function in the nematode *C. elegans*. After graduating, Margaret pursued her enjoyment of

teaching through working as an educator at both the Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester and the Detroit Zoo. More recently, she worked for the Northern Virginia Therapeutic Riding Program, which offers therapeutic riding instruction and hippotherapy to adults and children with disabilities. For several years, she has also volunteered as a Crisis

Counselor with Crisis Text Line. In her free time, Margaret enjoys hiking and camping with her husband in the many beautiful parks in the area.



Wes Solem

Wes Solem graduated from Western Washington University in 2019 with a B.S. in Behavioral Neuroscience and a minor in Biology. As an undergraduate at WWU, he worked as a laboratory assistant in the lab of Dr. Jeff Carroll, studying the neurobiology and behavior of mice modeling Huntington's disease. Wes was a Donald A. King Summer Research Fellow for the Huntington's Disease Society of America and

presented this research at HDSA's 34th annual convention in Boston, MA. In 2018, Wes completed an internship in neurodiagnostics at PeaceHealth Cascade Brain & Spine Center, as well as Northwestern University's summer internship in genetic counseling. He also volunteered as a one-on-one peer sexual health educator at WWU and a crisis counselor for Crisis Text Line. Wes enjoys cats, coffee, and alliteration.

Where are they now?

Class of 2019

Chenery Lowe ('19) enjoyed her time with the JHU/NHGRI so much that she decided to stay at Hopkins to pursue a PhD in social and behavioral sciences under the supervision of executive committee members Debra Roter and Sara Benjamin-Neelon. She's overjoyed to still see many students and local alumni frequently!

Katherine Anderson ('19) achieved her dream of moving somewhere warm with great food when she chose a job as an adult cardio GC at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville. She has been delighted by the people she's met and clients she's worked with, and she is excited to help grow the cardio genetic counseling team at Vandy. When the Vanderbilt Master of Genetic Counseling Program started this year, she jumped at the chance to serve as an instructor for the Medical Genetics course and has loved working with the students. She also finally gets to live with her previously long-distance fiancé and they're on the lookout for a sweet pup to adopt soon. She's excited to see folks in Nashville for NSGC next year!

Yingyue (Annie) Li ('19) transplanted to San Francisco after graduation and is working at the Sutter Health as a bilingual cancer genetic counselor. Annie enjoys working with medical colleagues with diverse training background and helping patients with cancer, some of which only speak Mandarin and appreciate the opportunity to talk about cancer genetics in their native language. When she's not working, she is enjoying outdoor activities and amazing Asian foods in the bay area with her boyfriend and local friends.

Alexa Geltzeiler ('19) reports that since May 2019, she has been living in New York and working as a pediatric GC at Columbia University Irving Medical Center, both in the clinical and research realms. Her research activities fall under Simons Searchlight, one of the largest studies of genetic causes of autism and neurodevelopmental disorders ever undertaken.

Ahna Neustadt ('19) returned to her home of southern California and began working at UCLA in the neurogenetics department. While she thoroughly enjoyed practicing in this specialty, after six months she took an exciting opportunity to transfer to the pediatrics department to practice in both the pediatric and general genetics specialties. She now enjoys working with the diverse families there, especially those that come to her autism clinic. Ahna is looking forward to the 2020 launch of the UCLA Genetic Counseling Master's program, where she will be able to work closely with trainees as a supervisor, teacher, and mentor. When Ahna is not working, she is enjoying the California sunshine and planning her wedding.

Halloween Fun

Every year for Halloween, each class year dresses up in a group costume which is kept secret to surprise everyone during seminar! This year, the first years dressed as a "Holliday junction" (genetics, but you may have to look it up), the second years (and Tyler) dressed as the Bachelor selecting from candidate gene variants, and the third years dressed as Lemony Snicket's "A series of Unfortunate Events".



