



Art by Rachael Johnson

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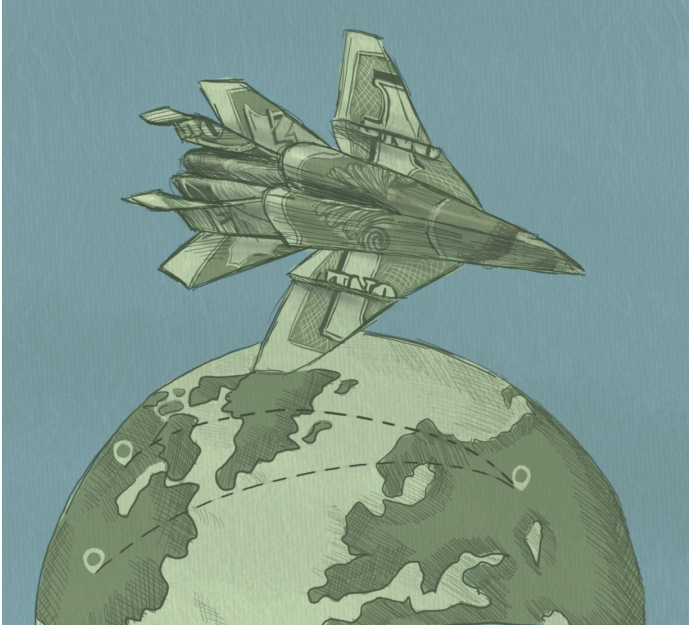
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SOAR Travel Award Updates and Scholarship Opportunities



Art by Julia Peña

The SOAR Travel Award supports BCM medical students from both the Houston and Temple campuses in presenting their research at conferences. The award promotes scholarly dissemination and professional development by helping offset travel-related expenses.

In April, the BCM Office of Student Affairs announced updates to the SOAR Travel Award eligibility criteria and selection process. In its statement, the office explained that these changes were made to accommodate the growing volume of applications and to promote more equitable access to funding.

What's Changed?

To ensure fairness, the eligibility criteria were updated from a maximum of one trip per student per academic year to a maximum of one trip per student during the entire course of medical school training (MS1-MS4). In an effort to stay impartial when comparing applicants' conferences and impact across a variety of disciplines, the committee has shifted to a

lottery-based selection process. Additionally, the application deadline has been adjusted from a minimum of six weeks to four weeks prior to the conference date. The committee clarified that neither the funding available for the travel awardees nor the number of awardees has changed.

Rather, it is the method of award distribution that has been revised. According to the committee, the travel awards have always operated with a set budget, and like many academic institutions across the country, funding is being carefully managed.

Student Reflections

The SOAR office has always been an essential component in the professional development of many students, helping make a real difference and empowering students to pursue academic and research opportunities.

"I've personally used their resources to learn about conference funding, and many of my classmates have benefited from their help with abstract submissions and research presentations," said first-year medical student and class president Hector Alvarez. "It's clear that SOAR plays a valuable role in helping students make the most of their medical education."

Alvarez said that he understands that resource management can be a challenge, especially when working to provide support to as many students as possible.

"These awards are often the only way many of us can afford to attend and share our work at conferences," said Alvarez. "It's a fantastic opportunity, and it's important that it remains as accessible and flexible as possible so all students can benefit."

Alvarez noted that as MS1 class president, he hopes to see continued communication and collaboration between SOAR, the curriculum office and students to make research more accessible for all students, including those early in their careers.

Continuing Support for Student Research

Dr. Mabel Perez-Oquendo, SOAR office director, took this opportunity to highlight the new support available to students in presenting and publishing their research.

“The growing number of eligible applicants for the SOAR Travel Award reflects the strong commitment of our medical students to research and scholarship,” said Dr. Perez-Oquendo. “The SOAR office is actively developing opportunities that provide all medical students, across both the Houston and Temple campuses, with meaningful ways to present, publish and expand their research skills.”

Resources available to continue supporting medical students include the monthly medical student research presentation sessions, the SOAR external conference catalog, the internal research conferences at BCM and access to a variety of research publication resources.

The monthly presentation sessions provide a structured and supportive space for students to present their research and receive specific feedback from BCM residents, fellows and faculty to help refine their communication skills and prepare for future conferences.

“The SOAR conference catalog includes conference opportunities at the local, regional, national and international levels, sorted by specialty or research type,” said Dr. Perez-Oquendo. “Most conferences offer student discounts, and some offer travel awards.”

