FALL 2024 - SPRING 2025

Annual Newsletter

BIOTECH CLUB AT UT SOUTHWESTERN

BIOTECHNOLOGY CLUB AT UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER

Season Overview

Hi everyone, and welcome to the Biotechnology Club at UT Southwestern's Annual Newsletter! Over the course of the 2024-25 academic year, we have had the privilege and the fortune of hosting some incredible guest speakers and providing a wide range of programming for our membership. We launched so many new initiatives this year that we are very excited to recap for you!

We launched the Intellectual Property Education initiative, focusing on the patenting process as well as how scientists can become involved with the legal and administrative side.

On the external affairs/outreach side, we sought new opportunities to bring (much) younger scientists into the fold through volunteering opportunities at the Dallas ISD STEM Expo and UTSW BioPrep. The She-E-O Series' Inaugural speaker event took place in January, allowing us the opportunity to spotlight women in biotech executive roles.

We worked on connecting our international trainees with counsel on the Visa transition process, bringing in support from immigration attorneys as well as our Office of International Affairs.

After a hard year of work, we launched our BioBridge Fellowship, supported by the Graduate Career Development office, to provide integral biotech internship experience to our graduate students. Further, we were also able to connect 92 trainees with industry mentors through our Academia to Industry Mentorship program using a very vigorous matching process.

Our season concluded with a powerful, moving patient panel event hosted by our Seminar Series team, reminding us of the value of scientific discovery and translation.

We hope you enjoy hearing more about our achievements this year within this newsletter, and stick with us for what's ahead!

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION!

HTTPS://WWW.BIOTECHNOLOGYCLUBUTSW.COM/

Where Science Meets Law: Turning Curiosity into Action

When we set out to build the intellectual property education arm of the Biotech Club, we had one goal: to help biomedical scientists realize that they don't have to choose between their love of science and an interest in law, they can do both. And this year, we made serious progress.

Navigating the Patent system: Insights from the USPTO

We also brought in the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) for a campus-wide talk on how their work directly affects scientists, what resources are available, and how inventors, yes, even grad students, can engage with the patent system. As well as in partnership with the Office of Technology Development (OTD), we hosted the director of the OTD and a patent attorney from a firm UT Southwestern works closely with, offering an inside look at how discoveries are translated into legal protections, business opportunities, and real-world impact.

A Scientist's Guide to Legal Careers

We launched a 9-part blog series exploring the intersection of science and law.

- Highlighted why biomedical scientists might consider a career in patent law.
- Published a brief, accessible guide to patent law basics for grad students, future inventors, and curious minds.
- Shared actionable networking advice—prompting several readers to schedule Zoom chats to explore the career path further!
- Covered topics such as application to law school as a graduate student, ethics in intellectual property, emerging trends in IP, and IP considerations for start-ups.

It was a powerful reminder that if you discover something worth patenting while you are an employee at the university, your first conversation needs to be with the OTD before the public finds out (that means presenting at conferences too).

Next Steps for IP Education

Looking ahead, **Samantha Sakells** will be taking the reins of IP programming and is already working to kickstart a long-overdue Patent Law Course at our institution. Meanwhile, more blog posts are in the pipeline, diving deeper into the science-law interface.

Please stay tuned as we continue our mission to support those navigating the science-to-law pathway by offering practical resources and clarifying guidance.

Connecting, Empowering, and Inspiring Our Biotech Community

Over the past year, the External Affairs branch has been dedicated to fostering meaningful connections between our student members, local communities, and industry partners, while promoting engagement and diversity in the biotech field.

We kicked off with our **Annual Biotech Networking Mixer**, where students from institutions like UTSW, UTD, and UTA, connected with professionals from organizations including the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association, Healthcare Wildcatters, and biotech companies at BioLabs at Pegasus Park. Attendees learned about our club's initiatives, shared feedback to help shape future efforts, and enjoyed generously sponsored refreshments from Lyda Hill Philanthropies. The event was a vibrant space to build networks and gain valuable industry insights.

Building on this momentum, we launched the **She-E-O Series**, an inspiring fireside chat featuring accomplished women founders and leaders in science and healthcare. This series aims to empower the next generation of diverse leaders by sharing authentic stories of challenges and success. Open to all members, it has become a cornerstone for elevating voices that shape the biotech ecosystem.

In the spirit of community outreach, we joined forces with the Biochemistry Society and Science Committee (BSSC) for **BioFriday at UTSW Bioprep**. Our collaboration helped deliver hands-on science demonstrations to over 200 Dallas ISD students, sparking curiosity through engaging experiments like Play-Doh circuits and magic wand activities for elementary school kids. This event not only amplified our visibility in the broader community but also allowed our executive team to unite around our shared mission of inspiring future scientists. We also proudly participated in the **Dallas ISD STEM Expo**, the largest STEM event in Texas held at Fair Park. This all-day event celebrates STEM careers and coursework, inviting participants of all ages to explore hands-on, interactive sessions offered by local colleges, universities, museums, engineering groups, and STEM-focused organizations.

