

# THE GSAWG REPORT

*Part of the UI COM Committee on Student Experience*

## An Introduction to GSAWG

*By Dr. Arynah Pradhan and Alexandra (Lexie)  
Socovich, GSAWG co-chairs*

Welcome to the first communication from GSAWG - the "Graduate Student Advising Workgroup". GSAWG was first founded in August by Deans Bellur Prabhakar and Kathleen Kashima, as well as several GEMS faculty. This group decided to found GSAWG so the college could create and implement an advising system for graduate students. GSAWG interacts with and regularly reports to the College Committee on Student Experience (CCSE). GSAWG began its work by conducting a broad survey of all UI COM graduate students in late fall 2020.

As co-chairs, we are now utilizing the results of the initial survey to create an action plan to improve the graduate student experience. In this newsletter, we aim to share the results of the survey and our plans moving forward to include student feedback, celebrate student achievements, and champion student wellbeing. We invite all graduate students to join our [Slack channel](#) to connect with students and stay up-to-date on COM events.

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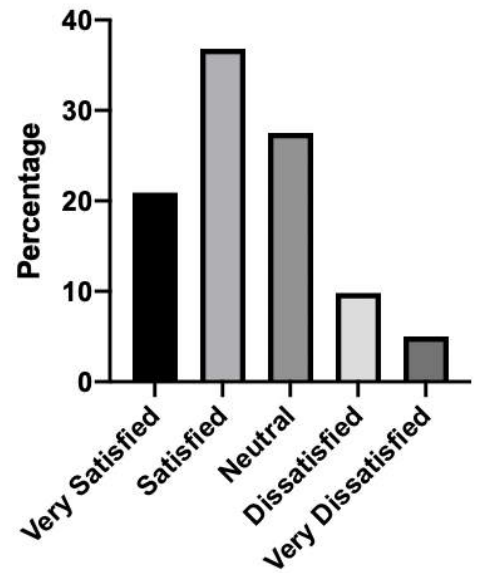
# GSAWG Fall 2020 Survey Results

OVER 150 STUDENTS SURVEYED

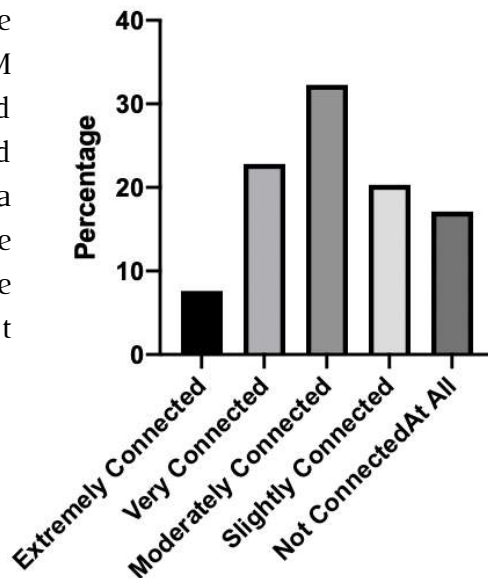
Thank you for making your voice heard! Our November survey was the first of its kind to unite graduate students across programs and campuses. This included GEMS, Neuroscience, and Bioengineering PhD programs, as well as both Chicago and Rockford Masters programs. We were pleased to see that many students are overall satisfied with their academic programs. We identified two critical areas of improvement common to different student populations: feeling disconnected and not supported in academic or career goals.

These results were presented to COM leadership and GSAWG has formed new committees as a direct results of the survey to improve the graduate student experience.

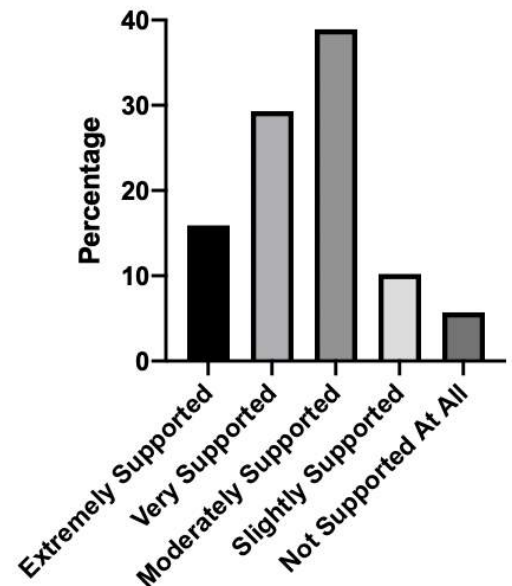
Are You Overall Satisfied?



How Connected Are You?



Are Your Career Goals Supported?