In addition, she encouraged students to participate in annual events such as the Henry J.N. Taub & James K. Alexander Medical Student Research Symposium, the TEACH-S Educational Symposium and various department-based research conferences. “These events are excellent venues to share work with the broader BCM and Texas Medical Center communities,” said Dr. Perez-Oquendo.

Lastly, the Texas Medical Center Library provides tools and guidance to support manuscript submission, journal selection and open-access publishing. Students have access to the Read & Publish model, helping reduce costs and increase visibility. Other tools like Web of Science, Browzine and JANE help students identify where to submit their work efficiently and effectively.

Looking ahead

“I’m grateful these resources exist. SOAR funding makes a real difference in helping students like myself pursue research and grow professionally,” said Alvarez. “Baylor is a school that truly cares about its students, and I believe we can continue building on that foundation by ensuring all students, regardless of background, feel empowered to pursue academic opportunities.”

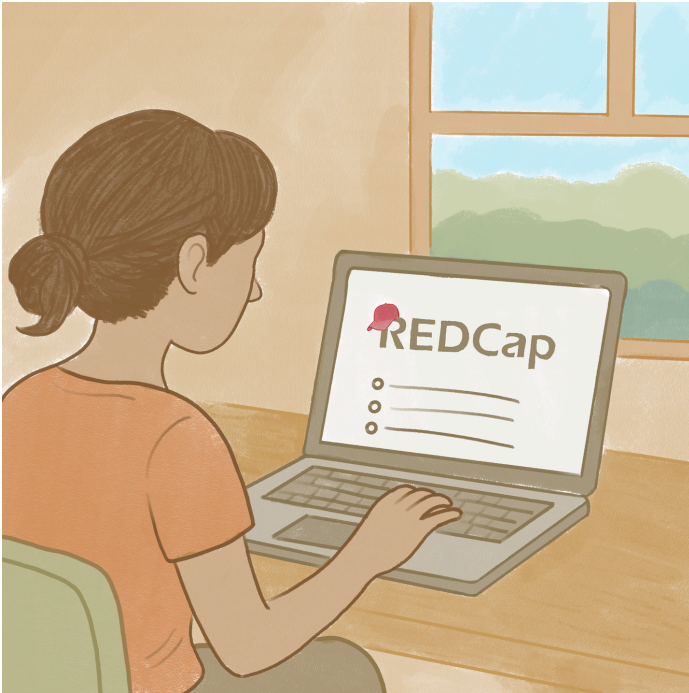
If you would like to learn more about travel awards and scholarship opportunities, please feel free to reach out to the SOAR office or Dr. Perez-Oquendo at SOARoffice@bcm.edu or mabel.perez-oquendo@bcm.edu, respectively.

Written by Mawada Al Faisal
Edited by Maheen Kara

REDCap Workshop

On May 28th, first-year medical student Lauren Reppert and second-year medical student Alicia Cotto facilitated and organized a hybrid workshop on REDCap. They are part of a larger team within the SOAR Workshop initiative, which is designed to help students develop the skills necessary to launch and sustain research projects successfully.

REDCap, which stands for Research Electronic Data Capture, is a secure, web-based software platform used for managing large-scale data. It supports data pulled from electronic health record systems like EPIC, as well as surveys created directly within the platform.



Art by Zuena Karim

“REDCap offers a high level of customizability in both data input and output, which may not be intuitive at first,” said Cotto.

Both Reppert and Cotto emphasized that while the platform has a steep learning curve, it is a powerful tool for researchers, and they aimed to provide a supportive forum to help students get started, gain hands-on experiences and ask questions freely.

During the hybrid session, students participated in two interactive lessons: one on generating data reports and another on deploying surveys. Reppert guided participants through the process of generating and customizing data reports to align with their specific research needs and goals.

On the other hand, Cotto led the survey-building segment, including its application in e-consent processes for clinical trials and participant recruitment. The workshop concluded with an open Q&A session, where attendees could troubleshoot challenges they were encountering in REDCap.

Looking ahead, Reppert and Cotto plan to offer this and other skills-based sessions as part of a recurring series for students.

They hope to continue supporting medical students in building foundational research skills that are practical and applicable to their work.

The next REDCap workshop is scheduled for fall 2025. The team welcomes feedback to better tailor future sessions to student needs. For inquiries or more information, please contact Alicia Cotto at Alicia.Cotto@bcm.edu.

