Four eager students, Jessica Anderson, Drew Cratsenberg, Sarah Montgomery, and Dianne Samad entered the Masters of Science in Genetic Counseling (MSGC) Program in August 2014. Now, 2 years later, those same students are eagerly joining the Genetic Counseling workforce as graduates of the OUHSC MSGC Program.

Throughout the 2-year program, students must attend graduate level courses in Molecular Genetics, Cytogenetics, Embryology, Psychology, Human Population Genetics, Cancer Genetics and Inborn Errors of Metabolism. They also have 3 semesters of clinical rotations and must complete and defend a thesis involving original research.

All four members of the Class of 2016 were recognized for graduating with a GPA of 3.8 or higher. Assistant Program Director, Erin Youngs, MS, LCGC, commented “just as with previous classes, we again saw the Class of 2016 strive for high academic achievement in their studies and research. We are very proud to call them our program alumni.”

When reflecting back on the journey these four young people took, Program Director, Susan Hassed, PhD said “as the Spring semester comes and goes, we see another group of MSGC graduates take their place in the genetic counseling community. We are pleased, but not surprised, with their growth from undergraduates through their graduate studies to the beginning of their chosen career. We are proud of their successes and grateful for the opportunity to become members of their extended family.”

The MSGC Program continues to be the cornerstone of the education programs offered in the Section of Genetics. Its early and continued success paved the way for the Medical Genetics Residency Program and the Clinical Laboratory Training Programs.

“We are pleased with their growth from undergraduates through their graduate studies to the beginning of their chosen career.”

Dr. Susan Hassed
Recognizing Mary Monks’ 35 Years of Service

Mary Monks, RN has spent 35 years providing nursing care across Oklahoma. Before joining the Section of Genetics in 2005, Mary worked as a public health nurse in the Children First Program at the Oklahoma City County Department of Health for 6 years. Mary is a true public health RN. While in Genetics, Mary has primarily been the Newborn Screening Long-Term Follow-up nurse case manager working closely with Dr. Susan Palmer and Dr. Klaas Wierenga, Ashley Ethridge, RD/LD, Ashley Taylor, PA-C and the Newborn Screening staff at the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

Mary earned her AA in nursing from Murray State College and went on to complete her BA in psychology from Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant.

The Section of Genetics wishes Mary a fond farewell and good luck in her retirement.

Reflections from Mary’s colleagues:

“Mary has been the fountain of daily comfort for our precious patients with positive newborn screening tests. She has been the caring face, hands, and soul of the program, the savior of these special kids and their extended families. Through crises, good news and bad, she is the steady rudder that gets patients, families, labs, and clinicians aiming straight through often troubled and murky waters. She’s been a joy to work with and has definitely made an enormous contribution to the kids of Oklahoma and the Genetics world here.” —John Mulvihill, MD

“Mary has been protecting Oklahoma babies for 11 years by making certain abnormal newborn screens are followed up and affected babies receive appropriate care. She is quiet, diligent, and never complains.” —Susan Hassed, PhD, LCGC

“As a dedicated public health RN, Mary has provided service to countless underprivileged kids and moms of Oklahoma. She would frequently use her own money to buy required nutritional supplements for families that couldn’t afford it and send the kids little cards or gifts for their birthdays. Mary’s calm demeanor will be missed.” —Susan Palmer, MD, PhD

“For more than a decade Mary has provided a wonderful service to children throughout Oklahoma in need of nursing care follow-up and management. She has given so much to these patients and it has been a joy to work alongside someone so hardworking and dedicated.” —Matthew Grim, MS

“Mary is my ‘go to person’ when I need answers or assistance with the NBS patient questions, telephone calls and/or faxes. Mary is always willing and eager to help, regardless of how busy her day is.” —Janice Lawrence

“Mary is a dependable colleague that will be truly missed. I would like to wish her farewell and hope she enjoys retirement.” —Ashley Taylor, MHS, PA-C

