

2026 FALL MEETING

Microbes Make Our World

HOUSTON, TEXAS | October 15 - 17, 2026



PROGRAM

BioScience Research Collaborative | 6500 Main Street, Houston, TX

Hosted by

 **UTHealth Houston**
McGovern Medical School

Microbiology and
Molecular Genetics

CONTENTS

Click any section title or page number to jump directly to that page.

<u>Thank You to Our Sponsors</u>	2
<u>Welcome from the Hosts</u>	3
<u>Texas ASM Branch Leadership</u>	4
<u>UTHealth Houston & MMG</u>	5
<u>Microbiology & Infectious Diseases Graduate Program</u>	6
<u>MicroSURP</u>	7
<u>Venue, Parking & Walking Directions</u>	8
<u>Scientific Program</u>	9
<u>Thursday, October 15</u>	9
<u>Friday, October 16</u>	9
<u>Saturday, October 17</u>	13
<u>Speaker Profiles</u>	16
<u>Keynote Speakers</u>	16
<u>Goldschmidt Award Recipients</u>	18
<u>Featured Faculty Speakers</u>	21
<u>Celebrating 85 Years of the Texas ASM Branch</u>	27
<u>Dr. Millicent “Mimi” Goldschmidt Centennial Tribute</u>	28
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	29
<u>TMC Emerging Leaders</u>	30
<u>MID Student Advisory Committee</u>	31
<u>Sponsor Advertisements</u>	32
<u>ASM Journals</u>	36
<u>Dining, Coffee & Essentials Near the Venue</u>	37

Thank You to Our Sponsors

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the institutions and companies that helped make the 2026 Texas Branch ASM Meeting possible.

GOLD SPONSORS



RICE UNIVERSITY



SILVER SPONSORS



Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences



BRONZE SPONSORS



Welcome from the Hosts

Welcome to the 2026 Texas Branch Meeting of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM)! We are delighted to welcome you to Houston as we celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Texas ASM Branch. This year, we have approximately 270 attendees from across Texas, working in many different areas of microbial science. From fundamental discoveries to clinical and applied microbiology, our meeting showcases the diversity and strength of the Texas microbiology community. We are especially pleased to highlight the contributions of students and early-career scientists and to provide opportunities for scientific exchange, new collaborations, and professional connections. We hope you enjoy the exciting science, engaging conversations, and sense of community that make this meeting special.

Michael Lorenz, Heidi Kaplan, and Anna Konovalova

2026 Texas ASM Branch Meeting Hosts



Michael Lorenz, PhD

Professor and Chair, Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, McGovern Medical School, UTHealth Houston

Dr. Lorenz joined McGovern Medical School in 2003, rose through the academic ranks, and became Chair of the MMG Department in 2023. He previously served as the Chair of Division F at the American Society for Microbiology and President of the Medical Mycological Society of the Americas. For nearly 30 years, he has investigated the molecular mechanisms that underlie the ability of *Candida* species to persist and cause disease in humans. He has served on numerous grant review panels for the National Institutes of Health and other national and international funding bodies and as an editor for several journals. Dr. Lorenz is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.



Heidi Kaplan, PhD

Conference Co-Chair, Associate Professor, Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, McGovern Medical School, UTHealth Houston

Dr. Kaplan joined McGovern Medical School in 1991. Her research examines bacterial community behaviors and responses to environmental changes, including bacteriophage therapy for biofilm infections. Dr. Kaplan is a Director of the Microbiology Summer Undergraduate Research Program (MicroSURP). She is also an active leader in ASM and the Texas Branch, she has served as Texas Branch President and Secretary and currently represents the Branch as its councilor. She is the inaugural Vice-Chair of ASM's Branch Advisory Council and served as Chair of ASM's Council on Microbial Sciences (2024–2025). She advises the Texas Medical Center ASM Graduate Student and Postdoc Chapter and previously chaired ASM's Distinguished Lecturer Committee (2015–2021). She has also served on the Career Development Grants for Postdoctoral Women Committee and chaired several ASM conferences.



Anna Konovalova, PhD

Conference Co-Chair, Associate Professor, Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, McGovern Medical School, UTHealth Houston

Dr. Konovalova joined McGovern Medical School in 2017. Her research investigates how Gram-negative bacteria assemble and maintain their outer membranes and respond to cell-envelope stress, with implications for antimicrobial resistance and antibiotic development. She is Director of the Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Graduate Program at the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Co-Director of the MicroSURP. Dr. Konovalova is a standing member of an NIH PCMB study section, serves on the editorial board of *mBio*, and is a member of the Executive Steering Committee of the Gulf Coast Consortium for Antimicrobial Resistance.

Texas ASM Branch Leadership

CURRENT BRANCH OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Natasha Kirienko

Rice University

COUNCILOR

Heidi Kaplan

McGovern Medical School, UTHealth Houston

PRESIDENT-ELECT

James Masuoka

Midwestern State University

SECRETARY

William Cody

University of Dallas

TREASURER

Patricia Baynham

St. Edward's University

ARCHIVIST

Dustin Edwards

Tarleton State University

ADVISORY BOARD

Gregory Frederick

American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine

Lee Hughes

University of North Texas

Madhusudan Choudhary

Sam Houston State University

Robert McLean

Texas State University

Kelli Palmer

University of Texas at Dallas

Kendra Rumbaugh

Texas Tech University Health Science Center

Ali Azghani

University of Texas at Tyler

Todd Primm

Sam Houston State University



Located in the heart of the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical center in the world, UTHealth Houston is Texas' resource for healthcare education, innovation, scientific discovery, and excellence in patient care. With more than half a century of experience, it is one of the nation's most comprehensive academic health centers. Across its statewide footprint, students, faculty, and staff are shaping a healthier future through cutting-edge clinical care, groundbreaking research, and world-class training environments.

Its mission is to educate health science professionals, discover and translate advances in the biomedical and social sciences, and model best practices in clinical care and public health to improve human health and well-being.

UTHealth Houston is recognized internationally as a leading research university, connecting research, education, patient care, and outreach to improve human health. Its research enterprise supports basic and clinical investigators through research institutes and centers, and shared core laboratories.

SEVEN SCHOOLS | ONE MISSION

- ▶ McGovern Medical School
- ▶ Cizik School of Nursing
- ▶ McWilliams School of Biomedical Informatics
- ▶ School of Public Health
- ▶ School of Dentistry
- ▶ School of Behavioral Health Sciences
- ▶ MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

UTHealth Houston at a Glance

\$430M+

Total research expenditures

\$174.7M

NIH awards

5,047

Students enrolled in 2025

7M+ sq ft

Clinical, research, training and administrative space

Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics (MMG)

Founded in 1989 by Dr. Samuel Kaplan, MMG grew into a community of microbiologists studying prokaryotic and eukaryotic model systems and pathogens, united by a goal of improving human health. Dr. Theresa Koehler, one of the department's earliest faculty, succeeded Dr. Kaplan as Chair in 2011.

Graduate education has been a core MMG mission since its inception. The department anchors the Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (MID) Graduate Program at the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, leads the Texas Medical Center-wide Molecular Basis of Infectious Disease training program, and supports the Microbiology Summer Undergraduate Research Program (MicroSURP).

Led by Dr. Michael Lorenz since 2023, MMG has 19 primary faculty pursuing research on bacterial, fungal and parasitic microbes. The following pages highlight MID and MicroSURP, two of its signature educational programs.

Learn more: [UTHealth Houston](#) | [McGovern Medical School](#) | [MMG](#)

Microbiology & Infectious Diseases Graduate Program

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) unites the strengths of two leading biomedical institutions in the Texas Medical Center to equip the researchers of tomorrow with the education and training to turn discovery into life-saving solutions.

The Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (MID) Program includes approximately 30 faculty from Microbiology and Molecular Genetics (MMG), other departments and schools across UTHealth Houston and MD Anderson Cancer Center. Students work with mentors across disciplines, connecting fundamental discoveries to questions important for human health.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to train the next generation of scientists through interdisciplinary study of microbes—including bacteria, fungi, and parasites—and their roles in biology, health, and disease. Rigorous coursework, cutting-edge research, mentorship, and professional development prepare students for independent research and diverse biomedical careers.