2019 halloween first years



2019 halloween third years



2019 halloween second years

2019 NSGC Annual Conference

Our alumni were busy in Salt Lake City with:

- 3 pre-conference symposia
- 2 educational break-out sessions
- 11 posters
- Various SIG and committee meetings
- Jane Engelberg Memorial Fellowship (JEMF) presentation

ALUMNI NEWS

Personal

Claire Anderson is expecting a baby girl in May, just before her son Henry turns 3. They're also having a house built and are hoping to move in by March – lots of changes in 2020!



Ellie and Coco

Melanie Baxter reports that her husband, Michael, recently had his one-year anniversary at Jump Company, an advertising agency based in St. Louis, but he's able to work from their Cape Girardeau office, keeping him close to home. Also, it has been one year

since they welcomed Coco into the family, after their oldest daughter Ellie pleaded, negotiated, and wrote persuasive letters arguing for a dog for over two years. Luckily, it worked out great, and Coco has been a perfect addition to the family!

Professional

Christy Smith is the Chair of the State Meeting and Education Committee within the newly formed Maryland and DC Society of Genetic Counselors that was formulated in the Summer 2018. Our biggest accomplishment will be to be held at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore on January 31, 2020. It has been very exciting to plan the first Annual Education Conference and have almost a dozen sponsors and a diverse group of speakers (<https://www.mdcgc.org/annual-conference>). She is also helping to build the Pediatric Cancer Predisposition Program at Johns Hopkins, including both increasing referrals and involvement in two quality improvement studies – they hope to publish very soon!

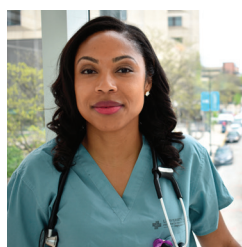
Ilana Solomon has returned to the City of Hope as Manager of the Precision Medicine Program. In this new position, she will be figuring out how to scale up delivery of paired tumor and germline genomic testing to cancer patients.

Melanie Baxter has transitioned back to a clinical position. In March 2019, she returned to the Saint Francis Cancer Institute in Cape Girardeau, MO, this time in a full-time capacity. She is excited to be providing cancer genetic counseling services in her community again.

Gillian Hooker will be stepping up in 2020 to lead the NSGC as its President. She is looking forward to being able to advocate for important advances in our field as part of this new role!

Claire Anderson just celebrated her one-year anniversary at Metis Genetics, where she's been providing telemedicine genetic counseling part-time, mostly within the prenatal/preconception and cancer settings. She really likes the flexibility and incredibly supportive team.

Julie Cohen was promoted to a faculty position as Assistant Professor in the department of Neurology at Johns Hopkins! She will continue in her clinical role specializing in neurogenetics at Kennedy Krieger Institute. Also, Julie was the recipient of the 2019 "Outstanding Supervisor Award" after being nominated by recent graduates as part of a new award through NSGC and the Association of Genetic Counseling Program Directors.

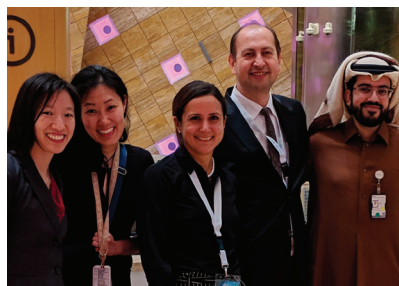


Tamandra Morgan

Tamandra Morgan graduated medical school and started her residency in OBGYN at UCSF!

Leila Jamal was appointed as an Affiliated Scholar in the NIH Clinical Center Department of Bioethics in June of 2019. She also co-authored

a position statement that came out in April 2019 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30951675>) and traveled to Doha, Qatar to speak about genetic counseling at the Sidra Medicine Institute.



Leila Jamal

SAVE THE DATE

- The National Society of Genetic Counselors' (NSGC) 39th Annual Conference will be held in Nashville, TN from November 17-22, 2020.
- The American College of Medical Genetics meeting is March 17-21, 2020, in San Antonio, TX. The American Society of Human Genetics Annual Meeting is October 27-31, 2020 in San Diego, CA

We invite you to continue sharing your personal and professional news with us so that we can update the JHU/NIH GCTP community. Megan can be reached at megan.cho@nih.gov and Lori can be reached at lori.erby@nih.gov