

GENETIC COUNSELING PROGRAM

<https://tinyurl.com/UMGCPprogram>

Updates from the UMGCP: Learning, Growing, and Thriving During a Pandemic



Greetings from the UMGCP. As you would expect, the past few months have been a chaotic and challenging time here on campus for students, faculty, staff, and the community. Southeast Michigan was struck particularly hard, and Michigan Medicine has provided care to a high volume of COVID-19 patients. The teamwork and leadership of our healthcare system has been outstanding.

What has this looked like for our program? We have been nothing short of amazed at our students' resolve and focus. The students returned from spring break on March 9 and attended three days of in-person classes before the University announced that the entire campus would have two days to shift to online classes and that all clinical training activities would be "paused." Like students and faculty across the country, we quickly learned the nuances of Zoom - from breakout rooms to background settings - and became acquainted

with each other's kitchens, partners, and cats. Classes and exams wrapped up at the end of April and we had a great "Match Day," after a truly unique admissions cycle that converted halfway through from in-person to remote interview days.

As highlighted in the rest of this newsletter, all members of the class of 2020 completed their degree requirements, which in addition to classroom and clinical requirements, also meant delivering their thesis presentations remotely. The quality of these presentations was remarkable and one of the upsides to going virtual was the number of alumni, clinical supervisors, committee members and friends and family who were able to be in "attendance." The same can be said for our Zoom graduation party. We had over 75 attendees spread across the country. While we really, really would have preferred to be gathered together in celebration in Ann Arbor, it was a special night celebrating the Class of 2020.

We are looking forward to seeing our returning students continue to grow over the summer, which will undoubtedly include some unique clinical training activities. At the end of August, we will welcome our incoming class of students. Now, more than ever, we appreciate what it means to be part of a supportive and compassionate community. Please be well and take care - and GO BLUE!

Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

This year, we have decided to focus our Spring newsletter on singing the praises of the members of the class of 2020. Below are some highlights on each of the 9 graduates.



Anna Vercruyssen came to us from Portland, Oregon with one of the more unique backgrounds we have seen in applicants. She graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in Marine Biology, performed oceanography research, and then worked as a Residency Tracking & Recruitment Coordinator at Oregon Health & Science University. Anna was able to marshall all of these skills and experiences as part of her graduate training time. Before joining us in Ann Arbor she noted that "Seeing a genetic counselor's ability to partner with their patients to provide personalized education and emotional support is what deeply motivates me to pursue this career. It has...validated my desire to become a genetic counselor, as the combination of effectively communicating and helping people gain knowledge and make informed decisions fits well with my personal and professional goals." Her passion for psychosocial counseling was evident in the prenatal, pediatric, cancer, and cardiogenetics training she had at Michigan Medicine, Beaumont Dearborn and Oregon Health & Science University. Drawing on her background in education and program evaluation, she undertook innovative research on genetic counseling didactic curriculums and how graduate programs keep pace with the dynamic genomics environment in which they exist. She plans to work in pediatric genetics where she will be an asset to her patients and colleagues.



Elise Sobotka earned degrees in both public health and genetic counseling. While most of our dual degree students have earned the MPH in Health Behavior and Health Education, Elise was the 2nd UMGCP student to earn the MPH in Health Management and Policy. Her multidisciplinary approach to graduate education mirrored her undergraduate experiences at Brandeis University where she focused on Biology and German. Following graduation from Brandeis, Elise returned to her hometown of Seattle and worked with their local Planned Parenthood affiliate as a patient care coordinator. This experience played an important role in her thesis which used community engagement to explore barriers to cancer genetic services access for Planned Parenthood of Michigan patients at an increased risk for HBOC. During her 3 years of training at Michigan, Elise had the chance to work in a wide variety of clinical and public health settings that included University of Michigan's Ophthalmic Genetics, Pediatric, and Breast and Ovarian Cancer Risk Evaluation clinics, Swedish Hospital in Seattle, WA, and the Genetic Alliance where she developed advocacy resources for patients and families interested in implementing and/or expanding newborn screening programs. Elise's experiences at Michigan ring true to the perspectives that started her genetic counseling journey. She stated, "A quality that I believe will make me an effective genetic counselor is my leadership ability....Patients are going to be looking for someone that can offer answers, direction, and support, and someone that can advocate for them. And that can mean being a leader in the community - understanding what resources are available to patients and being able to fight for them." Elise is looking forward to working as cancer genetic counselor at the City of Hope.