Written by Avishi Singh
 Edited by Laasya Achanta

Adapting to Shifting Federal Priorities: New Document Scanner For Sensitive Keywords

In today’s competitive research environment, the language of academia matters more than ever. Following policy shifts during the Trump administration, federal funding agencies, including the National Science Foundation, have become increasingly attentive to the language used in grant proposals and research narratives.

Terms related to public health, climate change and national security can trigger heightened scrutiny even when used appropriately. As a result, researchers must balance scientific clarity with clear communication to ensure their work aligns with evolving federal priorities.

To support this effort, the BCM Office of Research has introduced the Research Document Scanner, an online tool to help investigators identify potentially sensitive keywords in their research documents.

The Research Document Scanner is a user-friendly digital tool that scans uploaded research documents for flagged keywords that may trigger additional review from funding agencies. By identifying these keywords and generating a detailed report, the tool can help researchers fine-tune and contextualize their writing to ensure their use of language is precise and clear.



Art by Grace Anderson

If the scanner identifies words or phrases that may need to be fine-tuned, one of the suggested follow-up tools is BCM’s secure instance of [Microsoft Copilot](#). BCM’s Copilot operates in a closed, protected environment, making it safe for handling the proprietary content found in research reports.

Using secure tools like BCM Copilot is essential for sensitive or unpublished research to avoid potential data privacy concerns associated with open platforms such as consumer versions of Copilot or ChatGPT.

The internal BCM research document scanner site also includes a reference list of words of commonly flagged terms that are identified as sensitive. This can help investigators be proactive and review their work before submitting proposals.

Written by Geoffrey Zhang
Edited by Annika Jyothi

**To access the
BCM Document
Scanner, scan
the QR code!**



Veteran Research Fair

From May 13-17, 2025, the BCM-affiliated Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) celebrated its 100th anniversary of VA Research under the theme of “Saving Lives, Limbs, and Lungs,” offering veterans and students a platform to connect.

Most notably, the VA Research Experience Fair on May 13 and the Veteran Engagement Panel on May 16 underscored how VA-funded studies translate into improved care and patient outcomes.

The Research Experience Fair drew more than 500 veterans to a local community venue. “We wanted Veterans to see how VA studies impact their health and care,” said Eva Milstead, senior research communications coordinator and event organizer.

Dozens of study teams staffed booths, showcasing their posters, prototypes and early findings. Veterans had opportunities to explore each project and learn firsthand how each project aims to address real-world challenges.

“The enthusiasm from research staff, trainees and even veteran participants was highlighted,” said Milstead. “Presenting in a public-facing setting gives student teams the chance to share their work in a real-world setting while fostering direct feedback from those it serves.”

On May 16, the Veteran Engagement Panel offered a complementary perspective by centering veteran voices alongside faculty researchers. BCM M.D./Ph.D. student and U.S. Army veteran Juan Carlos Ramirez moderated the panel for the third consecutive year.

“The Veteran Engagement Panel serves to highlight the latest research at the VA and to reach out to veterans to participate in research,” said Ramirez.

Three faculty researchers provided brief overviews of their studies, followed by three veterans who shared how participation influenced their recovery, outlook on research and overall quality of life. Ramirez noted that this dialogue reinforced the importance of partnership and trust in the research process.

Furthermore, Milstead encouraged VA-affiliated students and researchers to apply for next year's events, emphasizing that Research Week is a great opportunity to see how research connects with the real-world experiences of veterans.

Bringing together more than 500 attendees, student presenters, and Veteran participants, VA Research Week 2025 successfully bridged the gap between academic inquiry and the community it serves.

SHOWCASE:

Laughter, learning, and connection: a collage of experiences at the Veteran Research Fair

Written by Austin Tran
Edited by Matthew Darmadi

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Eva Milstead





Vaishnav Krishnan, M.D. Ph.D. is an associate professor in the Department of Neurology, with adjunct appointments in the Departments of Neuroscience and Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at BCM. As an epileptologist, a specialist in epilepsy and related disorders, he splits his time between seeing patients in the clinic, remotely interpreting EEGs and intraoperative monitoring studies at several Baylor-affiliated hospitals. He serves as the attending physician at the Baylor St. Luke's Epilepsy Monitoring Unit for ten weeks of the year and manages a translational research lab.