OUR SCIENCE

MID faculty and students' research falls into two broad areas:

Fundamental life processes: Molecular genetics and genomics; gene expression regulation; protein, DNA and RNA homeostasis; membrane biology; macromolecular structure and function; cell cycle and differentiation; developmental biology; and cell physiology.

Molecular basis of microbial pathogenesis: Virulence mechanisms; host–microbe interactions; immune responses; microbiomes; antimicrobial resistance; innovative antimicrobial strategies; infectious disease surveillance; and genomic epidemiology.

This breadth introduces students to diverse experimental systems and encourages collaboration across genetics, biochemistry, structural and computational biology, immunology, and related fields.

TRAINING AND COMMUNITY

MID students develop as scientists through rigorous coursework, journal clubs, research seminars, grant writing, and individual mentorship. They are supported by well-funded laboratories with access to state-of-the-art technologies, competitive stipends, full tuition and health insurance, graduate assistantships, and travel awards. The annual MMG/MID retreat brings students, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and an invited keynote speaker together for research presentations and informal discussion. Group dinners, Halloween lab costume contests, and pumpkin and rock painting build community beyond the lab.

STUDENT SUCCESS & ALUMNI CAREERS

In the past five years, 21 MID students graduated, collectively contributing to 87 publications, including 42 first-author papers. Students have earned competitive NIH F31 NRSA and NIH T32 fellowships, American Heart Association fellowships, and UT System research awards. Alumni pursue careers in academic research, biotechnology and pharmaceutical R&D, education, medical writing, regulatory affairs, and other scientific fields.



MID/MMG annual research retreat

gsbs.uth.edu/microbiology-and-infectious-diseases

MicroSURP

UTHealth Houston Microbiology Summer Undergraduate Research Program

Undergraduate students with a strong interest in pursuing a PhD degree in microbiology and related biomedical sciences are invited to participate in this intensive **10-week summer research experience** at the UTHealth Science Center in Houston, Texas. Each student will have their own research project and work 'at the bench' alongside graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research staff, and faculty. Students receive a \$7,200 stipend to help defray costs. Nearby housing is available.



MicroSURP Trainees

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must be United States citizens or permanent residents. **College sophomores, juniors, and non-graduating seniors** with GPAs of 3.3 and above will be given highest consideration. Students from groups historically underserved in science are encouraged to apply.

ACTIVITIES

40 hours per week of **intensive, 'hands-on' research** experience guided by a faculty member, graduate student or postdoctoral fellow. The opportunity to **develop your own research project** in microbiology/infectious diseases.

Participation in **weekly MicroSURP meetings**, which include tours of the Center for Metagenomics and Microbiome Research and the Memorial- Hermann Hospital Clinical Microbiology Laboratory, discussions of the graduate school application process, graduate student presentations, and discussions with microbiology faculty and infectious disease physicians. It also includes weekly seminars with the **Microbiology & Infectious Diseases Graduate Program**.

Presentation of your results at the end of the program and the opportunity to include your work in publications and presentations at local and national meetings.

Located in the **Texas Medical Center** (the world's largest medical complex) and the vibrant city of **Houston** with a plethora of entertainment, museums, sports, and outdoor activities. This Program was initiated in 2006 and has trained over 165 undergraduate students. The vast majority of MicroSURP trainees go on to pursue careers in microbiology and related biomedical sciences.

Application

Complete the application form on The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences Summer Research Program Website:

<https://go.uth.edu/SURPapply>

Application open: **December 1, 2026**

All materials due: February 1, 2027

Questions regarding MicroSURP can be directed to: **Dr. Heidi Kaplan**,
Heidi.B.Kaplan@uth.tmc.edu (MicroSURP Director)



Scan for more info!



VENUES, PARKING & WALKING DIRECTIONS

MAIN CONFERENCE VENUE | BIOSCIENCE RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE (BRC)

6500 Main St., Houston, TX 77030 [BRC venue information](#)

Meeting spaces: Auditorium, pre-function area, Event/Exhibition Hall, and 10th-floor conference room. Breakout Room 106 will be used for Saturday programming. Additional lunch seating is available on the second-floor and outdoor patio.

Staying at the Marriott Medical Center? You can park at the hotel and walk around the corner (0.2 miles) to the BRC (hotel parking rates apply). [Walking directions to BRC](#)

PARKING | TRAVIS LOT | 1903 University Blvd



Travis Lot highlighted in blue; outline approximate.

Across the street from the BRC

\$11 per day (compared with \$13 for the BRC garage).

Friday, October 16: a parking attendant will be at the gate from 7:30–8:30 a.m.

No parking validation is provided to regular attendees.

This new lot may not yet appear on Google Maps or the Rice campus map.

FRIDAY AWARDS DINNER | ANDERSON-CLARKE CENTER

Event Commons, Rice University, [Venue details](#)

Walking from BRC: 0.5 miles Follow University Blvd. toward Entrance 8; the center is on the left after entering campus. [Google Maps walking route](#)

Nearby paid parking is limited. Maps: [West Lot 5](#) | [Moody Lot](#)

FRIDAY NIGHT SOCIAL | VALHALLA

Rice's graduate student pub is located beneath Keck Hall and staffed by graduate students and alumni volunteers. Seating is primarily outdoors. [Valhalla website](#)

Walking: 0.6 miles [Walking directions from Anderson–Clarke Center.](#)

Shuttle option: Rice Inner Loop Shuttle toward Valhalla runs every 8–10 minutes on Friday (6:00 a.m.–10:45 p.m.). [Shuttle schedule and route](#)

MMG-sponsored tab: tell staff “**Branch meeting**” when ordering. **Please wear your conference name tag and bring a photo ID for age verification.**

Additional drinks and limited food are available for purchase (**cash only**).

CONFERENCE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE:

[Open Google Maps — BRC, Marriott, dinner, parking & Valhalla](#)

Looking for food, coffee or nearby essentials? See Dining & Essentials, page 36.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

Thursday

3:00 – 5:00 pm Registration and welcome reception. Light refreshments and snacks provided.

Location: BRC Pre-Function Space (lobby)

5:00 – 5:15 pm **Welcome and opening remarks**

5:15 – 6:15 pm **Opening Keynote**

Jeffrey J. Tabor, Professor, Rice University.

"Engineering bacterial sense-respond systems for synthetic biology applications"

Concurrent sessions:

6:30 – 8:00 pm **Trainee mixer. Pizza provided.**

Location: BRC Pre-Function Space (lobby)

Sponsored by the Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Graduate Program (MID), The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

Hosts: Kim Garcia, Teresa Sullivan, Laurel Boatright, MID Social Committee

6:30 – 7:30 pm **TX ASM Branch Business Meeting (Hybrid)**

Location: Auditorium and online. Zoom Link:

[https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/97870473499?](https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/97870473499?pwd=sNG14idza6QDIU3kjdolSQYesnhBiW.1)

[pwd=sNG14idza6QDIU3kjdolSQYesnhBiW.1](https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/97870473499?pwd=sNG14idza6QDIU3kjdolSQYesnhBiW.1)

Chair: Natasha Kirienko, PhD, President, Texas Branch ASM

Friday

7:30 am **Registration opens. Light Breakfast.**

Location: BRC Pre-Function Space (lobby)

8:30 – 10:00 am **Concurrent scientific sessions:**

General Microbiology Session 1: "Microbial Survival Strategies"

Location: 10th Floor Conference Room

Session chair: Wu, Chenggang, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston

8:30 – 8:45 **Wei Zhao**, Graduate Student, Texas A&M Institute of Biosciences and Technology

"Development of a Fluorescent Based Transcriptional Assay for Analyzing the Effects of Fidaxomicin Resistance Mutations in Clostridioides difficile RNA Polymerase"

- 8:45 – 9:00** **Ella Stanley**, Undergraduate Student, Louisiana State University, UTHealth Houston
"Lipopolysaccharide remodeling as a resistance mechanism to cell envelope targeting antibiotics"
- 9:00 – 9:15** **Guadalupe Calderon**, Graduate Student, Texas A&M Institute of Biosciences and Technology
"Genomic diversity of Streptococcus gallolyticus subsp. gallolyticus, its type VII secretion system, and an expanded LXG toxin landscape is revealed via comparative genomic analysis"
- 9:15 – 9:30** **Stephnie Nwaiwu**, Graduate Student, Baylor University
"Investigating the Role of the Nonsense Mediated mRNA Decay Pathway (NMD) in Regulating the Cellular Response to Arsenic Stress in Saccharomyces cerevisiae"
- 9:30 – 10:00** **Brent W. Simpson**, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University
"Exploring the cell wall with LPS-free Acinetobacter"