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Upper Left: The Section of Genetics Metabolic team.
Lower Left: Section members gather to wish Mary good luck in retirement.
Right: Dr. Palmer speaks about Mary’s years of service.
Celebrating Our MSGC Graduates

The MSGC Program Leadership is proud to announce that all of this year’s MSGC graduates successfully acquired genetic counseling positions that will begin this summer:

- **Jessica Anderson**
  Department of Veterans Affairs-Genomic Medicine Service, Salt Lake City, UT

- **Drew Cratsenberg**
  University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE

- **Sarah Montgomery**
  Duke University, Durham, NC

- **Dianne Samad**
  Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX

Dr. Hassed, Program Director and Erin Youngs, Assistant Program Director, look forward to welcoming five new students in August 2016, as the incoming Class of 2018:

- Alexandra Ellison, Michigan
- Caleb Heid, Missouri
- Emily Lancaster, Michigan
- Zachary Salvati, Illinois
- Emily Teague, Kansas

We are excited to have them join the Section of Genetics family!

For more information about the Genetics Section visit: [www.ouhsc.edu/genetics](http://www.ouhsc.edu/genetics)

After the official pomp and circumstance of graduation, the MSGC program graduates, families, faculty, staff and friends gathered at the home of Susan Hassed to celebrate their successful completion of the 2-year Masters of Science in Genetic Counseling program. This year, the weather was great and allowed for party-goers to socialize outside under a beautiful Oklahoma sky and sunset. There was also plenty of food and drink, potluck style, with the addition of traditional Persian main dishes made by Susan’s husband, Mohamad Shaaf.


New Faces

Jeremy Jinkins, BS
Research Assistant
Genetics Laboratory

Meng Liu, MD
Research Scholar
Genetics Laboratory

Zhongmei Wen, MD
Research Scholar
Genetics Laboratory
The Race4Jase is an annual fundraiser held in Enid, OK each June to help raise funds to support galactosemia research. The 5k/1-mile fun run is named after Jase Dershem who was diagnosed with classic galactosemia at just 6 days old. Classic galactosemia effects 1 in 30,000 to 60,000 newborns.

This year was the 4th year for the event and raised over $7600 and had 200 attendees; including Drs Klaas and Andrea Wierenga.

The Dershem’s are strong advocates for their son and other children with rare metabolic diseases.

Pictured L-R, back row: Jeremy and Jesse Dershem, Dr Klaas Wierenga, Dr Andrea Wierenga, Amber Jones, holding Holden, and Aaron Jones. Center front: Race honoree, Jase Dershem (Photo provided by Lacy Hoggard with LH Photography)
Trainees Begin in Genetics Laboratory

The Section of Genetics’ Clinical Laboratory Training Program welcomed two new trainees July 1, 2016. The training program is accredited by the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics. Hongcheng Wang, MD, PhD will begin a combined training program in Molecular Genetics and Cytogenetics and Young Mi Kim, PhD will begin a combined training program in Cytogenetics and Molecular Genetics. The training program is led by Dr. Shibo Li, the Laboratory Director of the OUHSC Genetics Laboratory.

Over the duration of their training, Dr. Wang and Dr. Kim will rotate through the Molecular Genetics, Cytogenetics and Biochemical laboratories, participate in regularly scheduled didactic lectures, Genetics case conference and also rotate in the Genetics clinic in OUCPB to observe interactions with the medical and genetic counseling staff. Upon completion of training, they will both be board eligible in Clinical Molecular Genetics and Genomics and Clinical Cytogenetics and Genomics.

We asked our new trainees 5 questions to learn more about them:

**Hongcheng Wang, MD, PhD:**

1. **When did you first become interested in Genetics?**
   
   A few years ago I started becoming interested in Genetics. During the past two years, two family members developed medical issues, so I made my commitment to serve in the field of genetics diagnosis.