Elysa Bond graduated from St. Olaf College in 2016 with her B.A. in Biology and Music. Deciding to become a genetic counselor did not happen overnight and along the way, Elysa considered a career in music and education. Her time as a Genetic Counseling Coordinator at Reproductive Genetic Innovations in Chicago helped her solidify her interest in genetics and genetic counseling. When she joined us in 2018, she wrote "Discovering the field of genetic counseling was a revelation that I could pursue a career in the sciences that marries the excitement and awe of scientific discovery with the chance to work one-on-one with patients to provide education and support at a critical time. It soon became clear to me that my passion for empowering others through education extended beyond the classroom." It was unclear at first where Elysa's strongest clinical interests resided. She had a chance to explore the worlds of prenatal, adult and cancer genetic counseling at Michigan Medicine and Flower Hospital and pediatric and adult genetics at Spectrum Health Medical Genetics in Grand Rapids. She also took a deep dive in the world of young adults with the genetic diagnosis of von Hippel-Lindau (vHL) disease. As part of her research thesis she explored the rationale and approaches to disclosure of their diagnosis and genetic risk to dating partners among young adults with vHL. This important work was recognized with funding from the Jane Engelberg Memorial Fellowship and the James V. Neel Fellowship. Her results provide important knowledge for both those with this diagnosis and their health care providers. Her research will also be helpful as she starts her first job as a cancer genetic counselor at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.



Ilana Miller has been yelling "Go Blue" her whole life. She is an Ann Arbor native, graduated from U-M in 2016 (B.S. in Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience) and is now the recipient of an M.S. in Genetic Counseling. Over the years, Ilana has had many chances to work with alumni of the UMGCP, including Samantha Greenberg (M.S., M.P.H. - 2016) who was one of her undergraduate research mentors, Barbara Biesecker (M.S. - 1981) at the NIH and Anna Cisler (M.S. - 2010) and Kyle Salsbery (M.S. - 2015) who introduced her to pediatric genetic counseling when she interned with them at the Marshfield Clinic. Her time at the NIH was instrumental in the development of her research thesis exploring family's decision making process to continue or stop searching for a diagnosis for their child with an undiagnosed condition. She collaborated with the Undiagnosed Disease Network to explore this process. Ilana's own words best exemplify her passion for genetic counseling: "Standing at the crossroads of research and patient care, genetic counselors have the unique and exciting opportunity to shape the field. The rapidly changing and expanding knowledge base of genomics and counseling techniques will encourage me to always seek opportunities to learn, and I am eager to do so." She will have a chance to put this vision into practice as a pediatric genetic counselor at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C.



For **Kimberly Hilfrank**, the intersection between genetics and public health was at the heart of her training at the University of Michigan. She graduates from Michigan with two degrees, one in Genetic Counseling and the second in Public Health: Health Behavior and Education. She arrived in Michigan from Pennsylvania where she was a member of the Pennsylvania College Advising Corps, a position that she took on after graduating from Franklin & Marshall College with a B.A. in Public Health. As a dual degree trainee, Kimberly spent 3 years with us and had a chance to train in the Henry Ford Health system, with our colleagues in Maine Medical Partners (Portland, Maine) and at UM's Breast and Ovarian Cancer Clinic, as well as varied multidisciplinary cancer clinics in our healthcare system. She also had the chance to spend time delving into the world of newborn screening where she supported a wide variety of educational programs for the Michigan Department of Community Health. In applying to graduate school Kimberly said, "I want to be the person to introduce a new idea to people and to make them learn to understand and trust this innovative method of preventative medicine." Kimberly's long standing passion for education was key to her thesis in which she was able to develop an online video module on the genetics of congenital hearing loss for a massive open online course targeted at educating ENT doctors. Kimberly has accepted a position as a cancer genetic counselor at Columbia University Medical Center/New York Presbyterian Hospital.



Kristen Wong, one of two members representing our southern cohort, graduated from Clemson University having trained in Genetics, Psychology and Microbiology. Her multidimensional academic background was important in her thesis work on the interplay between genetic counselors' personal and professional lives in the pediatric clinical setting and the impact of this practice on decisions to have or not have children. This focus was not surprising given Kristen's passion for "helping patients navigate the intersection of genetics, social influences, psychological factors, and ethical concerns to successfully cope with genetic disease. I see a clinical genetic counselor career as an opportunity to apply scientific discoveries to improve patients' health not only as responsibility but as fulfilling purpose." Once Kristen established herself in the northern wilds of Michigan, she had the chance to learn in varied clinical settings at Michigan Medicine, including our prenatal, pediatric, and cardiovascular genetics clinics. After she went west for the summer to learn at the University of Iowa, she decided to keep moving west and will be working at the University of Utah School of Medicine as a Genetic Counselor in their Division of Pediatric Neurology. One of the many distinguishing events of her graduate training was winning the Anita and Howard Cramer Fellowship award for the highest GPA among the GC graduate students.