These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to connecting students with peer networks, external partners, and community opportunities, creating a supportive space for growth and inspiration in biotech.

Supporting Global Talent in Their Next Steps

The International relations team has concluded a rewarding year, marked by four key initiatives received with positive feedback by the international student community. Our primary goal for the year was to provide support to our international students as they navigate post-graduation transitions, particularly within the biotech industry for both PhD holders and postdocs.

Our inaugural event - 'OPTmise your Path' held in collaboration with the Office of International Affairs (OIA), offered F-1 visa holders invaluable guidance and up-to-date information regarding timelines and guidelines for applying for post-graduation opportunities, ensuring they were well-equipped for their next steps.

As part of our effort to explore global biotech opportunities, our second event, 'Navigating careers in Europe' brought together UTSW alumni who have successfully transitioned from the US to the European biotech job market. This panel facilitated insightful discussions on the differences between biotech job markets across the Atlantic, providing students with a wider perspective on potential career paths.

Our most significant undertaking this year was a two-part collaboration with the UTSW Postdoctoral Career Development Committee (pCDC), OIA, and Fragomen, a leading immigration law firm in the world. The first part of the event, in collaboration with OIA, covered important guidelines and planning strategies for J-1 visa holders considering transitions to Green Cards or H-1B visas, resulting in a high turnout of over 100 attendees. Building on the success of the first part of the event, part II—featuring experts from Fragoman— offered the audience a more in-depth legal perspective and updates on current immigration policies.

Overall, this year proved to be rewarding as we launched a diverse array of programs and received active participation and positive feedback from both students and staff. We are excited to build upon this year's success and expand our initiatives in the coming year, continuing to empower our international student and postdoc community and strengthen connections with the global biotech network.

BioBridge Fellowship: Connecting Students with Industry

The BioBridge Fellowship, a cornerstone of the fellowship initiative, provides invaluable internship opportunities for all UTSW graduate students. Generously supported by LHP, this program — like many offered by the Biotech Club — is designed to bridge the gap between academic training and real-world industry experience.

We're thrilled to announce significant progress in expanding internship access for graduate students. Thanks to the dedicated support of the Office of Graduate Career Development, we've successfully navigated internal processes and secured the necessary approvals to launch the BioBridge Fellowship this academic year.

Our inaugural partnerships are with UTSW's Office of Technology Development (OTD) and Signature Biologics, LLC, a local biotech company. Through these collaborations, two exceptional graduate students have been offered full-time, 12-week fellowships. We anticipate hosting a panel discussion at the conclusion of their fellowships, where they'll share their experiences and insights. Looking ahead, we are committed to expanding these fellowship opportunities in the coming years, further enriching the professional development of our graduate students.

BIOBRIDGE Fellowship

Building Bridges: Academia to Industry Mentorship Program

This year marked an exciting phase of growth for our Academia to Industry Mentorship Program, with 92 mentees matched to 48 mentors, a 59% increase in participation from the previous year! The significant rise in engagement reflects our growing community's enthusiasm for career exploration beyond academia and the strong demand for personalized guidance during this critical transition.

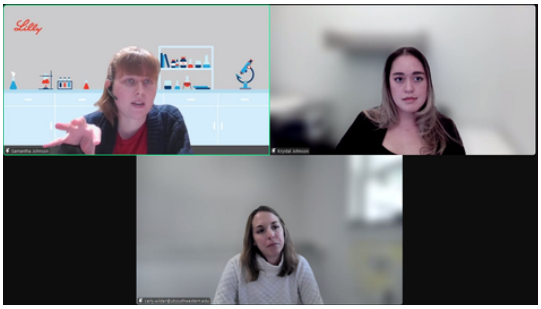
Through one-on-one mentorship connections, trainees had the opportunity to explore a wide range of industry paths including biotech, pharma, venture capital, consulting, startups, and more. Many mentees shared that the guidance they received not only helped them better understand potential roles and hiring practices but also gave them greater confidence in navigating their own transitions. For mentors, it's been equally rewarding to offer candid insights and empower the next generation of scientific leaders.

What's been especially rewarding this year is seeing how much the program has grown in both structure and spirit. This year, we focused on creating a more structured and inclusive program experience by incorporating mid-year check-ins, curated resources, goal-setting support, and communication tips to foster stronger engagement. These efforts not only enhanced the mentor-mentee experience but also contributed to tangible outcomes from mentees landing internships to building lasting professional relationships beyond the program.