2. **How many and which languages do you speak?**
   
   As the youngest child of an ordinary family that has three kids, I was raised in a small town in the northeast part of China. So, English is my second language. At this time point, I can only speak two languages, Chinese and English. My daughter was born here and goes to school at north Edmond. In order to help her learn Chinese, my wife and I speak Chinese at home.

3. **What’s your favorite color?**
   
   Navy has been my favorite color since I was a boy.

4. **How many different countries have you visited?**
   
   I finished all my education in China and then moved to the U.S. Like many other people, I love traveling. But so far these are the only countries that I have ever visited. Actually, I have toured more places in the U.S. than I did in China, though I had been living there for almost thirty years.

5. **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**
   
   First, it will take a couple of years to complete the program. Second, I wish I can continue serving in Dr. Li’s laboratory after the training. I have really enjoying working with the lab mates since the first day.

**Young Mi Kim, PhD:**

1. **When did you first become interested in Genetics?**
   
   As silly as it sounds, as a kid, I wanted to be a scientist who found a way to make people live forever and being invulnerable to diseases. However, after a little bit of high school science and a little more of my college science courses, I have come to the realization that it may be impossible at this time and era. However, I found genetics to be the closest thing to helping people live forever and being healthy, so that’s what still drives me to this day!

2. **How many and which languages do you speak?**
   
   I was born and raised in Korea, so I’m pretty good at Korean. I also speak a language that I’m currently answering your questions with.

3. **What’s your favorite color?**
   
   I love green, mostly because I love the color gradation of green onions!

4. **How many different countries have you visited?**
   
   I’ve visited China, Japan, Thailand, Italy, and Germany. I love exploring different countries, and I really wish my job gave me more time to explore! However, it doesn’t make me that sad because I love the place that I’m working now.

5. **Where do you see yourself in 10 years?**
   
   I see myself being in a lab that wishes to do anything that helps us prevent the genetic diseases that are so-called unavoidable, untreatable, or inevitable.
Matthew Grim, MS: graduated from the inaugural, and year-long OUHSC Leadership Council Program.

Hua Wang, MD, PhD: the current Medical Genetics Resident was awarded a Children’s Hospital Foundation Research Award to support resident research projects. She will be mentored by Klaas Wierenga, MD.

Yogesh Chutake, PhD: was invited to make a platform presentation entitled “Altered nucleosome positioning and deficient transcriptional initiation caused by the expanded GAA triplet-repeat in Friedreich ataxia” at the annual ataxia conference of the National Ataxia Foundation, April 2, 2016 (Orlando, FL).

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: was the featured speaker at the annual Friedreich Ataxia Research Alliance Ride Ataxia fundraiser; April 9, 2016 (Dallas, TX).

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: was invited to make a platform presentation entitled “Epigenetic Promoter Silencing in Friedreich Ataxia” at the International Congress of Genetics, 7th World DNA and Genome Day Conference in Dalian, China (April 25-28, 2016).

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: served on the grant review panel (RAC-1) of the Muscular Dystrophy Association May 13, 2016 (Tucson, AZ)

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: served as an “External Examiner” of the PhD Thesis (by Dantham Subrahamanyam) at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, India.

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: served on the grant review panel for the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences (AAAS) Research Competitiveness Service for projects funded through the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST; Saudi Arabia) Program.

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: served as an ad hoc reviewer for metabolomics pilot / feasibility projects for RTI's Regional Comprehensive Metabolomics Resource Center, supported by the NIH Common Fund.

Sanjay Bidichandani, MBBS, PhD: was appointed a full member of the Graduate Faculty in Neuroscience by the OUHSC Graduate Faculty Appointment Committee and the Graduate Council.

The Class of 2019 Oklahoma City & Tulsa SCM has awarded Dr. Sanjay Bidichandani the 2016 Aesculapian Award for excellence in teaching in the category of Faculty, Preclinical Sciences.

Dr. Bidichandani is also the recipient of the inaugural David L. Boren Professorship which recognizes excellence in teaching, research and leadership.

Congratulations, Dr. Bidichandani!

Recent Publications:

