BCM SOAR

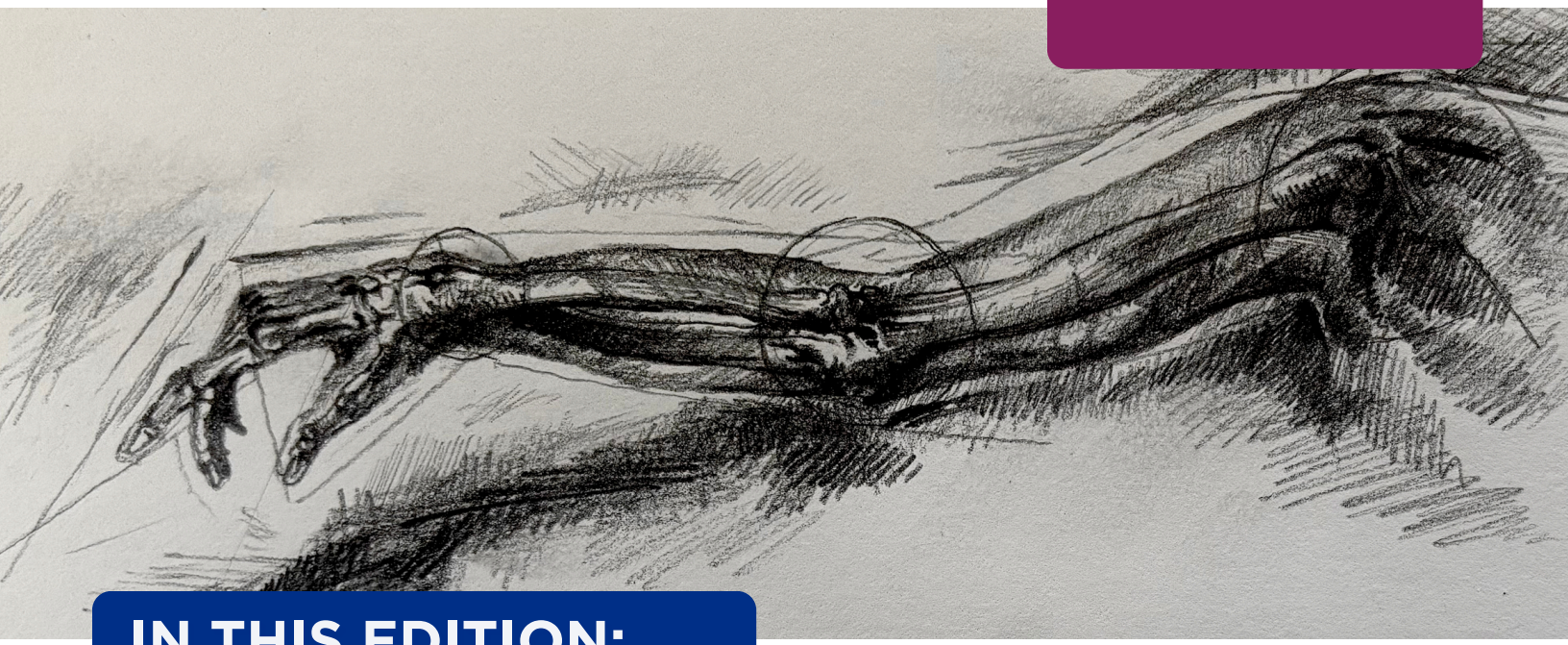
STUDENT NEWS

APRIL 2026 EDITION

Baylor College of Medicine

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT IN RESEARCH (SOAR)



Art by Tuesday Haynes

IN THIS EDITION:

A Practical SOAR Guide to Navigating Research Conferences

At my first research conference, I spent most of the time feeling lost, nodding politely at presentations I barely understood, avoiding eye contact with presenters and leaving with little more than a free tote bag. However, after presenting my own work and watching others navigate these events effectively, I realized that research conferences can be valuable if approached with intention.

Before the Conference

Set one clear goal. Whether you want feedback on your project, you are navigating how to get involved in research or you are exploring what's happening in your speciality of interest, having a single focus prevents aimless wandering and helps guide which posters and presentations to attend and who to talk to.