Dr. Krishnan's journey in medicine began in 1999 as an international student on an F-1 Visa at New York University, where he double-majored in neuroscience and chemistry. As a sophomore, he attended a lecture on the M.D./Ph.D. Medical Scientist Training Program by a visiting professor from the UT Southwestern Medical Center, where he incidentally went on to pursue his dual degree. His Ph.D. dissertation used a mouse model to study the molecular underpinnings of susceptibility and resilience to psychological stress. Initially, Dr. Krishnan was set on pursuing a psychiatry residency, just like his Ph.D. mentor, Dr. Eric Nestler. However, his clerkship experiences shifted his interest instead towards neurology.

"I enjoyed thinking about brain health in the context of other organ systems," said Dr. Krishnan. "I was drawn to advances in neuroimaging, neurodiagnostics like EEG and the more direct collaborations with neurosurgery."

After completing his residency, fellowship and postdoctoral training at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School teaching hospital, he accepted a faculty position at BCM, where he now works as an epileptologist and researcher.

In addition to seizures, patients with epilepsy often suffer from a wide range of comorbid psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety and autism.

Inspired by his Ph.D. work, Dr. Krishnan's research lab focuses on developing and applying digital neurobehavioral biomarkers to measure neuropsychiatric well-being. This spans the use of wearable devices in human subjects and instrumented home-cage technologies in mouse models of epilepsy. He hopes someday that these insights improve the care for nonverbal and intellectually disabled individuals with epilepsy.

"Measuring depression is very different from measuring your A1C, LDL or measuring your HIV viral load. Those are scalar metrics," said Dr. Krishnan. "My lab hopes to build similar metrics for constructs such as mood, anxiety, and sleepiness by studying the natural 24-hour fluctuations in physiological variables such as activity and temperature."

He further explains that by defining these relationships in verbal patients, they can then apply those insights to nonverbal patients.

Dr. Krishnan is also actively involved in mentoring medical students. He serves as an Inquiry Project advisor, through which he emphasizes the importance of early and hands-on research experiences. He recommends that students shadow a wide span of clinical specialists and start to get familiar with specialty-specific jargon and so-called 'bread and butter' cases.

"The most important thing early on is to find mentors, peers and a clinical field that excites you," said Dr. Krishnan. "Shadow often, ask questions and let your interests guide you. Everyone's journey is unique. Define your own path for your precision medical education."

Written by Justin Hu and Malay Shah
 Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

Research Opportunities in the SOAR Database

Investigating immunological mechanisms in therapy-related acute myeloid leukemia (t-AML)

Medicine
Basic Research
Dr. Russell Pourebrahim
russell.pourebrahim@bcm.edu

Impact of Ethnicity and Race on accuracy of cerebral NIRS (Near Infrared Spectroscopy) Measurements

Pediatrics
Clinical Research
Dr. Khayri Shalhoub
khayri.shalhoub@bcm.edu

Nutrition for Chronic Disease Prevention

Pediatrics
Clinical Research
Dr. Alexis Wood
alexis.wood@bcm.edu

Liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry-based metabolomics and lipidomics

Pathology
Basic Research
Dr. Thomas Horvath
thomas.horvath2@bcm.edu

Improving cognitive survivorship for pediatric cancer patients who have received radiotherapy

Neuroscience
Basic Research
Dr. Joseph Duman
duman@bcm.edu

Using hipsc-derived brain organoids to study human brain development and developmental disorders

