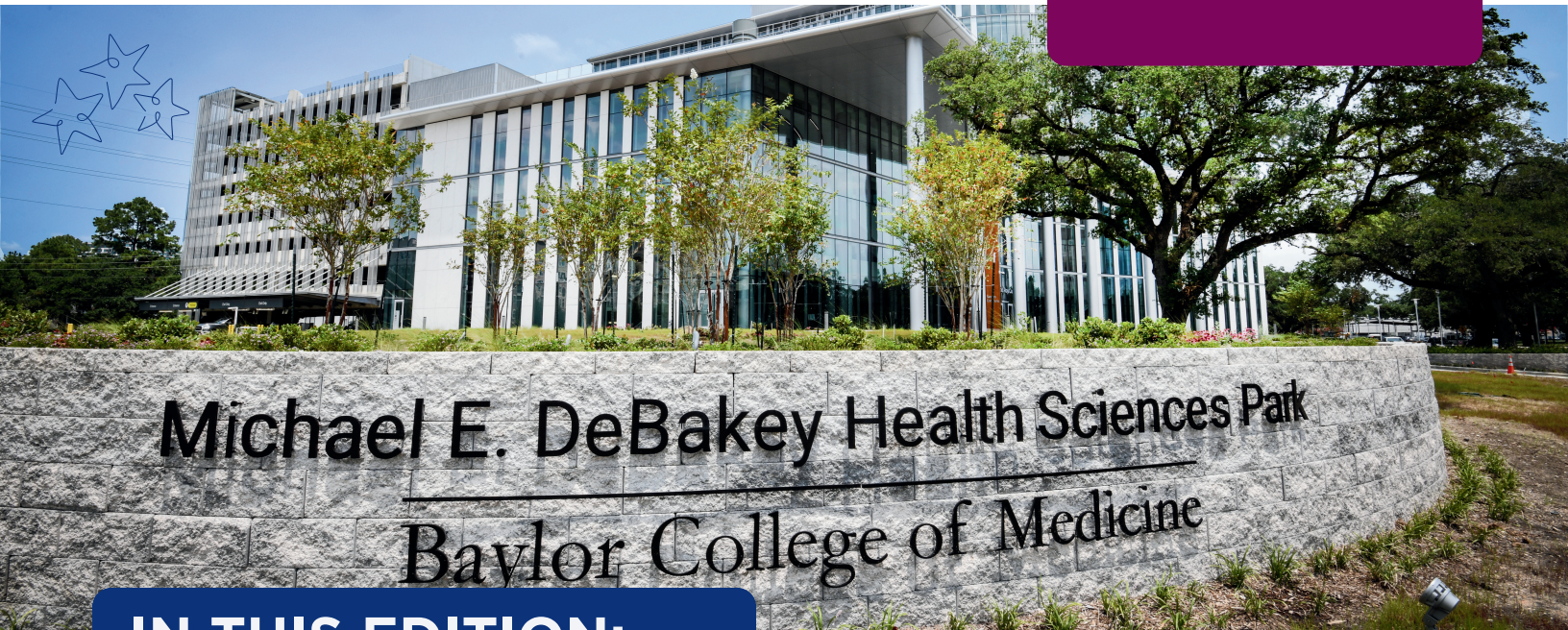




Michael E. DeBakey Health Sciences Park

Baylor College of Medicine

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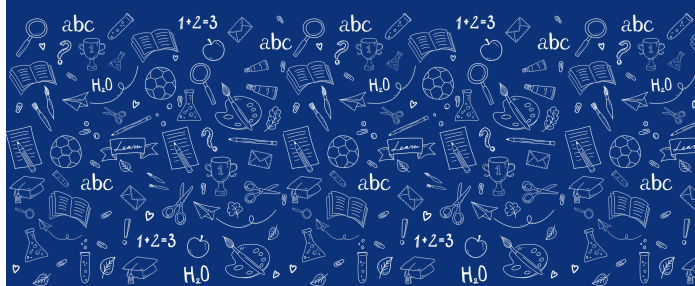
Courtesy of Molly Chiu

A New Center For Learning and Innovation: The Lillie and Roy Cullen Tower

In 2023, BCM first announced the construction of the new Lillie and Roy Cullen Tower located at the McNair Campus. Scheduled to open in 2027, the 503,000-square-foot, 11-story Tower will become home to the School of Medicine and the School of Health Professions.

The new Cullen Tower is expected to become one of the largest and most technologically sophisticated medical school facilities in the United States, changing the delivery of medical education. The main BCM campus, including the Roy and Lillie Cullen Building, will remain dedicated to research and administrative space.

