

# THE *biomedical* BEAT

Official Newsletter of the Graduate School of  
Biomedical Sciences



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## FROM THE DESK OF DEAN SCHNEIDER...

For most of us, the spring and summer of 2020 has proved to be immensely difficult. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives in ways that are almost unimaginable. Classrooms have been replaced by Zoom meetings. Graduations have been canceled. In many ways, the future is more uncertain than it has ever been before. Acts of brutality have set off waves of civil unrest opening our eyes to unacceptable inequalities and racial discrimination. COVID-19 cases are rising rapidly. Fear, anxiety, and apprehension have become a part of our everyday lives. It is time to make a stand together. It is time to make a binding commitment to promote change. Now, more than ever, it is time to live our Values Based Culture. We must speak out against racism and inequality everywhere we see it. We must replace hate with kindness, compassion, and

**Continued on page 2**



## FROM THE DESK OF DEAN SCHNEIDER (CONTINUED)

understanding. We must commit to change. We must support and ensure a world that is safe, free, and protective of all. We must start today to promote a better tomorrow.

I also would like to take a moment to celebrate all of our graduates. I would like to share with you my deepest appreciation for the diligent work you put in every day. I am awed by your enthusiasm, creativity, and your science. Louis Pasteur said it very well, "Science knows no country because knowledge belongs to humanity and is the torch that illuminates the world." So, to our graduates I say: Stay inspired, let's all make a difference together, and in doing so, make our world a brighter place!

## STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to our staff members who are celebrating work anniversaries and have a combined 60 years of service to TTUHSC!

Lauren Davis, 5 years

Tracy Cowin, 10 years

Terri Lloyd, 15 years

Pamela Johnson, 30 years



## STAFF MEMBER HEADING BACK TO SCHOOL

Congratulations to Velia Martinez, Admin Coordinator, on her acceptance to the Physician's Assistant program at the School of Health Professions! We will miss you but know you are going to do great things!



# OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

"There comes a time when silence is betrayal. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

-- attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The recent deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and others of the Black community can no longer be ignored. Now is the time that we must be united in our message: at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC), Black lives matter.

We must stand together to support and uplift our Black and minority communities that have been plagued by systemic racism and oppression for generations. The painful reminders of the injustices that still divide us have become more apparent.

We must condemn any form of discrimination and racism. We must acknowledge that these are not isolated issues, and we must come together as a community to fight these injustices.

We stand together with our TTUHSC team during this difficult time. When one person in our family hurts, we all hurt. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately hurt minority communities throughout our nation and in our local community. Now, more than ever, we must show the world that TTUHSC can be a beacon of hope not only for our West Texas community but also for the rest of the nation.

We must demonstrate that we will provide loving, compassionate care for all people, but especially for our minority communities. We must and will do better.

We must be able to create an environment where our Black and minority students' voices can be intensified and strive to create a community where no voice is left unheard.

We will not be silent:

- We will maintain schools that foster and take care of the most vulnerable in our community.
- We will be proactive in how we teach our students about the health care disparities that afflict our minority communities.
- We will continue to train our students and faculty in implicit bias.
- We will stand in solidarity and be leaders in the fight against injustice and inequality.
- We will have members of our Student Government Association and representatives of our diverse student organizations meet with local community leaders through our Deans' offices so their voices can be heard without fear of consequence.

As shared in the message by President Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D., in our commitment to treating each other constantly with compassion and respect, we will show the world that we are truly a kindhearted family united as one team in this fight for justice, inclusion, and equity.



# MASK REQUIREMENT POLICY

Our commitment during this pandemic is to maintain the safety and well-being of our TTUHSC community and those we serve. As such, our responsibility is to model and promote healthy behaviors. In doing so, we are also living our TTUHSC values, which drive everything we do.

TTUHSC requires everyone to appropriately wear facial coverings in public spaces on our campuses and university-related facilities, in accordance with the Texas Tech System policy.

Failure to comply may lead to disciplinary action for faculty, staff, and students, following verbal and/or written warnings. Initial efforts for compliance will focus on educating the TTUHSC community about the need of wearing facial coverings to minimize the spread of COVID-19. Further information regarding the disciplinary process is to come.

I would encourage you to refer to the editorial shared by School of Medicine Dean Steven Berk, M.D., (see attached). He makes a poignant case for wearing masks. Here's an excerpt:

“Masks are uncomfortable. Masks look really bad, especially if you are going to a bar to find a mate. Forcing people to wear masks is annoying, may even seem violating, but not that different from seat belts, or crosswalk or smoking on an airplane. The most sacred common ground for all of us is that no one wants to see an innocent person die of a virus infection. ... Wear a mask. Save lives.”

Sincerely,  
Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D.  
President



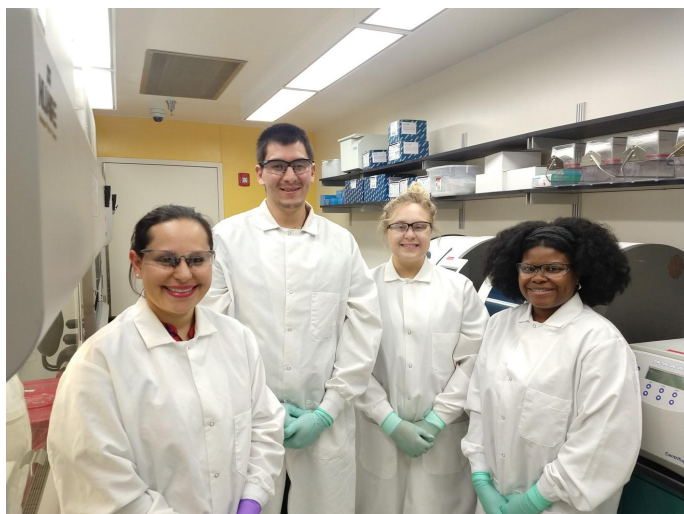
# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

## **GRADUATE AWARDS**

**K Wyatt McMahon Outstanding Graduate Award** - Ali Sifat

**Dean's Recognition Award** - Rachel Wagstaff, Rachael Akwii

**Harry Weitlauf Memorial Outstanding GMES TA** - Joey Almaguer



## **TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY BIOLOGICAL THREAT RESEARCH LABORATORY VOLUNTEERS**

At the end of March, we put out a call to arms for student volunteers to be trained to assist in COVID-19 testing at the Texas Tech University Biological Threat Research Laboratory at the Institute of Environmental and Human Health (TIEHH). Over 50 students reached out to Dr. Cynthia Reinoso Webb, Biological Threat Coordinator, and so far, 10 students have been trained! There are three

students who are currently working as part of the team, and we are so proud that they are all GSBS Ph.D. students! Brianyell McDaniel, Whitney Redman, and Josue Enriquez have been an “amazing addition to [the] team and are doing an outstanding job – their time and contribution is greatly appreciated.”

## **AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS, ETC.**

**Shanice Latham**, 2020 Excellence in Public Health Award from the U.S. Public Health Service Physician Professional Advisory Committee

**Joey Almaguer**, Community Foundation of West Texas Scholarship

**Omar Sikder**, Phi Kappa Phi Dissertation Fellowship

**Whitni Redman**, American Society of Microbiology Advocate

**Rachel Washburn**, SALUTE National Veteran's Honor Society Gold Tier Scholarship 2020

**Alec Egan**, Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society Inductee

**Jose Olascoaga**, Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society Inductee

**Bradley Schniers**, first place in the Immunohistochemistry category of The Greatest Stain competition put on by Bioss Antibodies



## STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS, CONT.

### AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, SCHOLARSHIPS, ETC.

**Whitni Redman, Taylor Hibler, Monica Sharma, Rachel Washburn, Amber Zickefoose, Aksha Upadhyay**, Phi Kappa Phi Initiates

**Sharavan Ramachandran**, Dean's Scholarship Award Recipient

**Fatema Zahra**, Dean's Scholarship Award Recipient

**Monica Sharma**, Dean's Scholarship Award Recipient

**Mariacristina Mazzitelli**, Dean's Scholarship Award Recipient

## SABR STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We are proud to announce that several of our recent SABR students have presented or published their research! **Nabeela Manal** presented her results at the Laura W. Bush Gender Symposium. **Darron Tharp**, with Dr. Nandana, authored the paper "How Prostate Cancer Cells Use Strategy Instead of Brute Force to Achieve Metastasis," published in *Cancers*. **Natasha Chugh**, with Dr. Tripathi, authored the paper "Neuroendocrine Differentiation of Prostate Cancer—An Intriguing Example of Tumor Evolution at Play, also published in *Cancers*.



## GRADUATE SERVES IN U.S. MILITARY

We love seeing what our students accomplish after graduation! Ryan Baxter graduated our GMS program and is now working as an Aerospace Medicine Resident with the U.S. Navy! We're so proud of you, Ryan!



# STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK 2020

Students from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry hosted the university's 32nd Student Research Week March 10-13 in Lubbock.

Student Research Week provides an opportunity for TTUHSC student investigators to showcase their work and hear presentations from distinguished national speakers related to the year's specific theme. Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences student Bradley Schniers, Student Research Week director for 2020, said this year's theme was 20/20 - Visions of Biochemistry.

"We wanted to have a little bit of a play on words with it being 2020 and show our gratitude for the Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry for hosting it," Schniers said. We also wanted to encompass and focus on the research that our presenters were giving as well."

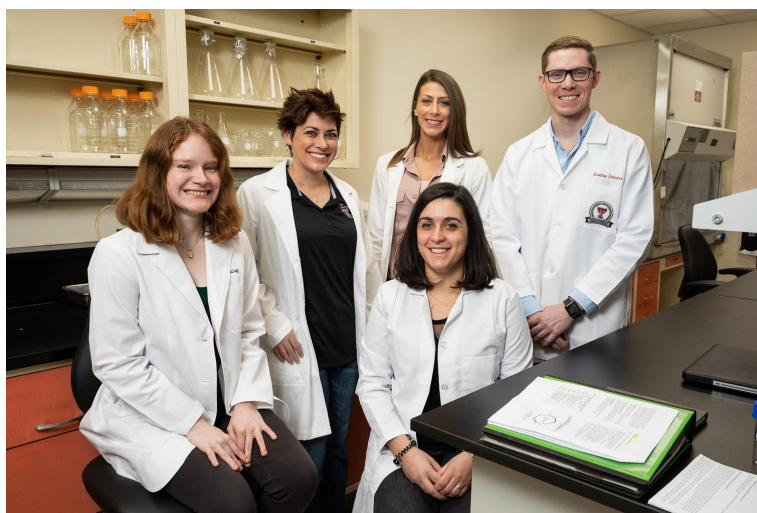
Travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic meant keynote speakers Ernest M. Wright, Ph.D., a Distinguished Professor at the UCLA Department of Physiology, and Maralice Conacci-Sorrell, Ph.D., assistant professor at the Department of Cell Biology at UT Southwestern Medical Center, were forced to cancel their appearances.

Wright was able to make his presentation via Zoom. Because Conacci-Sorrell was unable to do so, Schniers said Vadivel Ganapathy, Ph.D., chair of the TTUHSC's Department of Cell Biology and Biochemistry served as the second keynote speaker.

"We're really thankful that Dr. Ganapathy was able to step in and fill that time slot and give an interesting keynote address," Schniers said.

COVID-19 restrictions also forced the Graduate Student Association's (GSA) annual banquet to be canceled, though Schniers said there is still hope the event can be rescheduled later in the year.

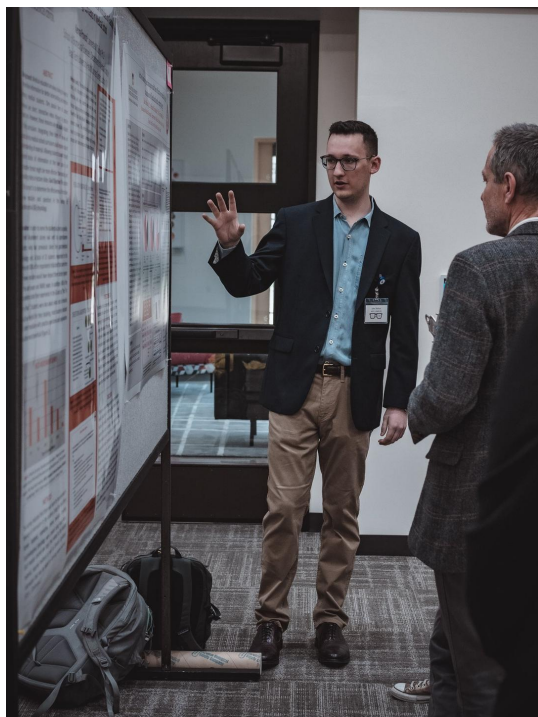
"I do want to make sure the GSA, and especially their president this year, Ksenija Korac, get recognition for the time that they put in," Schniers said. "Even though we were unable to have the banquet, they did put in the same amount of time and effort that we put into planning Student Research Week."



Above, SRW Committee: Morgana Kellogg, Rachel Washburn, Ksenija Korac, Bradley Schniers, Mariacristina Mazzitelli (sitting); not pictured: Ryan Sweazey



# STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK 2020



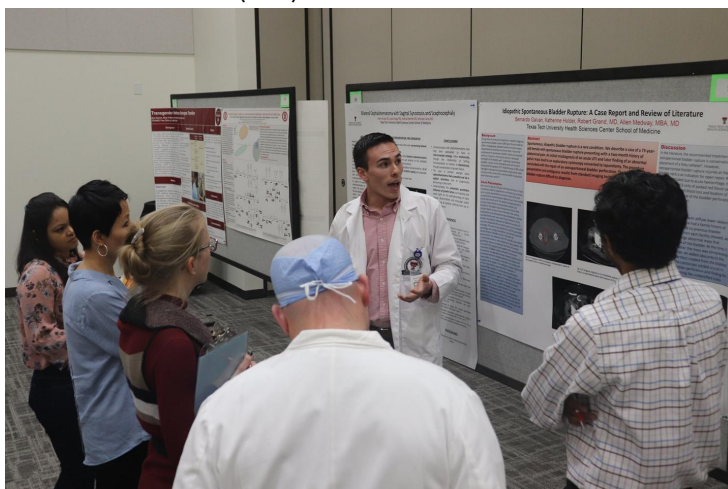
Student Research Week also features a poster competition whereby students present their research projects and discuss their findings and ideas from diverse research areas. In addition to Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences students, poster competition entries span the TTUHSC family, including the Schools of Health Professions, Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacy from campuses in Lubbock, Amarillo, El Paso and Abilene.

Schniers said there were 256 poster entries this year, a slight increase over the 2019 competition. “We did see a pretty significant increase in our first- and second-year presenters from the School of Medicine this year,” Schniers said. “Looking at the overall quality of the entries, especially with the new layout that we were

able to have in the Academic Event Center, I think the posters were really good this year.”

Poster competition winners for 2020 included:

- School of Nursing: Ashley James, BSN, RN and Julie Vereen, BSN, RN (1st Place); Matt Ellis and Troy Faulkner (2nd Place); and Elana Sherwood and Janelle Calloway (3rd Place)
- Health Professions: Brandi Murphy (1st)
- L. Luther Award: Chloe Cooper (School of Medicine)
- First- and Second-Year Medical Students, Graduate Medical Sciences and Public Health: Rachel Wagstaff (1st), Christopher Peterson (2nd) and Sabiha Armin (3rd)
- Third- and Fourth-Year Medical Students: Andres Guerrero Criado (1st), Kandis Wright (2nd), Ryan Dean (3rd)
- Residents and Fellows: Anastasia Ruiz (1st) and Ashish Sarangi (2nd)
- Undergraduate Research: Emily Ostermaier (1st), Betsaida Delgado (1st), Andrew Ibrahim (1st), Andrea Lopez (1st)
- School of Pharmacy/Pharmaceutical Sciences: Itishree Kaushik (1st)
- Lubbock Economic Development Alliance: Whitney Redman (1st), Shawn Macha (2nd) and Monica Sharma (3rd)
- Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences First- and Second-Year Biotechnology: Ismail Mohiuddin (1st) and Rachel Washburn (2nd)
- Third- and Fourth-Year Doctoral Students: Xiaobo Liu (1st), Diego Pedroza (2nd) and Monica Sharma (3rd)



# GSBS FACULTY MEMBER SELECTED FOR SCHOLAR PROGRAM

## Prestigious Award Will Allow Queen to Make Second Trip to Latvia

The Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences announced in April that Courtney Queen, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the school's Department of Public Health, has been selected to be a Fulbright U.S. Scholar.