Practice a brief introduction: "Hi, I'm Geoffrey, a second-year medical student. I'm interested in cardiovascular epidemiology and would like to learn more about X and Y."

It may feel rehearsed, but it's better than fumbling when someone asks what you're working on.

If You're Presenting
Prepare for questions. Common ones include:

- "What's novel about this work?"
- "How does this compare to existing literature?"
- "What are the limitations?" (It's better to acknowledge these upfront than wait for someone to point them out)
- "Is your sample size adequate?"
- "How might this influence clinical practice?"

If you don't know an answer, a simple, "That's a good question and I'll need to look into that further," is far better than a clearly improvised one. People appreciate honesty.

If You're Attending
Visit at least three posters and pay attention to how people present, not just what they present. Observe how effective presenters open their talks and how they handle challenging questions.

Consider asking:

- "How did you get involved in this project?"
- "What did the process look like and how long did it take?"
- "What would you do differently next time?"

These conversations reveal practical insights you won't get from the poster alone and can foster research opportunities and connections.

After the Conference
Within 24-72 hours, reflect on:

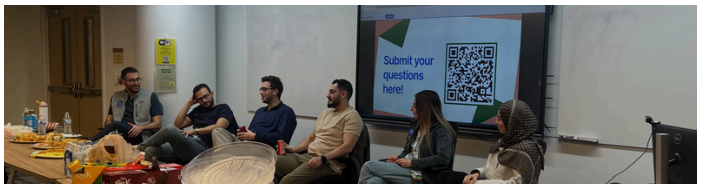
- What skills (e.g., research design, statistics, communication, networking) should I strengthen?
- What type of project genuinely interested me?
- Which mentor or peer should I reach out to?

Send a follow-up email to the people you connected with while the conversation is still fresh. Continuing to communicate with those you met can lead to meaningful partnerships and resources.

Engaging with presenters genuinely and following through afterward with a clear goal can maximize your time at research conferences, making them more than just an item to check off.

Written by Geoffrey Zhang
Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

NAAMA NextGen fosters community and mentorship: Resident Speciality Panel



BCM's National Arab American Medical Association (NAAMA) NextGen chapter recently hosted a Q&A panel with Arab American residents on March 2. With a diverse representation of specialities—general surgery, orthopedic surgery, ophthalmology, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology and anesthesiology—students were exposed to the day-to-day life of medicine from a variety of perspectives.

The event began with dinner catered by Sayyad Mediterranean Grill, where attendees and panelists gathered over shawarma sandwiches. Many participants also broke their fast together in observance of Ramadan, creating a strong sense of community.

The panelists included Dr. Ageedi, Dr. Ghali, Dr. Al-Haddad, Dr. Kawji, Dr. Kozhaya and Dr. Mikahel. Each panelist introduced themselves, walked students through a day in their lives and discussed the role of cultural identity in patient care.

For many residents, being able to speak Arabic with patients or connect over a shared identity and cultural background makes a meaningful difference for patients, strengthening their trust and improving the quality of care. Panelists also highlighted the importance of seeing Arabs represented in medicine as trainees, noting that it can help students feel included, motivated and inspired to pursue their careers.

The event marked a significant step forward for BCM's NAAMA NextGen chapter. On a broader scale, NAAMA NextGen aims to engage medical students in building connections and engaging with the Arab-American physician community. Through educational, philanthropic and service activities, NAAMA focuses on promoting the professional development and cultural identity of healthcare professionals with roots in the Arab world.

The BCM chapter has collaborated with NAAMA NextGen groups at the University of Houston College of Medicine, the University of Texas Medical Branch and McGovern Medical School on events such as coffee socials with pre-health students.

Through such partnerships, along with the broader NAAMA physician network, medical students benefit from multiple layers of mentorship, leaving them empowered, supported and with a sense of belonging. NAAMA also offers scholarship opportunities and professional and career development.

In addition, BCM NAAMA continues to expand its outreach within the larger BCM community by hosting social events to introduce the student organization and foster connections across the student body.

Looking ahead, the organization hopes to continue providing opportunities for mentorship, representation and community through events like its recent panel.