Medical Microbiology Session 1: "Microbial adaptation to host environment"

Location: Auditorium

Session chair: Jennifer Walker, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston

- 8:30 – 8:45** **Salma Waheed Sheikh**, Graduate Student, Texas Tech University.
"Deciphering the Role of Phospholipases in Lipid Remodeling and Virulence in Leishmania"
- 8:45 – 9:00** **Dakota Archambault**, Graduate Student, UTHealth Houston
"Identification and characterization of a novel Candida albicans hyphal regulator, ROH1"
- 9:00 – 9:15** **Vaca Fernanda**, Graduate Student, Rice University
"Pathogen-Induced Metabolic Rewiring Promotes Host Defense During Liquid-Based Bacterial Infection in Caenorhabditis elegans"
- 9:15 – 9:30** **Holly Branthoover**, Graduate Student, Baylor College of Medicine
"Evaluating the impact of human milk oligosaccharides on the vaginal microenvironment"
- 9:30 – 10:00** **Anne-Marie Krachler**, PhD, Associate Professor, UTHealth Houston
"May the force be with you: How EHEC exploits gut mechanics to colonize the GI tract"
- 10:00 – 10:15** **Break**

10:15 – 11:45 am **Concurrent scientific sessions:**

General Microbiology Session 2: “Microbial Ecology, Microbiomes, and Evolution (MEME)”

Location: 10th Floor Conference Room

Session chair: Souvik Bhattacharyya, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston

- 10:15 – 10:30** **Christian Guerrero**, Graduate Student, Texas Tech University
*“Adult gut microbiome perturbation and aggressive escalation in *Grylodes sigillatus*”*
- 10:30 – 10:45** **Oliver Bocanegra**, Graduate Student, University of Texas Medical Branch
“Ticks and Their Associated Pathogens in Domestic Dogs from Ecotones of the Peruvian Amazon Basin”
- 10:45 – 11:00** **Samuel Osei**, Graduate Student, University of Texas at Arlington
“Tillage Practices Restructure Bacterial Communities in Soybean Rhizospheres Across Arkansas and Texas”
- 11:00 – 11:15** **Namrata Bonde**, Graduate Student, The University of Texas at Dallas
“Growth constraints dictate evolution of nafcillin resistance in MRSA”
- 11:15 – 11:45** **Lauren Fuess**, Associate Professor, Texas State University
“Microbial symbionts drive coral immunity across species”

Medical Microbiology Session 2: “Pathogenesis and Host Defense”

Location: Auditorium

Session chair: Diana Proctor, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston

- 10:15 – 10:30** **Damilola Oyeboode**, Graduate Student, University of Texas at Arlington
*“Csnuc promotes antifolate resistance by facilitating extracellular nucleotide acquisition in *Listeria monocytogenes*”*
- 10:30 – 10:45** **Bryan Estrada**, Graduate Student, University of Texas at Dallas
*“Determining the Contribution of a Potential *Streptococcus agalactiae* Virulence Factor During Interaction with Brain Endothelial Cells”*
- 10:45 – 11:00** **Sabona Simbassa**, Graduate Student, UTHealth Houston
“A Neuropeptide F and FoxA axis regulates stem cell mediated parasite development”
- 11:00 – 11:15** **Jacob Williams**, Undergraduate Student, Rice University
“Identification of Immunogenic Peptide Targets for Improved Toxocariasis Diagnosis”
- 11:15 – 11:45** **Navonil Banerjee**, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston
“The chemical basis of host-helminth interactions”

11:45 – 12:45 pm Lunch. Trainees are invited to join one of six mentoring tables.

Location: Event Hall, additional seating available on the outside patio and the 2nd Floor of the BRC.

11:45 – 3:30 Poster sessions and Sponsor and Vendor show:

Location: Event Hall

Session chair: Pedro Miramón, PhD, Assistant Professor, Research, UTHealth Houston

12:50 – 1:35 Poster session A. Event Hall.

1:40 – 2:25 Poster session B. Event Hall.

2:30 – 3:15 Poster session C. Event Hall.

3:15 – 3:30 Break / Judges' Deliberations

3:30 – 4:45 Goldschmidt Award Presentations (Plenary)

Location: Auditorium

Chair: Natasha Kirienko, PhD, President, Texas Branch ASM

3:30 – 3:45 2026-2027 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Graduate Student Award
Gillian Brown, Graduate Student, Texas A&M University
"Live and Let Lyse: Genomic Characterization of Lysis Genes in CrAss-like Phage DAC15"

3:45 – 4:15 2025-2026 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Mentoring Faculty Award
Erica L. Sanchez, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Texas at Dallas
"Demystifying the Academic Science Career Path"

4:15 – 4:45 2025-2026 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Education Faculty Award
Gregory D. Frederick, Ph.D., Professor, American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine and LeTourneau University
"The Most Important Organism in the Laboratory - The Student"

4:45 – 5:00 Break

5:00– 6:00 ASM Distinguished Lecturer Keynote

Location: Auditorium

Sarah E.F. D’Orazio, PhD, Professor, University of Kentucky College of Medicine
"Virulence strategies of neurotropic Listeria monocytogenes strains."

6:30 – 8:00 **Dinner and Awards ceremony**
Dustin Cole Edwards, PhD, Tarleton State University
“Celebrating 85 Years: A Brief History of the Texas Branch ASM”

Heidi Kaplan, PhD, UTHealth Houston,
Tribute to Mimi Goldschmidt's 100th Birthday
Student Presentation Awards

8:00 – onward **Informal Social at Valhalla, Graduate Student Pub**
Sponsored by the Microbiology and Molecular Genetics Department, UTHealth Houston

Saturday

7:30 – 8:30 am **Light Breakfast. Registration (Saturday-only attendees)**
Location: Pre-Function Space (lobby)

8:30 – 10:15 am **Scientific Session (Plenary): “Decoding Microbiology Systems: Antibiotics, Phages and AI”**

Location: Auditorium

Session chair: J. Christian Perez, PhD, Associate Professor, UTHealth Houston

8:30 – 9:00 **Jing Zhang**, PhD, Assistant Professor, UT Southwestern Medical Center
“Decoding Bacterial Pathogenesis with Big Data and AI”

9:00 – 9:15 **Jordan Walker**, PhD, Assistant Professor, Sam Houston State University
“Metabolic Impacts of Bacteriophages on Anaerobic Phototrophic Bacteria in Early Earth Analogs”

9:15 – 9:30 **Rina Matsuda**, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Baylor College of Medicine
“Nasal Colonization by Klebsiella pneumoniae Promotes Gastrointestinal Carriage”

9:30 – 9:45 **Ran Wang**, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, UTHealth Houston
A Capsular Polysaccharide Transporter Couples Capsule Assembly with Gliding Motility.

9:45 – 10:15 **William Miller**, MD, Associate Professor, Houston Methodist Hospital.
“The Iron Age of Antibiotics”

10:15 – 10:30 **Break**

10:30 – 12:00 pm Concurrent Sessions: Trainee and Faculty Tracks

Trainee Track:

A career and professional development program designed for students and postdoctoral fellows. Trainees will learn about opportunities to build leadership and outreach experience through ASM and local microbiology communities, followed by a career panel featuring scientists who have pursued diverse career paths beyond traditional academic research.