Brandt Schneider, Ph.D., dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, said being selected to participate in the Fulbright Scholar program is a tremendous honor and he congratulated Queen for her achievement. "With less than 500 Fulbright U.S. Scholars working world-wide, this award clearly identifies Dr. Queen's research as being highly meritorious, innovative, impactful and wide-reaching," Schneider said. "The Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the Julia Jones Matthews Department of Public Health are incredibly proud of Dr. Queen and her accomplishments."



For the full press release, please [click here](#).

## FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to our **Outstanding Teachers of the Year!** Awarded to faculty members who exemplify knowledge, enthusiasm, patience, and interest in learning, this award is sponsored by the HSC Student Government Association and faculty members were nominated by students. This year's winners are: **Dr. Roger Sutton** - Biomedical Sciences; **Dr. Susan Bergeson** - Biotechnology; **Dr. Constantinos Mikelis** - PharmSci; **Dr. Duke Appiah** - Public Health.



# FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to **Dr. Ganapathy (top)**, recipient of the Chancellor's Council Distinguished Teaching Award, and **Dr. Abbruscato (bottom)**, recipient of the Chancellor's Council Distinguished Research Award!

**Dr. Liang's** lab recently made a significant advance in developing environmentally benign antibiotics. These antibiotics will be highly active in patients but will be quickly degraded to become antimicrobial inactive pieces once discharged into environment, hence eliminating the accumulation of antibiotic wastes in natural habitats that is the ultimate source of bacterial resistance. Their work was just published on *Biomacromolecules*. This paper is selected as the ACS Editor's Choice Article and ranks among the Most Read Paper at *Biomacromolecules*. It is also highlighted by C&EN in the Research News and a few other places (such as Rivet Radio: "Bottle-brush antibiotics busts bacterial membranes", 4/17/2020).



**Dr. Reynolds and Bala Koneru, Ph.D.** who did the work as part of his Ph.D. dissertation have developed a new classification for neuroblastoma, a childhood cancer with heterogeneous clinical outcomes. Dr. Reynolds' CPRIT-supported research, reported in the journal *Cancer Research*, used markers of telomere maintenance mechanisms to stratify high-risk neuroblastoma into three subgroups with different survivals. Building on the CPRIT grant findings, Dr. Reynolds secured a new grant from the National Cancer Institute to do the large confirmatory clinical study necessary to validate the new clinical risk stratification. If validated, the stratification has the potential to improve the analysis of future clinical trials in patients with high-risk neuroblastoma and reduce the intensity of therapy for the better risk patients. CPRIT supported Dr. Reynold's research with an Individual Investigator Research Award for Childhood Cancer (RR170510).

**Dr. Reynolds'** lab has received two new grants so far this year: CPRIT GD2 Expression and Response to Chemoimmunotherapy in Neuroblastoma and the Department of Defense Characterizing Tumor Evolution and Therapy Resistance in High-Risk Neuroblastoma Translational Team Science Award.

**Patricia C. Nelson, M.D., and Zuber D. Mulla, Ph.D.,** have a paper that has been accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed journal *Ophthalmic Epidemiology*. Nelson is Assistant Professor of Surgery at TTUHSC El Paso (Transmountain campus), and Mulla is Full Member in the GSBS Julia Jones Matthews Department of Public Health. Mulla is also Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Assistant Dean for Faculty Development at TTUHSC El Paso. Their article is entitled The Cost of Hospitalized Ocular Injuries in Texas, 2013-2014.



## PUBLICATIONS

For a complete list of faculty and student publications, please contact the Graduate School.