Written by NAAMA NextGen: Jenna Zamil
Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

From Brain Signals to Student Success: Inside the Papageorgiou Lab

Dr. T. Dorina Papageorgiou leads the Investigational Targeted Brain Neurotherapeutics (ITBN) Laboratory at BCM. The lab aims to understand the mechanisms of adaptive and maladaptive cortical plasticity to promote central and peripheral nervous system recovery across cognitive, sensory, motor and affective disorders. The lab uses advanced neuroimaging and individualized neuromodulation to study these processes.

The lab showcased its commitment to innovation and mentorship at the Henry J.N. Taub and James K. Alexander Medical Student Research Symposium.

"The symposium reflects something I prioritize in my lab: giving students early exposure to how research is structured and how complex concepts are communicated," said Dr. Papageorgiou. "What matters to me is creating an environment where students are motivated and supported to pursue research."

Third-year medical student Cameron Noorkhbash presented research utilizing large language models and representational similarity analysis to decode brain signals under individualized neuromodulation.

The study demonstrated notable sex differences in visuospatial networks, with findings suggesting enhanced signal magnitude and network expansion in females. Engineering-Medicine Texas A&M students Joshua Robert and Cyril Pillai were also part of the team supporting this work.

Additional student achievements included first-year medical students Michael Davis and Brian Bishara, who were awarded second place in Basic and Translational Science Research and Best Visual Poster.

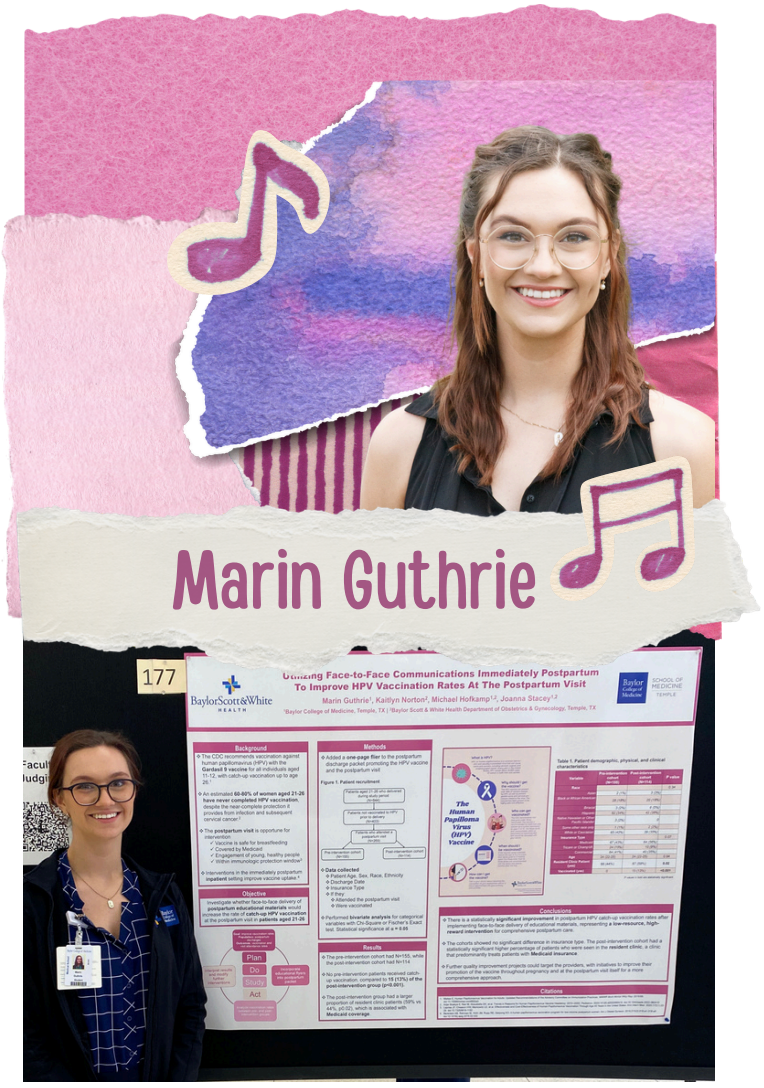
The Papageorgiou Lab has shown how individualized AI-guided neuromodulation can improve swallowing function through motor and sensory cortical and subcortical networks. This work has promising applications for head and neck cancer patients following surgery or radiation, as well as patients in early stages of ALS or Parkinson's disease.

The lab's impact is further strengthened by the contributions of current and former trainees, including second-year resident Sandy Reddy and fourth-year medical student Anthony Allam, who recently matched to neurosurgery at the Cleveland Clinic.

Their continued involvement highlights the collaborative and longitudinal nature of research within the ITBN Lab.

Written by Dr. T. Dorina Papageorgiou & Mawada Al Faisal
Edited by Maheen Kara

Passion Projects: Student perspectives on research, Ben Taub Symposium



What research project did you present at the symposium, and what question were you trying to answer?

I presented my Inquiry Project, ***A quality improvement initiative to increase postpartum HPV vaccination rates among women aged 21-26.*** We incorporated an educational flyer into a postpartum discharge packet and provided personalized communication to patients with the hopes of increasing catch-up vaccination rates, and we were successful!

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

The field of OB/Gyn has a little bit of everything, from complex pelvic surgery to exciting deliveries and longitudinal outpatient care. Preventative medicine might not be as glamorous as catching babies, but the HPV vaccine is highly effective at protecting women from cervical cancer. Yet, it is often declined, so increasing uptake was a meaningful project for me.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

As someone with limited research experience, it was interesting to see how the project evolved over time. For instance, we had to change our approach to the intervention after talking with our nursing team, and we also expanded our dataset to mitigate confounding variables. It was a good lesson in flexibility and adaptability.

What advice would you give to other medical students who are interested in getting involved in research or presenting a project?

Talk with your mentors! Attendings often have great ideas for projects but limited bandwidth to execute them all, and that's where you can help get something off the ground.

What was your favorite moment at the research symposium?

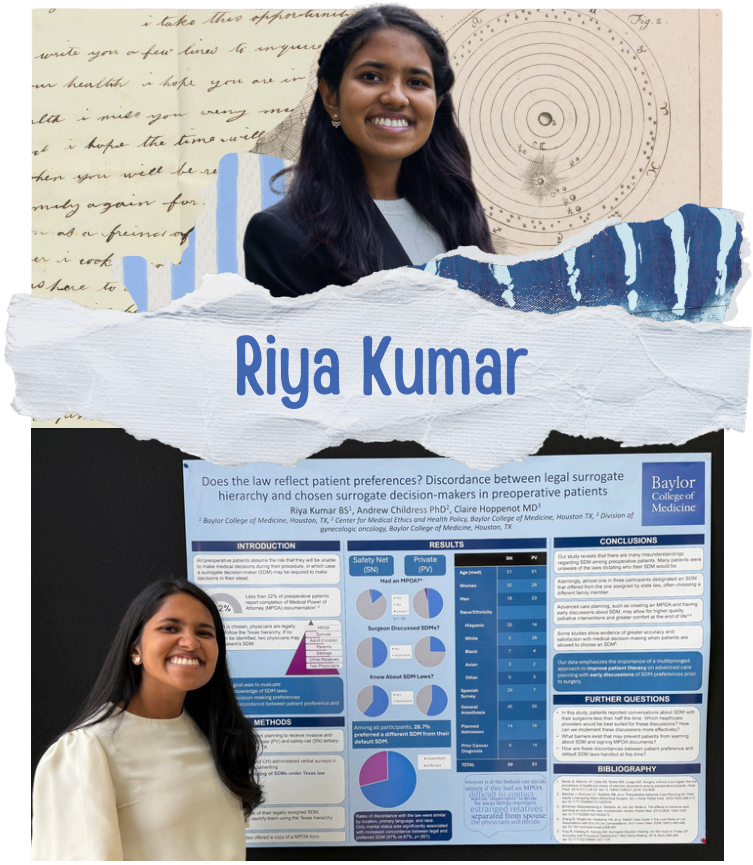
As a Temple student, I really enjoyed talking with my Houston peers and getting inspired by the amazing things people are working on. I was also excited to represent my campus when my project was recognized in the Quality Improvement category!