The Tower is part of the first phase of Baylor's planned Michael E. DeBakey Health Sciences Park, an 800,000-square-foot project. It is adjacent to the Texas Medical Center's Helix Park, a 37-acre development devoted to healthcare, life sciences and business projects.



"...one of the largest and most technologically sophisticated medical school facilities in the United States."



"...offering immersive and hands-on learning for students..."



"...state-of-the-art anatomy and teaching labs..."



"The way the space is configured, you're going to want to study there..."



Dr. Nadia Ismail, vice dean of the School of Medicine and internist at Harris Health's Ben Taub General and Lyndon B. Johnson Hospitals, has been involved in the early planning process, playing a role in the design and development of the space.

"It's a fantastic space because it really is all about connecting students with each other and with their faculty," said Ismail. "It's about providing all these touch points and the physical space for collaboration, teamwork and active learning."

The space offers a large-capacity, high-tech theater-style auditorium and state-of-the-art anatomy and teaching labs with innovative technology to facilitate active learning for students and educators and optimize their interactions with each other.

A dedicated floor will house the simulation center, offering immersive and hands-on learning for students and ensuring a comfortable space for standardized patients.

"It's almost double the current capacity, but also again, the technology and the space to do the debriefings and teachings," said Ismail. "There's also an entire space dedicated to point-of-care ultrasound, which we needed."

Additionally, the new Tower will focus on improving student life with spacious and comfortable small-group and studio classrooms, a student wellness center, a rooftop garden and an elevated courtyard and various study spaces and cubicles with aesthetically pleasing lounges and decor.

"The way the space is configured, you're going to want to study there," said Ismail. "You're going to want to meet your friend there." She hopes that students take advantage of the space whether it's for interest group meetings or studying for shelf exams.

Medical students can expect to fully transition to the new building as early as January 2027, with the exception of the testing center for NBME examinations, which will remain at main BCM. Other departments will also be joining the Tower, including the Center for Space Medicine and the School of Health Professions, with cutting-edge equipment to facilitate each program.

Ismail encourages all students to take the shuttles to the new building and to make the most of the space. "I'd love to see life there," she said.

She adds that the Tower represents BCM leadership's commitment to education and investment in spaces designed for students. "And that's an important commitment," said Ismail. "And it is physical. You can see it and you'll feel it when you're there."

Written by Mawada Al Faisal

Edited by Molly Chiu (Senior Communications Specialist)

Navigating Medical School: Finding Your Rhythm, Your People and Yourself

As the Houston summer heat continues, August marks the exciting start of a new academic year. To the incoming MS1s, welcome to the beginning of your medical journey, and to returning students, welcome back!

To help first-year medical students navigate the transition, Kennedy Hawkins, second-year medical student and class president, shares her perspective on finding balance and staying human amid the rigor of medical school.

The first year of medical school is known to be intimidating, with students covering a wide breadth of topics such as basic human physiology, histology, anatomy and biochemistry in a short span of time. 

Regarding the heavy workload, Hawkins emphasizes the importance of flexibility. “You might test out a lot of different study methods, or maybe you will find your groove from day one,” said Hawkins. “Allow yourself to break free from something that isn’t working for you and be open to trying new things to see what really works.”

For example, Hawkins tried various study methods throughout the year and even switched around her daily routine at times depending on the material.

“In the end, I realized that I needed multiple passes through the material—watching lectures, taking notes on key points, consolidating with practice questions and whiteboarding the key concepts again with friends,” said Hawkins. “Many people love Anki, but it didn’t work for me all of the time.” 

She encouraged students to allow themselves to grow beyond their medical knowledge. “Explore the city with classmates, make lifelong friendships, have self-care nights, exercise and relax and block off time to see or talk to your family,” said Hawkins. “These things will help your mind stay strong for all the studying and testing you will go through.” 



Mentorship is another pillar of the first-year experience. Hawkins suggests looking to peer resource network (PRN) “parents” as a home base for mentorship and leveraging interest groups to meet upperclassmen. Often, Hawkins’s PRN parents helped her connect with physicians, interest groups and upperclassmen for specialty-specific questions.

“Specialty-specific mentors are great resources for understanding requirements and expectations for different fields, and peers are great for sharing the true nature of what it is like going through preparing for match day later down the road,” said Hawkins.

Perhaps most importantly, Hawkins advocates for mental health as nonnegotiable. She maintained her own well-being through exercise and social connection. 

“To keep my mind afloat, I regularly exercised at my neighborhood gym, went to yoga classes and played volleyball every week,” she said. “I stayed in touch with my hometown friends and family, while making friends at school through class socials and study groups.”

She urges students to remember that while they are medical students, they are also human. “Allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them,” said Hawkins.

As you begin this new chapter, Hawkins reminds students of the significance of their role. “Y’all are learning to become a physician, learning to take care of people and be someone they can trust,” she said. “This is a very special time.”