Pediatrics
Basic Research
Dr. Xiangling Meng
xmeng@bcm.edu

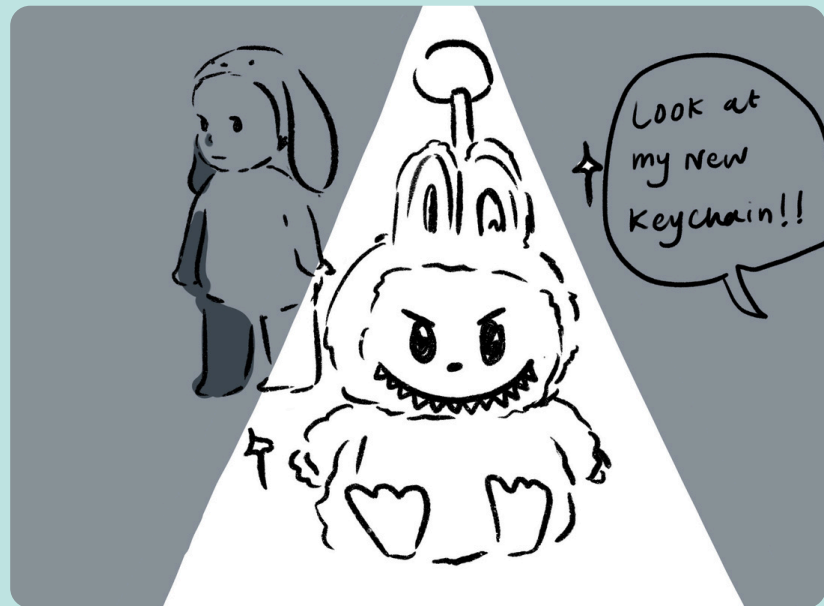
Pediatric clinical lab medicine

Pathology
Clinical Research
Dr. Sridevi Devaraj
sxdevara@texaschildrens.org

Functional analyses of IBD genetic risk factors

Molecular Virology & Microbiology
Basic Research
Dr. Buck Samuel
bucks@bcm.edu

The Funny Bone



times change

Art by Megan Benavides

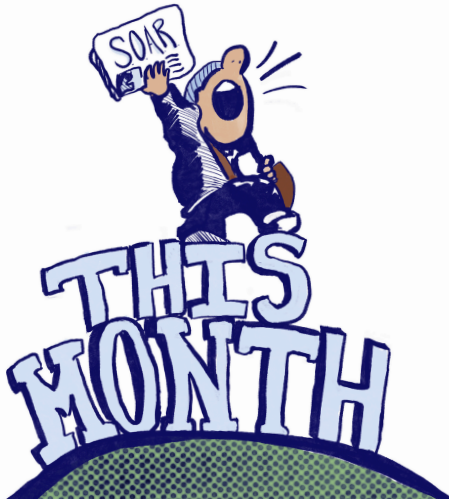
Identifying therapeutic targets for leukemia

Pathology
Basic Research
Dr. Daniel Lacorazza
hdl@bcm.edu

Chronic Diseases

Medicine
Community Medicine
Dr. Ifeoluwa Malmberg
ifeoluwa.malmberg@bcm.edu

Chief Design Officer: Ayisat Adegbindin
With help from Allen Dao and Hafsa Khwaja



Art by Megan Benavides and Grace Anderson

Upcoming Events

June 20, 1:30 PM – 2:00 PM

SlicerDicer - Info Session

[Register here for the Teams link.](#)

June 27, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

From Concept to Collaboration: How the Consortium for Translational and Precision Health (CTPH) Supports Your Research

[Register here](#) for the Teams link.

June 27, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Mapping the Evolving Definitions of Translational Research

[Register here](#) for the Teams link.

Research Tool Spotlight

BRAIN ESP1 Changes Impacting Human Research

BRAIN ESP1 updates aim to strengthen regulatory compliance by refining sections on subject cost and payment, research drug information, current devices and sponsor investigator, and five-year check-in forms.

Community Engaged Research Studio

The Consortium for Translational and Precision Health in the Department of Family and Community Medicine offers the Community Engaged Research Studio, a resource designed to improve study design, recruitment plans, ethical approaches, and grant readiness.

Travel Award Opportunity

The Booth-Johnson Medical Student Travel Award supports medical students presenting at the American Society of Pediatric Neuroradiology (ASPNR) Annual Meeting, which will be held in Tampa, Florida, from January 16 to 18, 2026.

This award provides funding to attend the conference and encourages students interested in pediatric neuroradiology to engage with the professional community.

The abstract submission period for the meeting is open from July 15 to September 15, 2025. For full details, visit the [ASPNR website](#).

- **Deadline:** September 15, 2025
- **Eligibility:** Medical students interested in pediatric neuroradiology; ASPNR membership required.
- **Award:** Up to \$1,000 to attend the ASPNR Annual Scientific Meeting.
- **Details:** Applicants are encouraged to submit an abstract; selection considers abstract submission.

Local Conference

4th Annual AI in Health Conference:
[Conference website.](#)

- **Conference Dates:** September 23-24, 2025
- **Submission Deadline:** July 10, 2025
- **Location:** Rice University, Houston, TX

Main Topics: (1) Robotics and Healthcare, (2) AI for Modern Therapeutics, and (3) AI for Clinical Research

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Mabel Perez-Oquendo, Ph.D.

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