What are your future research or career interests?

I will be applying to OB/Gyn next year, and I have a passion for women's health policy that I hope to explore.

What is one hobby or activity you enjoy outside of medical school?

I love live music and try to attend as many concerts as my medical student budget allows!



What research project did you present at the symposium, and what question were you trying to answer?

My project was titled ***Does the law reflect patient preferences? Discordance between legal surrogate hierarchy and chosen surrogate decision-makers in preoperative patients.*** My research focused on understanding who preoperative patients would prefer to make medical decisions for them as their surrogate decision-maker (SDM), and if this preferred SDM was the one who would be appointed by Texas state law.

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

I joined this project as an MS1. At the time, I wasn't sure which specialty I was interested in, but I knew for a fact that I was interested in learning more about the patient experience. Speaking personally with so many patients about their understanding of medical decision-making and surrogate decision-makers was incredibly interesting to me.

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

I joined this project as an MS1. At the time, I wasn't sure which specialty I was interested in, but I knew for a fact that I was interested in learning more about the patient experience. Speaking personally with so many patients about their understanding of medical decision-making and surrogate decision-makers was incredibly interesting to me.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

Our study revealed that around one in three preoperative patients would choose a different surrogate decision-maker from the person assigned by the Texas SDM hierarchy. Realizing how many patients may have a nonpreferred SDM was both shocking and extremely concerning.

What advice would you give to other medical students who are interested in getting involved in research or presenting a project?

I would tell other medical students to take their time choosing a project. It's okay not to jump on the first project you see, and I believe it's very important to find work that aligns with your interests and values.

What was your favorite moment at the research symposium?

I really enjoyed seeing my fellow MS3s! Since rotations have ended, everyone has become busy with electives and STEP dedicated, so it was delightful to see my classmates and learn a little bit about what they have been up to.

What are your future research or career interests?

I will be applying to Anesthesiology this fall! I hope to continue my work examining surrogate decision-maker laws and continue my interest in medical ethics into residency.

What is one hobby or activity you enjoy outside of medical school?

Outside of medical school, you can find me at the climbing gym! I got into bouldering during undergrad and continue to enjoy the sport!

What research project did you present at the symposium, and what question were you trying to answer?

My project was titled ***Tolerability and Efficacy of Trigeminal Nerve Stimulation for Treating Epilepsy in Veterans.*** We explored how a non-invasive device, FDA-approved for migraine management, could effectively reduce seizure frequency and improve quality of life in our patient cohort.

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

Most of my previous research experiences have been in wet labs, so I was excited to pursue this project as an opportunity to develop my skills in prospective clinical studies while nurturing my interest in neurology.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

One of the most intriguing findings from my project was the variability in patient responses to the treatment. One patient tolerated the treatment well and had a marked reduction in seizure frequency, whereas others experienced serious adverse reactions that prompted more investigation.

What advice would you give to other medical students who are interested in getting involved in research or presenting a project?