Written by Kennedy Hawkins and Geoffrey Zhang
Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

Sowing Seeds For the Next Generation: SNMA's Commitment to a Diverse Medical Pipeline



Undergraduate Pre-Medical students and BCM SNMA members at MedBridge event

The Student National Medical Association (SNMA) is a national, student-led organization dedicated to supporting underrepresented minority students in medicine and increasing diversity within health care.



At BCM, SNMA is engaged at multiple levels of the Houston community, from undergraduates to practicing physicians. Through community-based mentoring initiatives, volunteering that addresses social determinants of health and programming focused on academic enrichment, the organization works to build an invaluable and lasting network for members.

SNMA's mission is to inspire the next generation academically, professionally and personally, in order to strengthen the pipeline of underrepresented minorities in health care.

This past academic year was instrumental in growing the mentorship network. SNMA partnered with local chapters of the Minority Association of Pre-medical Students to launch MedBridge, an educational intervention offering undergraduate students hands-on early exposure to medical devices and clinical scenarios.

Pre- and post-session surveys showed measurable gains in the students' knowledge, reflecting the strength of this new program.

The results of the MedBridge intervention were presented at the research symposium during the Annual Medical Education Conference (AMEC) in April 2026. AMEC is the premier national gathering for SNMA members nationwide, and this year the chapter sent a record number of 19 BCM members.

The conference provided opportunities for professional growth, from connecting with residents and program directors in exhibit halls to exchanging ideas with peers and discovering potential research collaborations at the symposium.

Students also attended specialty-focused breakout sessions that helped them find mentors outside the immediate BCM community.

In addition to MedBridge and AMEC, SNMA remains deeply connected to the pre-medical community through its DiverseSTEM program, which invites current undergraduates and gap-year students to virtual educational sessions led by BCM SNMA members.

Covering topics such as interview preparation, personal statement writing and resume development, these smaller, more intimate sessions give students a comfortable space to ask questions and build relationships with mentors.

These connections extend well beyond the sessions themselves; mentees form long-term relationships with mentors that provide advice during pivotal periods in their medical journey.

SNMA recognizes that the path to medicine is becoming increasingly difficult for underrepresented students to see as attainable amid rising anti-DEI sentiment and growing financial barriers.

In response, the BCM SNMA chapter remains committed to a shared responsibility: continuing to invest in future students, just as previous generations did, while advocating for a medical student community that remains diverse, inclusive and accessible to all.



Written by SNMA (Deba Elaiho and Aariah Richards)
Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

Supporting Your Research Journey: A Student's Introduction to the SOAR Office

For medical students at BCM, research is an opportunity to explore questions beyond the classroom while developing skills that shape their future careers. While research can be one of the most rewarding parts of medical school, knowing where to start can be hard.

To help students get started, the Student Opportunities for Advancement in Research (SOAR) office serves as the central research hub for students at both the Houston and Temple campuses.

"The office is committed to helping students identify research opportunities, connect with mentors, develop research skills and grow as scholars throughout medical school," said Dr. Mabel Perez-Oquendo, director of SOAR.

Perez-Oquendo emphasizes that the door is open to everyone. "Students do not need prior research experience to get started," she said.

She encourages students as early as their first year to begin by exploring SOAR's research databases to find projects that align with their interests.

Additionally, students can now enroll in a newly approved Research Mentorship and Scholarly Development Elective course or connect with the Medical Student Research Ambassadors (MSRA) for peer-to-peer guidance.

One of the office's recent initiatives is the SOAR Peer Research Opportunities program. Perez-Oquendo describes this as a new mechanism that allows students who are already involved in research to share available roles on their projects with other medical students.

This initiative aims to expand access and help students find collaborators with the skills, availability or research interests a project requires.

SOAR's resources extend far beyond project placement. The office provides individualized advising, research workshops and even networking events to foster the medical student research community at BCM.

For students ready to share their findings with the broader scientific community, the office also provides financial support. "The SOAR Travel Award provides financial support for eligible medical students who have been accepted to present their research at regional, national, or international conferences," said Perez-Oquendo.

Medical school is a whirlwind, but your research journey does not have to be. As the office continues to grow with new mentor roundtables and specialty series, the team at SOAR is focused on making sure every student has a friendly place to start.

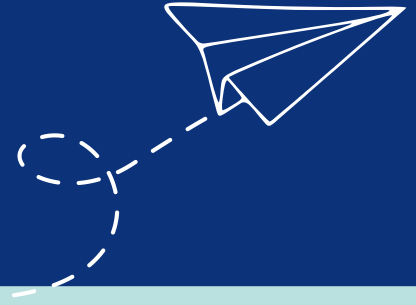
"We encourage students to engage with SOAR early so that we can help them identify opportunities and develop a research plan that fits their interests and medical school schedule," said Perez-Oquendo.