Mackenzie Trapp is the second member of the southern cohort in the class of 2020. She made the journey to Michigan from North Carolina where she earned her B.S. in Cell/Molecular Biology from Appalachian State University and also had a chance to work with the UNC Cancer & Adult Genetics clinical team. Mackenzie's clinical training included spending time learning about cancer genetics at Flower Hospital in Toledo, Ohio; learning how to navigate the diversity of the world of adult genetics (UM Medical Genetics) and working with Logan Karns, M.S., a master genetic counselor, at the University of Virginia. Her research was focused on informing efforts to improve the care of individuals with Lynch syndrome by looking at patient adherence to screening guidelines and identifying barriers to regular colonoscopic screening. In Mackenzie's application to graduate school she told us that one of the reasons that genetic counseling was the right career for her was because...."Simply 'creating knowledge' in the laboratory left me missing the human component...I came to realize that I am deeply fulfilled when helping others. This is when I discovered genetic counseling. It is both a dynamic, rapidly evolving field and one that makes an impact on individual patients and their families. A career in genetic counseling would integrate the science of genetics with the compassion of patient care, allowing me to create and disseminate knowledge in ways that directly help others." Mackenzie will be using this passion to help children and their families as part of the pediatric genetics group at the University of Virginia.

"We are confident that you are now well prepared to face many of the challenges of being a Genetic Counselor and that you will be outstanding contributors to this incredibly important profession!

*--Tony Antonellis, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Human Genetics*





Nicholette Sloat came to Michigan after working as a Senior Clinical Research Coordinator at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. She had previously graduated with a B.S. in Psychology and minors in Biology and French and an M.A. in Psychology from the University of Dayton. During her clinical training, Nicholette spent time at Henry Ford Hospital in West Bloomfield, MI, worked with the pediatric, cancer and ophthalmic genetics groups at Michigan Medicine, and learned in a variety of Pediatric Specialty Clinics, including the Disorders of Sex Development Clinic, the Biochemical and Metabolic Genetics Clinic, and the Immunology-Hematology Comprehensive Clinic. Nicholette used her background in psychology to develop the focus of her thesis on the education of and decision-making process in patients with depression who undergo pharmacogenomic testing to guide their treatment. She created an educational intervention video and crowd sourced her work to understand patient attitudes, perceptions, and expectations for pharmacogenomic testing using the Theory of Planned Behavior. Nicholette has accepted a genetic counseling position at Duke Cancer Center in Clinical Cancer Genetics in Durham, North Carolina. As a strong but more reserved member of the graduating class, Nicholette reflected “Had I been aware of the field earlier in my academic career, I may have pursued genetic counseling sooner... Reflecting on my experiences and ultimate pursuit, I believe that I am better off having taken the long way. Genetic counseling...is a natural fit with my experiences and interests. I feel confident that this is the area where I can make an impact in science and healthcare.” We are also confident that she will continue to make a “Michigan” difference moving forward.



Following **Rachel Gosselin’s** graduation from Carroll University in Wisconsin, with a B.S. in Biology, she made her way to Ann Arbor ready to jump feet first into graduate training. Rachel was often spotted on campus either running or biking back and forth between her favorite spots within the Department of Human Genetics and her home in Ann Arbor. Her regular runs with the members of the class of 2019 and 2020 (including Ilana Miller, Colby Chase and Kimberly Hilfrank) often complemented her long study days. She left Ann Arbor to complete part of her clinical training at the Women and Infants Hospital in Providence, RI, but for the rest of the time, stuck close to her adopted home in Ann Arbor with stints in UM’s Cancer Genetics, Cardiovascular Genetics, and Pediatric Genetics clinics. These experiences were instrumental in her decision to pursue her first clinical GC position in Pediatrics and Pediatric Cardiovascular Genetics at Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, OH. Rachel is a bit of a renaissance GC and chose to focus her research endeavors within the oncology world where she explored cancer genetic counselors’ decision-making process in the use of polygenic risk scores. Her work was critical in understanding how early adopters make decisions to utilize emerging technology. When Rachel applied to us, she talked about the process she took to discover genetic counseling and stated, “...the best learning--the kind that changes your core--can only come from experience, but experience requires time, and time has brought me to the genetic counseling profession, and I am incredibly excited for where this path will take me.” We are also excited to see where she goes in the next steps of her professional journey.

“Getting to know and learn from all of you was one of my favorite things about my first year at Michigan. You helped make the department a home away from home and were always there for us. I can’t wait to see all the great things you will do.”
 --Nicole Huser, current GCP student

“Each of you have been infinitely curious and excited by your new discoveries about yourself, what it means to be both a genetic counselor and a compassionate health care provider. All of you are more than ready to take on the challenges ahead.”
 --Bev Yashar