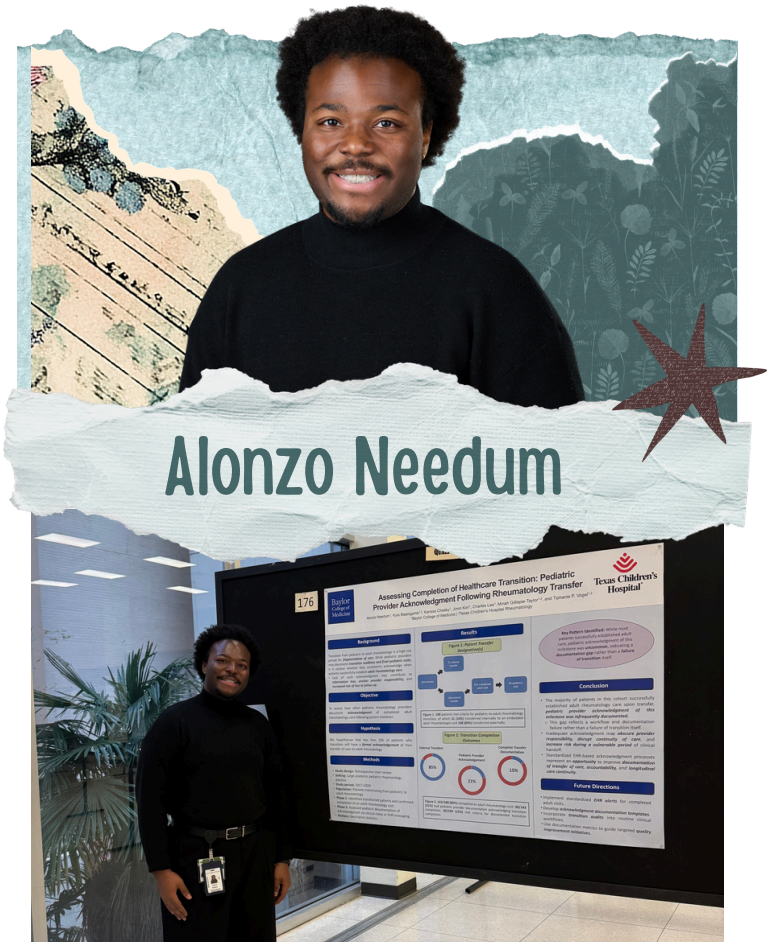
Embrace the learning curve, and ask lots of questions!

What was your favorite moment at the research symposium?

Receiving support from my peers, close friends, and distinguished faculty was certainly the highlight for me.

What are your future research or career interests?
I am most interested in neurology and otolaryngology, so I'm trying to explore those fields as much as I can!

What is one hobby or activity you enjoy outside of medical school?
Playing and watching basketball by far! I can't wait to watch my Spurs go all the way.



What research project did you present at the symposium, and what question were you trying to answer?

I presented a project examining how often pediatric rheumatology providers document acknowledgment when patients successfully transition to adult care. We wanted to understand whether gaps in documentation might obscure continuity of care during this vulnerable transition period.

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

I was drawn to this topic because transitions in care are critical moments for patients, and even small gaps in communication or documentation can have real clinical consequences. Working with the rheumatology team at Texas Children's Hospital sparked my interest in how health systems can better support patients during these transitions.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

One of the most interesting findings was that most patients successfully established adult rheumatology care, yet formal acknowledgment of that transition by pediatric providers was rarely documented. This suggested that the challenge may be less about failed transitions and more about opportunities to improve clinical workflows.

What advice would you give to other medical students who are interested in getting involved in research or presenting a project?

Start with a question that genuinely interests you, and find mentors who are excited to support your curiosity. Research becomes much more meaningful when you see how your work can translate into improvements in patient care!

What was your favorite moment at the research symposium?

My favorite moment was discussing the project with other students and faculty and hearing how people from different specialties thought about improving care transitions. It was exciting to see how a focused clinical question could spark broader conversations about healthcare systems and patient safety.

What are your future research or career interests?

I'm interested in pursuing a career in academic medicine where I can combine clinical care with research that improves healthcare systems and patient outcomes. My current career interests are in surgical fields and women's health, particularly areas where care coordination and systems design can make a meaningful difference.

What is one hobby or activity you enjoy outside of medical school?

Outside of medicine, I enjoy playing tennis and staying active. It's a great way to reset and connect with friends and classmates outside of the hospital.

Michael Davis

What research project did you present at the symposium, and what question were you trying to answer?

I presented a study titled ***Neuromodulation Targeted for Head and Neck Cancer Patients Enhances Swallowing Response and Oxygenated Hemoglobin Signal-to-Noise Ratio.*** We aimed to determine whether individualized neuromodulation strengthens brain networks involved in swallow motor and sensory control, with the long-term goal of improving neurorehabilitation for dysphagia in patients with head and neck cancer.

What inspired you to pursue this research topic?

I was inspired by my grandfather's battle with dementia and my undergraduate research on traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. These experiences motivated me to pursue work in neurodegeneration and neurorehabilitation, areas that are both personally meaningful and clinically impactful.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

Even in healthy participants, individualized neuromodulation significantly improved the signal-to-noise ratio in brain networks involved in swallow motor and sensory control.

What advice would you give to other medical students who are interested in getting involved in research or presenting a project?