# GSAWG Member Spotlight

*Five New Students Added and Looking for More Representatives*

To further understand and improve the graduate student experience, GSAWG has added five new student members spanning different departments and campuses. In our first edition, we are highlighting our new student representatives and their impressive backgrounds. Amplifying and listening to student voices is at the heart of GSAWG's mission - if you are interested in joining a GSAWG subcommittee as a student representative, please email GSAWG co-chairs at [asocov2@uic.edu](mailto:asocov2@uic.edu) and [pradhan4@uic.edu](mailto:pradhan4@uic.edu)



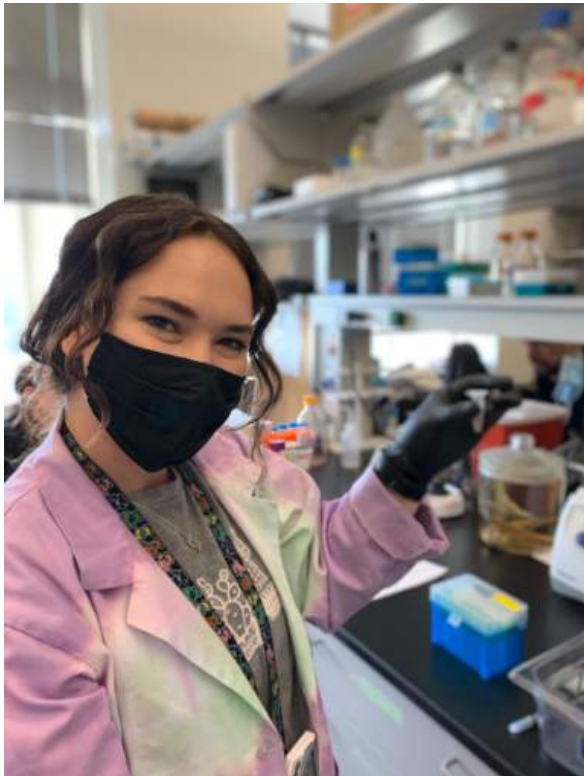
## **Mounica Bandela, BioE**

I'm Mounica Bandela, a predoctoral student from the Department of Bioengineering, University of Illinois at Chicago. I received my Masters degree from the same department in 2018. Currently, I'm working under Dr. Steven M Dudek, Chief of Division of Pulmonary, Critical care, Sleep, and Allergy. My research focuses on exploring the role of cytoskeleton proteins in cigarette smoke-induced lung endothelial injury. I recently won American Heart Association-predocotrinal fellowship, among various other awards. I'm a curious individual fascinated by science. I believe science is a "gold standard" solution for major problems around the world.

# GSAWG Member Spotlight

## Paula Bazzino, GPN

My name is Paula Bazzino and I am a second year graduate student in the Graduate Program of Neuroscience (GPN). I'm working in Dr. Mitchell Roitman's laboratory where we seek to understand the role of the mesolimbic system in both adaptive and maladaptive motivated behaviors. In my free time I like to explore the city, paint and go for a run. As part of the GSAWG and co-chair of the career subcommittee with the goal to facilitate students' success in job hunting by providing a list of updated career resources.



## Kirty Krieger, GEMS

My name is Kirty Krieger and I am a second year GEMS student in the Cancer Biology concentration. Working in the Larisa Nonn lab, I focus on the disparity surrounding vitamin D deficiency and increased risk of aggressive prostate cancer. We believe that vitamin D sufficiency supports normal prostate differentiation and growth! When I am not in the lab, I enjoy roller-skating around the city, trying out new places to eat, walking Cleo (my dog) around the medical district, and attending live music venues (unfortunately not during COVID). I am most excited to be a part of GSAWG to assist in creating positive communication between students and program staff to overall improve the graduate student experience. As a co-chair of the culture subcommittee, I hope to improve the culture and communication for all COM programs.

# GSAWG Member Spotlight



## Leslie Carrillo-Sáenz, GEMS

My name is Leslie Carrillo-Sáenz and I am a 3rd year student in the Department of Physiology & Biophysics. When I entered the GEMS program in fall 2018 as a first-generation Latina student, one big source of support for me included my peers and the friendships that developed amongst my cohort while navigating this new community (UIC). In summer 2019 I began working in Dr. Pingwen Xu's laboratory in the Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism where we seek to understand the role of the brain on metabolic factors such as energy homeostasis in complex diseases such as obesity. As part of the Student Culture Development subcommittee in GSAWG, I am eager to serve as a bridge between my peers, including underrepresented minority (URM) students, with UIC personnel to communicate your specific needs and concerns. My hope for all my peers in COM-programs would be that they remember their time training at UIC in a memorable way!

## Preksha Shahagadkar, Biotech

My name is Preksha Shahagadkar, a second year Master student from the Medical Biotechnology program. I work in Dr. Gnanasekar Munirathinam's lab and my project mainly focuses on Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) and potential treatment for BPH with lesser side effects. In my free time, I love listening to music and skateboarding! The most rewarding aspect of being part of GSAWG is that I can contribute to improving student experience. This is also a great learning experience.



# Protecting the Student Learning Environment

*in collaboration with Tim Lacy and GSAWG*

In its ongoing efforts to meet goals outlined in UI COM's Strategic Plan, the College seeks to improve the learning environment for its valuable graduate students, as well as their faculty and staff colleagues. We want to foster successful, sustainable, and effective graduate programs. To help ensure improvement, the responsibilities of the Director of Medical Student Learning Environment are being expanded to accommodate graduate student mistreatment concerns. As has been done with medical students, Lacy will offer an outlet for concerns about mistreatment. This means consulting about possible mistreatment, as well as helping process actual reports.