Sometimes it takes a student to help a student. Our Legacy Now Student Foundation (OLN) is a student-led organization that provides emergency financial assistance to students who are experiencing unanticipated hardship. OLN gives Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) students a place to turn to when the unexpected happens. Due to COVID-19, our students need your support now more than ever. Even while staying apart, we are all in this together. The students at TTUHSC are going to be the frontline heroes in our communities very soon! Please show them support now, so they can keep you healthy later.

[Click here](#) for to make a donation or to apply.

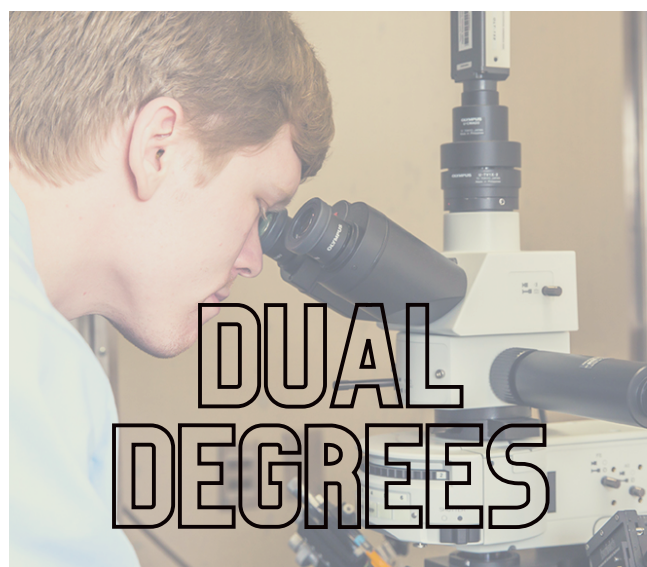
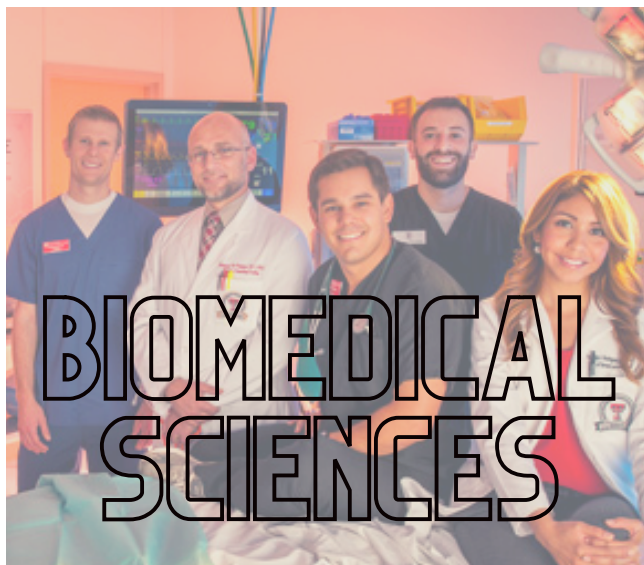
## GRADUATION UPDATE

All of the schools within the TTUHSC, including the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, have decided against holding Summer 2020 graduation events. As a Health Sciences Center, our primary concern is always to do no harm, and to promote health and safety for all. This is especially relevant when considering the gathering of hundreds of people during a global pandemic. Our President, Dr. Lori Rice-Spearman, and all five Deans of the HSC schools have agreed that this is the appropriate decision. In addition, Texas Tech University has decided that there will be no August commencement ceremonies this year.

We understand that many of you will be disappointed, but I hope you will understand that health and safety for all is our greatest concern. We are so very proud of each and every one of you and seeing the joy on your faces at graduation and sharing the event with you and your families and friends is one of the rewards we anticipate and cherish. We share your regret that we had to miss that event in May, and now also in August. For those of you that have incurred regalia rental expenses, the GSBS office will be reaching out to you with additional information. Each one of our 2020 graduates is invited to our May 2021 graduation event. We are very proud of you, we wish you the very best, and hope that you will be able to join us next year to celebrate your accomplishments.



# PROGRAMS & CONCENTRATION WEBSITES



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