My advice would be to find a great mentor and surround yourself with a strong team. My mentor, Dr. Papageorgiou, has been incredibly supportive and inspiring, and my lab teammates are the ones who truly made this work possible!

What was your favorite moment at the research symposium?

My favorite moment was walking around and seeing the incredible research my colleagues have been working on. It was genuinely inspiring to be surrounded by such innovative and impactful work being carried out at BCM.

What are your future research or career interests?

I plan to continue my research in the Papageorgiou Lab with a focus on translating our work into meaningful clinical applications.

What was the most interesting or surprising thing you learned from your project?

Even in healthy participants, individualized neuromodulation significantly improved the signal-to-noise ratio in brain networks involved in swallow motor and sensory control.

What is one hobby or activity you enjoy outside of medical school?

I love golfing in my free time, and I recently founded the Baylor Golf Club to share that passion with others and connect with my classmates outside the classroom.

Edited by Matthew Darmadi

Upcoming Events

Specialty-Specific Medical Student Research Series (MSRS) - Dermatology, Internal Medicine, Orthopedics

April 2, 13, 16 - 5:30 PM

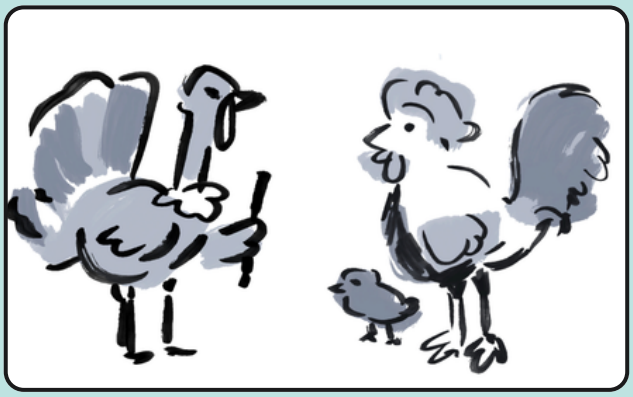
A 1-hour session for Houston students to present their research and pitch new ideas. All students, including Temple, are welcome to attend and connect with peers, residents, and faculty in their specialty of interest. Temple students will have another MSRP session to present their research. Hosted by SOAR, MSRA, and Specialty Interest Group. Sign up here to participate.

AI Tools for Students

April 10, 12:00 PM – 12:30 PM

The TMC Library is hosting a 30-min session on how to utilize relevant AI tools to enhance your ability to develop effective search strategies and interpret information while strictly adhering to academic and ethical standards. Register here to reserve a seat. *Students are responsible for following institutional policies regarding AI (BSWH and BCM have different AI policies).*

The Funny Bone



Changing of the guards

Art by Megan Benavides

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McNair Symposium

- Free Registration
- **Conference Date**: April 14, 2026
- **Topics**: Neuroscience
- **Location**: Jan and Dan Duncan Neurological Research Institute

Texas Dermatological Society Spring 2026 Annual Conference

- Register Here
- **Conference Date**: April 24-25, 2026
- **Topics**: Dermatological Medicine
- **Location**: Fairmont Hotel in Dallas, TX

Pri-Med Southwest Primary Care CME/CE Conference and Expo

- Free Registration
- **Conference Date**: May 6-8, 2026
- **Topics**: Primary and specialty care, including 22 Baylor faculty presenting 20 sessions and a keynote talk by Dr. Peter Hotez
- **Location**: George R. Brown Convention Center in downtown Houston

Baylor Scott & White Scholars Day

- Event website.
- Event Date: May 8, 2026
- Submission Deadline: February 20, 2026
- Location: Medical Education Center

Funding Opportunities

ASTRO Medical Student Fellowship Award
Purpose: 8-week mentored research in radiation oncology
Stipend: Up to $6,000 (stipend + travel support)
Application Open: December 2026

SOAR Travel Award
Purpose: Supports BCM medical students presenting research at conferences
Amount: $500
Application: Monthly review cycles
Important: NICER or Inquiry approval must be obtained before project initiation and abstract submission

Designed by: Ayisat Adegbindin, Hafsah Khwaja, and Zuena Karim

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