Given this expansion of duties, Dr. Lacy's title has been changed to Executive Director, Student Learning Environment. The MSLE website and policy documents are now updated to reflect these changes. Dr. Lacy has been with the College of Medicine since September 2018. Prior to that, he served, from 2012 to 2015, as an assistant professor and academic advisor in Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine. There he assisted students and residents—through seminars, workshops, and one-on-one sessions—regarding personal, academic, and professional/career issues.

He has also advised pre-health professions students at Loyola (2006-08), and graduate students in health informatics, bioinformatics, and regulatory compliance at both Northwestern University and the University of Chicago (2015-2018). Dr. Lacy's PhD and MA degrees are in the field of history, from Loyola University Chicago, and he possesses a BS in chemistry from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He has taught individual graduate electives and undergraduate courses on the history of medicine, health, and technology.

***Graduate students can now report mistreatment at this website. Contact Tim Lacy with general questions about the reporting process or the privacy of the reports at [timlacy@uic.edu](mailto:timlacy@uic.edu) or 312-413-9632 for more information.***

Tim Lacy, Executive Director of the student learning environment, provides a new resource advocating for graduate student wellbeing



# Resiliency Center

"The University of Illinois College of Medicine Student Resiliency Center provides mental health services to UI COM medical and graduate students. Services are provided by clinicians who do not have any evaluative role for College of Medicine students"

GSAWG would like to remind students about the Resiliency Center as a mental health resource. The Resiliency Center is available to students across campuses and programs. The center is still open and all sessions are Telehealth (either Webex video or telephone). Students looking to make appointments can contact the Resiliency Clinic Director Jenna Duffecy, PhD to begin the intake process. Dr. Duffecy can be reached at [jduffecy@uic.edu](mailto:jduffecy@uic.edu) or 312-413-1225.

Senior Associate Dean of Students Kathleen Kashima, PhD is co-chairing the UIC Student Mental Health Task Force with Dean Linda Deanna. This task force members are nearly all students and will make recommendations for community-based activities at UIC. GSAWG is committed to the well-being of students and will continue to work with UIC groups to improve mental health resources.

[HTTP://CHICAGO.MEDICINE.UIC.EDU/EDUCATION/MD-STUDENT-SERVICES-AND-SUPPORT/RESILIENCY-CENTER/](http://chicago.medicine.uic.edu/education/md-student-services-and-support/resiliency-center/)

[HTTPS://ROCKFORD.MEDICINE.UIC.EDU/EDUCATION/MD-STUDENT-SERVICES-AND-SUPPORT/STUDENT-HEALTH-WELLNESS/](https://rockford.medicine.uic.edu/education/md-student-services-and-support/student-health-wellness/)



# December Graduates

## **ROCKFORD MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MEDICAL BIOTECHNOLOGY**

REEM BAGABAS  
RAVEENA GUPTA  
JACOB MANTHE  
VALERIA MELENDEZ  
DIANA PELEDIS  
JENNA PIMENTEL  
NEHAL SINGH  
PRASANNA KUMAR SOMASUNDARAM BASKAR  
SHRUTHI VENKATASUBRAMANIAN  
PRIYADHARSHINI VISWANATHAN

## **GRADUATE PROGRAM IN NEUROSCIENCE**

KANA HAMADA  
HOORIYAH RIZAVI

## **GRADUATE EDUCATION IN MEDICAL SCIENCES**

CASSANDRE COLES  
JAMES HOPKINS  
KAYLEIGH TOVAR

## **BIOENGINEERING**

BISWAJIT MAHARATHI  
ZHENG ZHONG  
RAHUL MEHTA  
PRITESH PARMAR



# GSAWG Members

**Mounica Bandela** - BioE student, careers subcommittee

**Paula Bazzino** - GPN student, careers subcommittee co-chair

**Jenny Baker**, project manager

**Mark Brodie, PhD** - GEMS, culture subcommittee

**David Eddington, PhD** - BioE

**Ahlke Heydemann, PhD** - GEMS, careers subcommittee co-chair

**Mia Johnson** - GEMS director of program administration, commencement committee co-chair

**Kathleen Kashima, PhD**- senior associate dean of students

**Kirby Krieger** - GEMS student, culture subcommittee co-chair

**Amy Lasek, PhD** - GPN

**Julie Mann** - MSTP director of program administration, commencement committee co-chair

**Bradley Merrill, PhD** - GEMS co-director, culture subcommittee

**Amynah Pradhan, PhD** - GPN and co-chair

**Leslie Carillo-Sáenz** - GEMS student, culture subcommittee

**Preksha Shahagadkar** - Rockford Biotechnology student, culture subcommittee

**Daniel Shaye, PhD** - GEMS, culture subcommittee co-chair

**Khalifah Sidik, PhD** - Rockford Biotechnology, career subcommittee

**Alexandra (Lexie) Socovich** - GEMS student and co-chair

*Students interested in joining GSAWG subcommittees may email the co-chairs at [asocov2@uic.edu](mailto:asocov2@uic.edu) and [pradhan4@uic.edu](mailto:pradhan4@uic.edu)*