Location: Auditorium

10:30 - 11:15 "Leadership and Outreach in Microbiology"

Session chair: Alex Kang, PhD, Houston Methodist Research Institute

Moderator: Kaitlyn Foerster, Texas Tech University Undergraduate Student Chapter ("Raiders ASM")

Zoom Link for a hybrid meeting:

<https://riceuniversity.zoom.us/j/94923710134?pwd=5m7nf6s7H3gyFcaCjaxIH98bdbbyNFR.1>

10:30 – 10:45 Alex Kang, PhD, ASM Young Ambassador to Texas

10:45 – 10:55 Chetna Dureja, PhD, Texas Medical Center Student and Postdoctoral Chapter ("ASM-TMC")

10:55 – 11:05 Salma Waheed Sheikh, Texas Tech University Graduate Student Chapter ("TechASM")

11:05 – 11:15 Shivani Bhut, Texas A&M University Student Chapter

11:15 – 12:00 "Careers in Microbiology" Panel

Session chairs: Chetna Dureja, PhD, Texas A&M IBT; Hossaena Ayele, MSc, UTHealth Houston

Laura Ortiz-Velez, PhD — Senior Manager, Medical Field Scientist Lead -US, Vedanta Biosciences

Amy Prewit, PhD — Research Coordinator, Nantz National Alzheimer Center, Houston Methodist Hospital

Shelby Simar, PhD, MPH — Instructor, CMMR Sequencing & Analytics Laboratory, Baylor College of Medicine

Aaron Regberg, PhD — Geomicrobiologist, Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science (ARES) Division, NASA

Dr. Sarah D'Orazio, PhD — Professor, University of Kentucky College of Medicine

Faculty Track: "Behind the Editor's Desk" workshop

A practical discussion designed for research-active faculty and established scientists about the realities of scientific publishing and editorial work. Journal editors and publishing professionals will discuss challenging editorial decisions, how scientists can get involved in editorial work, and how to balance editorial responsibilities with a busy research career.

Location: Breakout Room 106

Chair: Jayhun Lee, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston.

10:30 – 11:00 **Michael E. Lerman**, Senior Managing Editor, ASM Journals
 "ASM Scientific Publishing"

11:00 – 12:00 **Meet the Editor discussion panel:**

Cesar Arias, MD, MSc, PhD, Houston Methodist, Editor-in-Chief,
Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy

Danielle Garsin, PhD, UTHealth Houston, Section Editor for Microbial
Genetics – Bacteria and Archaea, PLOS Genetics

Michael Lorenz, PhD, UTHealth Houston, Section Editor for Mycology,
PLOS Pathogens

Sarah D'Orazio, PhD, University of Kentucky College of Medicine,
Founding Editor, mSphere

Opening Keynote Speaker
Jeffrey J. Tabor, PhD,
Professor, Rice University



Jeffrey J. Tabor is a Professor of Bioengineering, Biosciences, and Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering, and the Director of the Rice Synthetic Biology Institute at Rice University. He earned his B.S. in Biochemistry from the University of Texas at Austin in 2001, during which time he studied bacteriophage evolution with Professor James J. Bull. He went on to earn his Ph.D. in Molecular Biology with Professor Andrew D. Ellington at the University of Texas at Austin in 2006. As a Ph.D. student, he made contributions to the emerging field of synthetic biology, demonstrating that genetic circuits can enhance noise in gene expression by competing for ribosomes, and co-developing the first optogenetic system for bacteria. After his Ph.D. he became an NIH Kirschstein Postdoctoral Fellow with Professor Christopher A. Voigt at the University of California – San Francisco. Here, he programmed a bacterial lawn to function as a distributed computer that solves the challenging image processing problem of edge detection by connecting a bacterial light sensor to a cell-cell communication system and several synthetic genetic circuits. During this time, he also developed the first green light responsive bacterial optogenetic tool which he used to achieve independent control of two bacterial genes with two different colors of light.

Dr. Tabor's group at Rice has continued to advance optogenetics and expanded to focus on applications such as diagnostic and therapeutic bacteria. For example, they have engineered the most blue- and red-shifted optogenetic tools available for bacteria, used light to program tailor-made gene expression signals such as linear ramps and oscillations in live bacteria, used these signals to characterize genetic circuit dynamics and optimize yields from engineered metabolic pathways, and programmed the function of the gut microbiome with light. Toward bacteria that diagnose disease, he has engineered genetically-encoded sensors of biomarkers including thiosulfate, acidic pH, and L-kynurenine that are linked to inflammatory bowel disease. He has combined these sensors with fluorescent and acoustic reporter genes enabling the use of oral probiotics to detect inflammation through stool sampling and ultrasound imaging. His group has also linked such inflammation sensors to the secretion of anti-inflammatory cytokines to mitigate colon inflammation *in vivo*. Collaborating with biomaterials researchers, his group has encapsulated these engineered microbes in biomaterials to enhance their survival and function. Finally, he has recently engineered a probiotic that secretes an exercise-inducible metabolite that suppresses hunger and combats diet-induced obesity.

The impact of Dr. Tabor's work has been recognized by NSF CAREER and ONR Young Investigator awards and a DoD Vannevar Bush Faculty Fellowship. He is also a Fellow of the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering (AIMBE) and the International Academy of Medical and Biological Engineering (IAMBE).

Closing Keynote Speaker
ASM Distinguished Lecturer
Sarah D'Orazio, PhD,
Professor, University of Kentucky



Dr. D'Orazio received her Ph.D. in Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Miami School of Medicine. For her dissertation work she studied the transcriptional regulation of urease genes in *Proteus mirabilis* and uropathogenic *E. coli* under the direction of Dr. Carleen Collins. She then completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard Medical School with Dr. Michael Starnbach where she studied the role of MHC-Ib-restricted CD8+ T cells in clearance of intracellular bacterial pathogens. In 2004, she was hired as an Assistant Professor at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine where she established her research program studying host-pathogen interactions during foodborne *Listeria monocytogenes* infection. She is currently a Full Professor and Vice Chair for Education in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology and Molecular Genetics at the University of Kentucky where she serves as a Co-Director of the Transdisciplinary Training in Microbiology & Immunology T32 program. She served for 10 years as a Founding Senior Editor for the ASM journal mSphere. She also serves as a Faculty Mentor for the NIGMS-funded UK SuRE Resource Center, a unique program that supports R15/R16-eligible institutions to help their faculty prepare better grant applications and help their business offices administer grant awards more efficiently.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Dissemination of *Listeria monocytogenes* Following Foodborne Infection. The facultative intracellular bacterial pathogen *Listeria monocytogenes* faces several different bottlenecks in the gastrointestinal tract to cause life-threatening systemic infections. D'Orazio lab developed the foodborne model of murine infection to study the mechanisms used by bacteria to invade the intestinal mucosa, avoid clearance by phagocytes in the underlying lamina propria, transit to the draining lymph nodes, and then use cell-to-cell spread to exit into the bloodstream.

Axonal Migration of Neurotropic Strains of *Listeria monocytogenes*. The most common form of listeriosis in ruminants is a brainstem infection called rhombencephalitis. These infections also happen in humans and can occur in young, otherwise healthy individuals, suggesting that the pathogenesis is a function of the bacterial virulence rather than any deficiency in the immune status of the host. D'Orazio lab works to understand how certain neurotropic strains of *L. monocytogenes* have the ability to invade cranial nerves in the gut and then used actin-based motility to spread within an axon all the way to the brainstem.

***Listeria monocytogenes*: A Model Intracellular Pathogen that has Taught Us So Much About Innate and Adaptive Immunity.** Systemic listeriosis has been a favored infection model used by immunologists for decades because it induces a robust cytotoxic T cell response that results in sterilizing immunity with long-lasting protective memory. The intravenous model of infection is highly reproducible and the bacteria can be manipulated genetically making it a very useful model system. D'Orazio lab works to understand how *L. monocytogenes* has been used to better understand all facets of a protective immune response, including vaccine development.

2026-2027 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Graduate Student Awardee

**Gillian Brown, Graduate Student,
Texas A&M University**



Gillian Brown graduated from Western Kentucky University in 2022 with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Chemistry after researching in the lab of Dr. Rodney King. Her undergraduate honors thesis detailed the discovery of a microbacteriophage and its ability to infect stationary phase cells. Gillian is now a fourth-year microbiology Ph.D. candidate at Texas A&M University working in the lab of Dr. Jolene Ramsey. She currently studies how bacteriophages in the human gut lyse their hosts and affect the overall composition of the gut microbiome. Her goal as a bacteriophage researcher is to learn how to best use these versatile viruses to fight disease and promote public health.

During her undergraduate career, Gillian Brown received the Dr. Dan Skean Award for Outstanding Microbiology Student. In her time as a Ph.D. student, she has been recognized as an Honorable Mention for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program (NSF GRFP). Being granted the Goldschmidt Award allowed Gillian to present her research at the inaugural Gordon Microbiome Editing Conference in Pomona, California and learn techniques for genetic manipulation of anaerobic bacteria with Dr. Andrey Shkoporov in Cork, Ireland.