As we look ahead, we're excited to build on this momentum by expanding our mentor pool, even further into emerging areas like digital health and translational R&D and broadening our program's reach and impact. Whether you're a trainee exploring industry opportunities or a professional eager to give back, this is a chance to be part of a growing network that supports growth on both sides. Let's keep bridging the gap between academic research and real-world innovation together!

Seminar Series: Exploring Careers and Innovation

We kicked off our seminar series initiative this past academic year with a panel titled **"Industry Postdocs: Careers Beyond Academia"** featuring scientists from a variety of different pharmaceutical companies. Our panelists, Dr. Krystal Johnson (current postdoc at Alnylam Pharmaceuticals), Dr. Carly Wilder (previous postdoc at Boehringer Ingelheim), and Dr. Samantha Johnson (previous postdoc at Eli Lily and Company) all shared with us their career trajectory from academia to industry, and how their industry postdoctoral position has benefited them. We similarly hosted our "Biotech on the Coasts" series, learning about the biotech hubs in Boston and San Diego.



Moving towards the business side of industry, entrepreneurship is a vital aspect of biotech. However, the process of founding a biotech company is often allusive to scientists. To increase scientists' exposure to entrepreneurship, we showcased two speakers with experience in this area. Our first seminar titled **"Building Bridges: My Path from Science to Entrepreneurship"** featured Dr. Rui Zhang, co-founder and CEO of XGen Bio. Dr. Zhang spoke about his experiences starting a company centered around technologies that are advancing research in lipid nanoparticles (LNP).

We dove into the world of life science valuation with Tyler Ridely, MSc, CPA, from Weaver to discuss essential principles and methodologies used to financially analyze biotech, pharma, and healthcare innovations. The **"Fundamentals of Life Science Valuation"** seminar offered a unique opportunity to learn how assets and businesses in the life sciences are valued and how this can impact a company.

We concluded this year with a patient panel event titled "Rare Disease, Real Impact: How a Nameless Disease Created a Community at SLC6A1 Connect." This powerful and thought-provoking event centered on the rare neurological disorder SLC6A1. The event brought together voices from both the scientific and patient advocacy communities to explore how translational research can impact the lives of patients. The panel was moderated by Amber Freed, founder and CEO of SLC6A1 Connect, a nonprofit established to fund research for her son's rare disease. She was joined by Whitney Feldman and Kimberly Fry, two additional mothers of children with SLC6A1, and Dr. Steven Gray, a UTSW professor driving forward research on SLC6A1 gene therapy.

Together, these events have offered invaluable exposure to a wide range of biotechnology careers and highlighted the real-world impact of scientific innovation. We look forward to building on this momentum in the coming year with even more seminars that explore emerging topics and careers in biotech.

Farewell and Thank you

The Biotech Club has grown, the opportunities have expanded, and all that wouldn't be possible without the passion of our membership and the determination of our leadership team. With that, we are very grateful to our departing leadership team members for their contribution to our programming.
We can't wait to see what your future holds!

Abbas Zaki, as outgoing president, oversaw our executive team's expansion and the start of new initiatives including the "A Day at Novartis" virtual panel, and was a constant source of motivation.

Shawn Huang, as a former VP, consistently led our Professional Headshot Events, supported event coordination, and expanded our club's collaborative efforts.

Lexus Tatge, PhD, brought her IP initiative to life with the "A Scientist's Guide to Legal Careers" blog and events with the OTD office, introducing us to patent law.

Victor Tse, PhD, led the impactful "Rare Disease, Real Impact" patient panel event, a monumental event that explored the junction between scientific advancement and patient communities.

Minwoo Kim supported our PhD to Industry Mentorship Program, overseeing 92 matches with industry mentors for our club members.

Desiree DeHart established new connections with student organizations at UTD and UTA.

Sonya Ostashevskaya-Gohstand lead our Seminar Series and launched our first Patient Panel in 2024!

Additionally, we are very grateful to **Amogh Vaidya, PhD**, and **Kara Poole**, our outgoing Board Advisors who dedicated time to our organization through a leadership team restructure and previously led our executive team.

Behind the Biotech Club

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Our Partners in Innovation

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all our collaborators, partners, and sponsors whose support has made this year's events possible. Your generosity—whether through funding, resources, or shared expertise—has empowered us to bring innovative programs, inspiring speakers, and valuable networking opportunities to our members. Together, we've been able to foster a vibrant community of aspiring scientists, entrepreneurs, and leaders in biotech. We look forward to continuing these partnerships as we work toward advancing education, innovation, and collaboration in the years ahead.

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