To take your first step, dive into the SOAR website, keep an eye on the monthly newsletter or schedule a one-on-one advising session.



Written by Dr. Mabel Perez-Oquendo and Geoffrey Zhang
Edited by Mawada Al Faisal

Travel Award Opportunities



SOAR Travel Award

The SOAR Travel Award supports BCM medical students who are presenting their research at regional, national, or international conferences. Eligible students may receive up to \$500 to help offset travel-related expenses.

- **Application Deadline:** Rolling; submit at least **4 weeks before the conference**
- **Award:** Up to \$500 for one trip during medical school, contingent on available funding
- **Important:** Students must have an approved NICER form, Student Scholarship & Inquiry Project Approval form, or qualifying research elective in place before beginning the research project and before abstract submission

[Learn more and apply for the SOAR Travel Award](#)

Pediatric Neuroradiology

The American Society of Pediatric Neuroradiology (ASPNR) Booth-Johnson Medical Student Travel Award supports medical students interested in pediatric neuroradiology, neuroradiology, or pediatric radiology who would like to attend the ASPNR Annual Scientific Meeting.

- **Application Deadline:** September 25, 2026
- **Eligibility:** Currently enrolled medical students

[Learn more and apply through ASPNR](#)

Interventional Radiology

The SIR Foundation Dr. Constantin Cope Medical Student Research Award recognizes medical students who have made a meaningful contribution to original interventional radiology research submitted for presentation at the Society of Interventional Radiology Annual Scientific Meeting.

- **Abstract Submission Deadline:** September 24, 2026
- **Award Application Deadline:** November 15, 2026, at 5:00 PM ET
- **Eligibility:** Medical student primary authors who have played a meaningful role in original research conducted under the guidance of one or more SIR members

[Learn more and apply through the SIR Foundation](#)

Reconstructive Microsurgery

The American Society for Reconstructive Microsurgery (ASRM) Medical Student Travel Grant supports medical students interested in attending the ASRM Annual Meeting and gaining exposure to reconstructive microsurgery.

- **Application Deadline:** October 1, 2026
- **Eligibility:** Medical students who will still be enrolled at the time of the Annual Meeting

[Learn more and apply through ASRM](#)

Upcoming Events

REDCap Training

September 8 | 12:00–1:00 PM | Virtual

Learn the fundamentals of creating and preparing a REDCap project for data collection, including instrument design, data dictionaries, codebooks, data export, testing workflows, and implementation best practices. The training is offered by the Consortium for Translational & Precision Health. [Register here.](#)

Research Grand Rounds: Starting a Research Project

September 9 | 12:00–1:00 PM | McMillian Auditorium and via Teams

Learn practical considerations for evaluating research opportunities and preparation for a first meeting with a potential mentor. Invited speakers: Dr. Mabel Perez-Oquendo and Panel of Medical Students.

Data Analytics Tutorial: i2b2

September 18 | 1:30–2:30 PM | Teams

Learn how to use i2b2, a self-service analytics tool that allows BCM users to explore and analyze clinical, research, and other data. [Register here.](#)

Data Analytics Tutorial: SlicerDicer

September 25 | 1:30–2:30 PM | Teams

Learn how to use SlicerDicer for self-service exploration of clinical and research data, including its new SideKick AI-powered assistant. [Register here.](#)

Medical Student Research Session: Surgical Specialties

September 28 | 5:30–6:30 PM | Alkek Building

The Medical Student Research Ambassadors will host a specialty-focused research session featuring Surgery, Plastic Surgery, Cardiothoracic Surgery, and Vascular Surgery. [Continued on next column]

The session will include medical student research presentations with reviewer feedback, early-stage project pitches as applicable, a specialty-focused panel discussion, and informal networking with faculty, residents, fellows, and students.

[Interest to present or attend is due September 12 here.](#)

Temple students will have an in-campus session on the same day from 5:00pm–6:00pm.

Local or Virtual Conferences

Dan L Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center Symposium

September 25 | 8:30 AM–5:00 PM | Lillie and Roy Cullen Tower, McNair Campus

The 21st annual symposium will feature keynote speaker Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Young and scientific presentations in breast cancer, cell and gene therapy, cancer prevention and population sciences, pediatric cancer, and tumor biology. [Register here.](#)

4th Annual Mechanical Circulatory Support, ECMO and Perfusion Conference

September 25–26 | TMC Helix Park + Virtual

This hybrid conference will cover cardiogenic shock, hemodynamic assessment, ECMO, perfusion advances, device management, goal-directed perfusion, and team-based decision-making. [Learn more and register.](#)

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