2025-2026 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Mentoring Faculty Awardee

**Erica L. Sanchez, PhD, Assistant
Professor, University of Texas at Dallas**

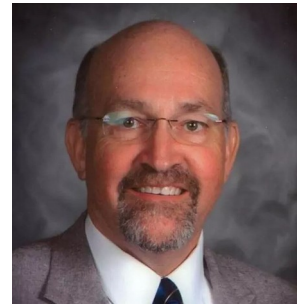


Dr. Sanchez is currently an Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD). She completed her PhD at the University of Washington and her postdoctoral training at the University of California San Francisco. Dr. Sanchez started her lab in 2020 at San Francisco State University and relocated her research program to UTD in 2023. In SF, she conducted research with primarily masters students and undergraduates and at UTD they have expanded their lab to include PhD graduate students. Her lab currently has 7 PhD students, 3 MS students, and a 3 undergraduate researchers. Mentorship is a critical component of the lab, not just PI to student, but also peer-mentoring from student leaders in the lab. These efforts help everyone grown and mature while also building a leadership portfolio as a part of their professional development.

Dr. Sanchez's lab is centered on identifying alterations in metabolism during lytic Kaposi's Sarcoma Herpesvirus (KSHV) infection. They are particularly interested in lytic replication as this active state of infection is known to seed newly infected cells in the Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) tumor and contribute to paracrine signaling among endothelial cells and other cells of the tumor. They aim to define the metabolic and lipidomic signatures of lytic infection to better understand the energy and biosynthetic intermediates required by infected cells. Other projects in the lab are exploring host-viral protein protein interactions during infection and the mechanisms by which the virus hijacks the host cell as well as mechanisms to inhibit host cell death to maximize virus production. When she's not in lab, Dr. Sanchez is spending time with her husband, a Neuroscientist professor and researcher, their one year old son, and their cat!

2025-2026 Eugene and Millicent Goldschmidt Education Faculty Award

**Gregory D. Frederick, Ph.D., Professor,
American University of the Caribbean
School of Medicine and LeTourneau
University**



Dr. Greg Frederick is a longtime educator, scientist, and academic leader with extensive experience in higher education, student mentoring, and faculty leadership. After earning a B.S. in Biology and Microbiology from the University of Kansas and a Ph.D. in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics from the University of Kansas School of Medicine, he pursued research and training appointments in both industry and academia, including positions at Novartis in Switzerland and the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, where he trained medical students, Ph.D. candidates, and pathology residents in molecular biology and diagnostic techniques. Since returning full-time to higher education in Texas in 2005, Dr. Frederick has taught and mentored students at multiple universities, earned tenure, and served in academic leadership roles, including Chair of the Department of Biology and Kinesiology at LeTourneau University. Throughout his career, he has been dedicated to student success, preparing future healthcare professionals and scientists through excellence in teaching, advising, curriculum development, and academic leadership.

Dr. Greg Frederick views it as both a privilege and a responsibility to serve as a professor in higher education, helping students develop not only scientific knowledge but also the skills and confidence needed for lifelong success. His teaching emphasizes active, evidence-based learning strategies, including flipped classrooms, collaborative learning, gamification, and authentic undergraduate research experiences that engage students in critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and scientific inquiry. By combining high expectations with strong mentorship, he seeks to create learning environments where students take ownership of their education, develop resilience and intellectual curiosity, and learn to think like scientists. Throughout his career, Dr. Frederick has measured success not simply by content mastery, but by the ability of his students to apply knowledge, pursue meaningful careers, and thrive as healthcare professionals, researchers, and lifelong learners.

Featured Faculty Speakers

Brent W. Simpson, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University



Brent Simpson trained as a bacterial geneticist at the Ohio State University in the laboratory of Natacha Ruiz. During his Ph.D., he studied how Gram-negative bacteria build the outer membrane and published 3 lead author papers on LPS transport. He also received awards for excellence in teaching and a distinguished dissertation. Brent then moved to the University of Georgia to work with Stephen Trent. He began working on why LPS is essential in most Gram-negative bacteria using a model organism that is able to survive with complete absence of LPS. He performed the transposon-sequencing comparing cells with and without LPS. This experiment revealed new details about peptidoglycan physiology in the Gram-negative pathogen *Acinetobacter baumannii* and resulted in 4 published papers in mBio, PNAS, and Journal of Bacteriology. Brent was awarded an NIH F32 Kirschstein fellowship and the UGA Postdoctoral Research Award for his research contributions. He joined the Texas A&M biology department as an Assistant Professor in August 2026. His new lab studies cell physiology of *Acinetobacter* and other Gram negatives with the hope of developing strategies to overcome multi-drug resistant infections. Brent is passionate about microbial physiology, mentoring and teaching students, and his three cats.

The Simpson lab studies Gram-negative pathogens that are difficult to treat and have a high rate of antibiotic resistance. We study how these bacteria build the cell envelope, lipid membranes and peptidoglycan, because these are essential structures that can be targeted with antimicrobial therapies. The lab's goal is to reveal new aspect about how bacteria build their cell in order to leverage this information in the development of new drugs.

Anne-Marie Krachler, PhD, Associate Professor, UTHealth Houston



Anne-Marie Krachler, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at McGovern Medical School, The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth Houston), where she has been a faculty member since 2016. She previously established her independent research program at the University of Birmingham, UK.

Dr. Krachler received an M.Eng. in Chemical Engineering from Vienna University of Technology and a Ph.D. in Biology from the University of York, where she studied bacterial cell envelope biogenesis. She completed postdoctoral training with Kim Orth at UT Southwestern Medical Center, investigating bacterial virulence mechanisms and host signaling.

Her research focuses on how enteric pathogens sense and respond to the physical, chemical, and biological environments encountered during gastrointestinal colonization. Her laboratory investigates bacterial adhesion and how physical contact with host surfaces is sensed and translated into changes in virulence. Her group has developed zebrafish models of enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* (EHEC) and adherent-invasive *E. coli* (AIEC) to define mechanisms of bacterial colonization and virulence regulation, and to investigate how bacterial toxins alter gut physiology to promote infection.

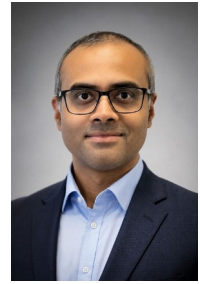
Lauren Fuess, PhD,
Associate Professor, Texas State
University



Dr. Lauren Fuess is an Associate Professor of Biology at Texas State University in San Marcos Texas. She received her bachelors degree in Marine Biology from College of Charleston in 2012 and her doctorate in Quantitative Biology from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2018. She then spent two years as a postdoctoral fellow with Dr. Daniel Bolnick at the University of Connecticut before joining the faculty at Texas State in 2020. Throughout her training Dr. Fuess has received many prestigious awards and fellowships including: an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, US Fulbright Full Grant to Jamaica, American Association of Immunologists Intersect Postdoc, Gulf Research Program Early Career Fellowship, and the SICB Lochmiller Award for Early Career Ecoimmunologists. Her work characterizing mechanisms of animal-microbe associations has been supported by over \$4 million in external funding including both an NSF CAREER award and NIH NIGMS R35 (MIRA award).

Dr. Fuess's group focuses on understanding the evolutionary ecology of host-microbe interactions, with a particular focus on how these interact are governed by and shape host immunity. Projects in her group primarily focus on cnidarian systems (corals and anemones) and seek to understand how symbiotic associations drive variation in immunity and vice versa. Furthermore, her group works to characterize the cellular mechanisms which contribute to variability in beneficial host-microbe associations, and the consequences of this variability for host immunity. To investigate these questions she and her group integrate methods across fields, including multi-dimensional 'omics data, experimental approaches, biochemical immune assays, and microscopy.

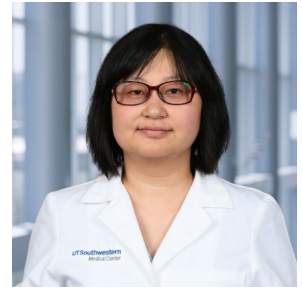
Navonil Banerjee, PhD, Assistant Professor, UTHealth Houston



Dr. Banerjee joined the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at UTHealth Houston McGovern Medical School as an Assistant Professor in September 2026. He received his Ph.D. in Neurobiology at UMass Chan Medical School where he studied neuropeptide signaling mechanisms driving behavior using the free-living nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* as a model. His postdoctoral research in Dr. Elissa Hallem's lab at UCLA focused on how chemosensation drives host-parasite interactions in helminths. Using the human-infective helminth *Strongyloides stercoralis* as a model, his work demonstrated how parasitic helminths may detect and respond to host-associated chemosensory cues at a cellular and molecular level. He also developed genetic tools including an approach to generate stable knockout lines in a human-parasitic helminth. Navonil's postdoctoral work has been funded by a T32 training grant and an F32 NRSA. Navonil is also the recipient of a New Innovator Award (DP2) from NIAID which will support future research in his lab combining knowledge of parasitology and neurobiology to understand how host-derived chemical cues drive parasitism in helminths.

Parasitic helminths infect approximately two billion people globally causing extensive morbidity. However, the mechanisms by which these parasites interact with their hosts to establish infections, remain obscure. Repeated use of a limited number of available drugs in mass drug administration programs has made drug resistance a growing concern. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop new strategies to prevent or treat infections. These parasites encounter multiple host-derived chemicals throughout their life cycle. Do interactions with host-derived chemical cues facilitate crucial steps of host-parasite interactions that ultimately lead to infections? By combining knowledge of parasitology, neurobiology and genetics, Dr. Banerjee research program broadly aims to (a) investigate how host-derived chemical cues shape the development, behavior and physiology of parasitic helminths, thereby enabling successful host infection, (b) elucidate the neural and genetic mechanisms by which these parasites detect, integrate and respond to these cues, and (c) inform the development of new anthelmintic drugs that disrupt critical interactions of helminths with host-derived chemicals. Overall, research in the Banerjee lab will address how the host chemical environment shapes helminth parasitism – a highly underexplored area in infectious disease research.

Jing Zhang, PhD, Assistant Professor, UT Southwestern Medical Center



Jing Zhang, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at UT Southwestern Medical Center, where she began her faculty appointment in September 2026. She received her Ph.D. from UT Southwestern under the mentorship of Dr. Nick V. Grishin, using comparative and population genomics to investigate butterfly evolution, speciation, and the genetic basis of phenotypic diversity. She subsequently conducted postdoctoral research with Drs. Qian Cong and Nick V. Grishin, where she expanded her work from genome evolution to protein function, structure, and molecular interactions. Her research has since integrated large-scale genomics, protein evolution, structural biology, and artificial intelligence to investigate biological mechanisms across diverse systems, with a growing focus on bacterial pathogenesis and human disease. She received an NIH K99/R00 Pathway to Independence Award and CPRIT recruitment package to support the development of her independent research program.

Dr. Zhang's research focuses on understanding the molecular mechanisms of bacterial pathogenesis and human disease and translating these insights into new therapeutic strategies. Her work leverages large-scale genomic and protein data, structural biology, and artificial intelligence to discover previously unrecognized genes, proteins, molecular interactions, and evolutionary relationships, with a particular interest in using protein structure and function to uncover new opportunities for therapeutic intervention. In the future, her laboratory aims to combine data-driven hypothesis generation with experimental validation to transform computational predictions into mechanistic biological discoveries.

William Miller, MD, Associate Professor, Houston Methodist Hospital.



Dr. William Miller is an Associate Professor of Medicine with the Division of Infectious Diseases at Houston Methodist Hospital, Houston Methodist Academic Institute, and Assistant Professor of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. He joined the division in 2021. He received his medical degree and completed his residency training in Internal Medicine/Pediatrics at The University of Texas McGovern Medical School (UTHealth) and completed a fellowship in adult Infectious Diseases at the joint UTHealth and MD Anderson Cancer Center program. He currently serves as the Associate Program Director for the Infectious Diseases Fellowship program at Houston Methodist, and is an active volunteer with the Subcommittee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing with the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI).

Dr. Miller is focused on understanding the mechanisms of antibiotic resistance (AMR) in Enterococci, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and other healthcare associated pathogens. His research seeks to understand the mechanistic basis and genomic epidemiology of resistance with the goal of applying this knowledge to improve diagnostics and therapeutic strategies at the patient bedside. Current projects include penicillin binding protein mediated β -lactam resistance in *E. faecalis*, the intersection of fitness and mechanisms of resistance to the siderophore cephalosporin cefiderocol in *P. aeruginosa*, and the clinical impact and therapeutic strategies for non-carbapenemase producing, carbapenem resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae*.

Celebrating 85 Years of the TX ASM Branch

Branch history and anniversary remarks by
Dustin Edwards, Ph.D., Tarleton State University,
TX Branch ASM Archivist



The Texas Branch of the American Society for Microbiology was founded in 1941 as one of the earlier regional branches of what was then still called the Society of American Bacteriologists. Faculty and microbiologists at the University of Texas led the effort, with I. M. Lewis of the Department of Bacteriology serving as the first president. From the start, the Branch held meetings that moved from campus to campus and city to city, combining formal presentations with informal discussions.

Within two decades, the Branch grew into one of the more active regional groups with more than 500 members. It marked its 25th anniversary in 1966 with a Golden Jubilee in San Antonio, its 50th in 1991 with a Reunion Banquet in Austin, and its 75th in 2016 with a Founders' Ceremony at the University of Texas at Dallas. Across the years, meetings have maintained a tradition of a Thursday evening seminar, research reports on Fridays, and professional sessions on Saturdays. In addition, the Branch has long encouraged student and early-career scientists, recognizing the best presentations with honors such as the O. B. Williams Award for general microbiology and the S. E. Sulkin Award for medical microbiology. Several members have also held national roles in the Society, including serving as president and serving on committees, editorial boards, and international meetings.

For 85 years, the Branch has served as a scientific forum and professional network for microbiologists across the state, supporting and sustaining successive generations of students, faculty, clinical scientists, and public-health workers.

Celebrating the 100th Birthday of Dr. Millicent “Mimi” Goldschmidt



Pioneering Microbiologist, Educator, Mentor, and Champion of Women in Science

Special tribute by Heidi Kaplan, PhD, UTHealth Houston

Dr. Millicent Edna Goldschmidt, affectionately known as Mimi, has spent a remarkable lifetime advancing science, educating generations of students, and opening doors for women in scientific research. Born on June 11, 1926, in Erie, Pennsylvania, she discovered her love of biology as a young girl and was determined to become a scientist from the age of ten. Despite the obstacles facing women pursuing scientific careers in her era, she persevered, earning her bachelor's degree from Case Western Reserve University and her master's and Ph.D. degrees in microbiology from Purdue University.

Dr. Goldschmidt's distinguished career has spanned groundbreaking research, medical science, and space exploration. During the Apollo program, she played a vital role in developing procedures for the safe handling and examination of lunar samples returned to Earth. She helped prepare astronauts to collect uncontaminated samples and contributed to efforts to assess potential biological hazards. This extraordinary work connected her expertise in microbiology with one of humanity's most historic scientific adventures.

Her subsequent research focused on developing faster, more effective methods for detecting microorganisms, with important applications in clinical diagnosis, food safety, and public health. As a professor at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, she taught medical, dental, and graduate students, sharing both her scientific knowledge and her enthusiasm for discovery.

Equally significant is Dr. Goldschmidt's enduring commitment to mentoring women and promoting equity in science. Through her professional leadership, advocacy, and support for women researchers, she has helped create opportunities for future generations. Awards bearing her and her late husband Eugene's names continue this legacy by recognizing outstanding women graduate students in microbiology.

As we celebrate Dr. Goldschmidt's 100th birthday, we honor not only her extraordinary scientific accomplishments but also her courage, curiosity, generosity, and determination. Her life reminds us that scientific discovery is enriched by perseverance, teaching, and the willingness to challenge barriers. Her legacy lives on in the knowledge she helped create, the students she inspired, and the women scientists whose paths she helped illuminate.

Watch "Women in Microbiology" interview between Hazel Barton and Millicent “Mimi” Goldschmidt, recorded at the 2016 ASM Microbe Meeting, is on the ASM YouTube Channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQq0ZkW1pR4>

Texas Medical Center: Women's History Project. Interview with Millicent Goldschmidt

<https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/tmc-whp/23/>

Acknowledgments

The 2026 Texas ASM Branch Meeting would not have been possible without the generosity, dedication, and hard work of so many colleagues, staff, and volunteers. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed their time, energy, and expertise to making this meeting a success.

Our deepest gratitude goes to Natasha Kirienko, President of the Texas ASM Branch, for securing the Rice University conference grant that provided essential venue and meeting support. Her guidance, encouragement, and support throughout every stage of planning have been invaluable.

We are especially grateful to Michael Lorenz, Chair of the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, for his generous support of the meeting, and to our faculty colleagues who stepped in to help with so many aspects of its organization. We thank Diana Proctor, Pedro Miramon Martinez, Jayhun Lee, Souvik Bhattacharyya, and Bill Margolin for their assistance with conference logistics, and Anne-Marie Krachler, Danielle Garsin, Jennifer Walker, and Souvik Bhattacharyya for their contributions to scientific programming and abstract review.

We sincerely thank Alex Kang, Chetna Dureja, Hossaena Ayele, Kimberly Garcia, Teresa E. Sullivan, and Laurel Boatright for developing and organizing the trainee-focused programming that is such an important part of our meeting.

A special thank-you goes to all our MID/MMG trainee ambassadors, who enthusiastically volunteered their time to help with meeting preparations and activities. We particularly appreciate the contributions of Katy Ayers, Raquel Luna, Marta Minarro Cano, Madhvi Bhakta, Oliyad Jeilu, Santosh Kumar, and Martynas Basevicius. Their willingness to help wherever needed made a real difference.

We also thank Alisson Silva, Dorothy Cantu, Christine Nguyen, Bonnie Martinez, and Carolyn Agurcia-Parker for their administrative support and assistance with meeting preparations.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all our speakers, session chairs, poster presenters, judges, and attendees. Your enthusiasm, scientific contributions, and engagement are what make the Texas ASM Branch Meeting such a special community event.

Anna Konovalova and Heidi Kaplan
2026 Texas ASM Branch Meeting Co-Chairs

TMC Emerging Leaders

Recognizing Contributions to Trainee Programming and Mentorship

We thank the emerging leaders who helped organize the lunch mentoring tables and Saturday's trainee programming, including sessions on leadership, outreach, and careers in microbiology. Their work helped make these opportunities an important part of this year's meeting.



D. Alex Kang, PhD

Postdoctoral Fellow, Houston Methodist Research Institute

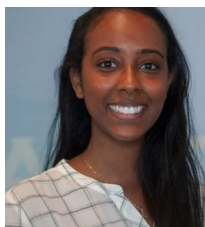
Dr. D. Alex Kang is a postdoctoral fellow at Houston Methodist Research Institute in the laboratories of Dr. Will Miller and Dr. Cesar Arias. He studies the mechanisms of cefiderocol resistance in *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, supported by postdoctoral fellowships from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and NIH (T32 Antimicrobial Resistance Training Program in the Texas Medical Center.) Dr. Kang completed his BA, MA, and PhD in Biochemistry and Cell Biology from Rice University with his thesis advisor Dr. Natasha Kirienko. He is the current ASM Young Ambassador to Texas and former president of the ASM Texas Medical Center Student and Postdoc Chapter.



Chetna Dureja, PhD

Assistant Research Scientist, Institute of Biosciences and Technology

Dr. Chetna Dureja is an Assistant Research Scientist in the Hurdle Lab at Institute of Biosciences and Technology in Houston. Her path to research was nontraditional: she earned her undergraduate and master's degrees through evening classes while working full-time as research technician. She completed her Ph.D. in Molecular Microbiology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. Her research focuses on antimicrobial resistance and microbiome-sparing drug targets for *C. difficile* infection. She received the NIH K99/R00 Pathway to Independence Award. She is the president of the ASM-TMC Student and Postdoc Chapter and postdoc chair of GCC-AMR-SC. She enjoys arts, crafts, and spending time in nature.



Hossaena Ayele

PhD Candidate, UTHealth Houston School of Public Health

Hossaena Ayele is a sixth-year PhD candidate and Graduate Research Assistant in Dr. Blake Hanson's lab at UTHealth School of Public Health, co-mentored by Dr. Cesar Arias at Houston Methodist Research Institute. She holds a BSc in Microbiology and an MSc in Medical Microbiology from the University of Manitoba. For her PhD, she received an American Heart Association predoctoral fellowship to investigate how gut-colonizing AMR pathogens associate with bloodstream infection risk. Hossaena serves as the student representative for the GCC AMR Scholars Committee and professional development coordinator for the ASM-TMC Student/Postdoc Chapter, advocating for STEM mentorship and community engagement.

MID Student Advisory Committee

Recognizing Contributions to Meeting Organization and Trainee Engagement

We thank Kimberly Garcia, Teresa E. Sullivan, and Laurel Boatright, graduate students in the Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (MID) Graduate Program at the UT MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS), for their leadership and service. As members of the MID Student Advisory Committee, they organized Thursday evening's trainee mixer and coordinated MID student ambassadors who assisted throughout the meeting. Their efforts helped welcome attendees and foster connections across the Texas microbiology community.



Kimberly Garcia

Kim is a third-year PhD candidate in Michael Lorenz's laboratory in the Department of Molecular Microbiology and Genetics at UTHealth Houston. She previously earned her bachelor's degree in Microbiology and Immunology from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her current research focuses on identifying genes involved in *Candidozyma auris* virulence using a *C. elegans* infection model. Beyond research, she serves on the Student Advisory Committee for the Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (MID) graduate program and chairs the MID Social Committee, leading initiatives that foster student engagement, scientific development, and collaboration within the graduate community.



Teresa E. Sullivan

Teresa is a PhD candidate working in Anna Konovalova Lab at the UTHealth Houston. She earned her bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University, and her current research focuses on antibiotic resistance mechanisms within the bacterial outer membrane. As a previous fellow of the GCC Molecular Basis of Infectious Diseases (MBID) T32 fellowship and a current officer for the MID Student Advisory Committee, Teresa is actively involved in her scientific community. When she's not in the lab, she can be found at home reading the latest thriller novel or playing with her two cats.



Laurel Boatright

Laurel is a fourth-year PhD student in the lab of Christopher Johnston, PhD, at UT MD Anderson Cancer Center. She earned her bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences from Texas A&M University. Her thesis research interrogates the relationship between cervicovaginal microbiota, specifically *Lactobacillus iners*, and cervical cancer. Laurel currently serves on the MID Student Advisory Council and steering committee and regularly makes it a point to engage in outreach and recruitment for the GSBS. Beyond the bench, Laurel enjoys karaoke and yoga or simply hanging out at home with her cat and lizard.

Sponsor Advertisements

CHOOSING YOUR PATH

Two paths to a Rice
graduate degree.



RICE

Research Degrees

(Ph.D., Master of Arts,
Master of Science)

- Centers on a publishable thesis — an original, significant contribution to your field
- Typically prepares you for research, academia or R&D careers
- Qualified Ph.D. students often receive a tuition waiver and stipend
- A Ph.D. normally takes four to six years; a research master's is often two years

Professional Degrees

(Non-Thesis Master's)

- Coursework-based — no thesis required
- Built to give you an edge heading straight into industry
- Often completed in three to four semesters; some available online
- Merit scholarships and assistantships vary by program
- Not sure which path fits you? Reach out to your program of interest for more information.

*Scan to explore every
program of study*



or visit graduate.rice.edu/programs-study

Questions? Contact the Office of Graduate
and Postdoctoral Studies.
gradadmissions@rice.edu

COME SEE IT FOR YOURSELF

Events and campus tours.

Campus Tours

Held on select Fridays throughout the semester, led by a graduate student ambassador — ask anything about grad life at Rice.

Coffee Chats

Informal virtual conversations with current students across departments, countries and interests.

Prospective Student Events

Meet us on the road! We'd love to meet you at a grad fair or info session in your city.

PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Eight schools. One Rice.

From engineering to music, Rice offers research and professional graduate study across eight schools — every program backed by faculty working at the front edge of their field.

90% of new graduate students receive a funding package

*Scan to see the current
calendar and register*



*or visit [gradadmissions.rice.edu/
portal/meet-rice](https://gradadmissions.rice.edu/portal/meet-rice)*

UTHealth Houston Microbiology and Molecular Genetics Department MicroSURP and MID programs

MID + MicroSURP

VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE



Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Explore graduate training in Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (MID) at GSBS and the Microbiology Summer Undergraduate Research Program (MicroSURP).

GRADUATE APPLICATION DEADLINES

PhD program:

International: November 1, 2026 (final)

Domestic: November 1, 2026 (priority) • December 1, 2026 (final)

MS program:

March 1, 2027 (priority) • April 1, 2027 (final)

[REGISTER HERE](#)



Time and meeting link: provided upon registration

MicroSURP deadline: February 1, 2027



Your Partner for Laboratory & Research Solutions

- Laboratory & microbiology supplies
- Sample storage & cryogenic solutions
- Pipetting & liquid handling
- Equipment & instrumentation
- CE and Safety
- Cost-saving alternatives & sourcing support

Need a quote or looking for a better solution?

Connect with Thomas Scientific at the 2026 Texas ASM Fall Meeting



Natalie Rodriguez

Houston Sales Associate
(346) 516-8574

Natalie.Rodriguez@ThomasSci.com



Discover Opportunities to
Learn, Connect, and Advance

Whether you're a high school student, undergraduate, graduate student, postdoctoral fellow, faculty member, research professional, or community partner, GGCTSA offers opportunities to learn, connect, and grow.

Join our mailing list to receive updates about:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ✓ Research training programs | ✓ Career and professional development resources |
| ✓ Workshops and seminars | ✓ Funding and scholarship opportunities |
| ✓ Internships and experiential learning opportunities | ✓ Conferences and presentation opportunities |
| ✓ Mentoring and networking events | ✓ Community-engaged research activities |

Sign up for the
mailing list:



In partnership with: University of Texas Medical
Branch • Houston Methodist • Texas Southern
University • University of Houston-Clear Lake

Cancer

UT MD Anderson

UTHealth

Houston

Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

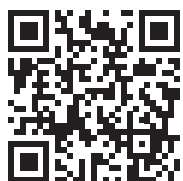
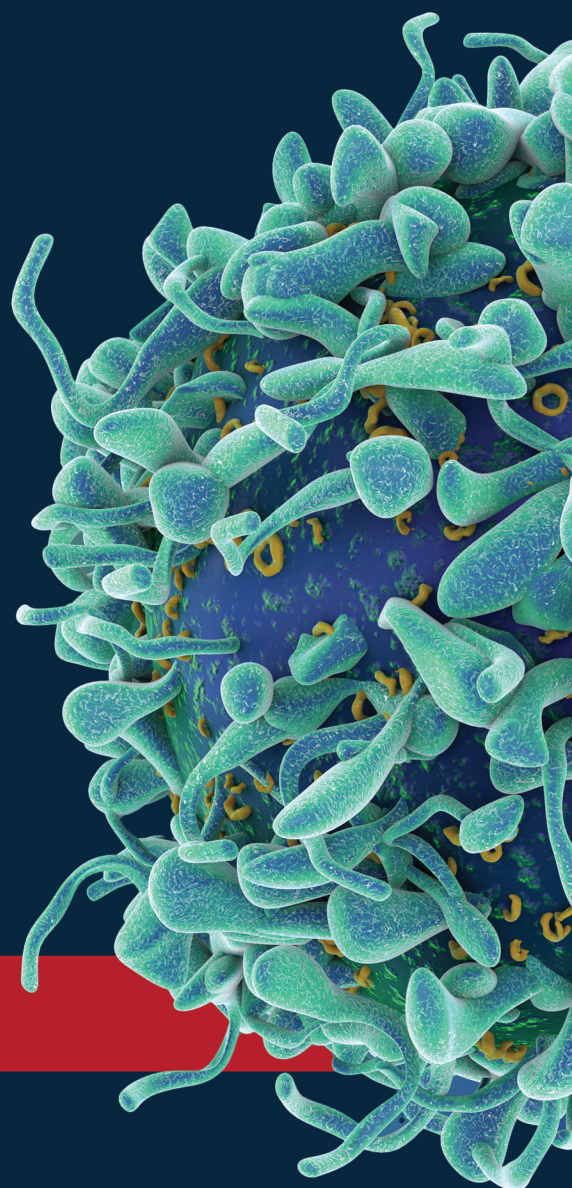
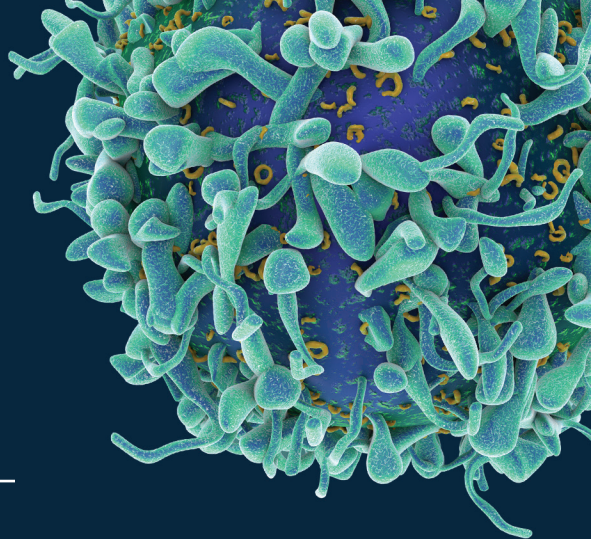
JOIN US FOR A WEEKLY VIRTUAL SERIES FOR PREPARING AND APPLYING TO
GRADUATE SCHOOL EACH FALL
DISCOVER BIOMEDICINE SERIES

Get to know

ASM Journals

ASM Journals welcomes submissions from researchers across the world at all stages of their career. Authors trust us to handle their research with fairness, integrity and focus on the best science to advance the microbial sciences.

- **86% Research Articles Cited** within 2 Years of Publication
- ASM Articles **Account for 16% of All Articles in the Microbiology Category***
- Just Over a Month to First Peer Review Decision
- **69 Million** Total Annual Full-Text Views/Downloads
- ASM Journals Represent 20% of All Microbiology Citations.



Explore and Read More
From our Family of Journals

 ASM Journals

*Based on Journal Citation Reports Year 2024 released by Clarivate in 2025.



Publish with
ASM Journals

DINING, COFFEE & ESSENTIALS

NEAR THE CONFERENCE VENUE

A quick neighborhood guide for attendees at Rice University's BioScience Research Collaborative (BRC) and the Houston Marriott Medical Center/Museum District. Most dining and coffee options below are concentrated around Main Street, Fannin Street, and Dryden Road. Click any business name to open its location in Google Maps.

RESTAURANTS & QUICK BITES

Main & Green	6580 Fannin St. · 713-770-8070
Hollywood Café (second floor, BRC)	6100 Main St. · 713-348-8008
Brown Bag Deli	1709 Dryden Rd., Suite 2 · 281-906-4524
Gyro Hut	6609 Main St. · 713-393-7845
Poke in the Bowl	6611 Main St. · 832-767-3592
CAVA	6618 Fannin St. · 346-509-5234
MOD Pizza	6622 Fannin St. · 832-919-8863
Chipotle	6600 Fannin St. · 713-792-9390
Piada	6602 Fannin St. · 281-459-0998
Salata	6620 Fannin St. · 832-426-4079
Miller's Café	6560 Fannin St., #110 · 713-791-1717
Poblano's	6560 Fannin St., #120 (Scurlock Tower) · 713-799-8512
Alonti Café & Catering	6550 Fannin St. · 713-796-0122
Einstein Bros. Bagels	6565 Fannin St. · 346-238-7114
Subway	6621 Fannin St. · 832-822-0305

COFFEE & TEA

Starbucks	6600 Fannin St. (Medical Tower) · 713-383-8215
Moge Tee	1709 Dryden Rd., Unit 2A · 713-485-6467
Blackwater Coffee Roasters	6560 Fannin St., #245 · 281-617-1744

PHARMACY & EVERYDAY ESSENTIALS

Walgreens Pharmacy · 6560 Fannin St., Suite 260 (Scurlock Tower) · 713-797-1410

Houston Methodist location, second floor; typically open weekdays only (7 AM–6 PM).

CVS Pharmacy & Store · 2266 W. Holcombe Blvd. · 713-218-2180

Full-service pharmacy and convenience items; farther from the immediate walking area.

Please note: Business hours, menus and services may vary, particularly on weekends. Check the linked listings before visiting.