

MHP Alumni Newsletter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MHP | UF COLLEGE OF MEDICINE



A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear Medical Honors Program Alumni,

By way of introduction, we are Peter Sayeski and Danielle Thomas. As the Director and the Assistant Director, respectively, of the Medical Honors Program (MHP, formerly Junior Honors Medical Program), we are both honored and humbled to lead this program. For the past nine months, we have worked together to identify ways to build upon the prior success of the MHP. One such way that we have identified is to bring the MHP family closer together. To this end, we have created this MHP Newsletter. It will be used as a vehicle to share news about the program and the people associated with it. In this inaugural issue, our current MHP students have interviewed Ms. Thomas and I under a column entitled, "TEN QUESTIONS." The hope is that you will learn a little bit about the two of us. In future issues, various students, alumni, faculty, and staff will be featured. Consequently, you may hear from our students requesting an interview with you. Our plan is to publish one issue each Fall and one issue each Spring, as a means for us to stay connected with one another.

To bring the MHP family closer together via an alternate approach, we have organized an MHP reception as part of the UF COM Alumni Weekend. Specifically, we are having an MHP Alumni-Student reception on Friday, November 9, 2018 at 4:30 pm in the Harrell Medical Education Building. This will be a wonderful opportunity to see old friends and make new ones. Moreover, it will be a great way for our MHP students to form both professional and social networks with all of you. If you are able to join us, please RSVP by October 29th to MED-ADMISSIONS@UFL.EDU or call 352-273-7990. We hope to see you there!

One thing that we wish to briefly mention in this missive is our vision for the MHP. Ms. Thomas and I have noticed that regardless of your professions, a common denominator amongst all of you is that you are leaders in your respective medical fields. Consequently, we have modified the MHP curriculum to include formal leadership training for our students.

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Letter from the Directors (Cont.)

The purpose is to augment the leadership and communication skills the MHP students enter the program with, and arm them with transformational leadership skills that will be useful to them in their future medical endeavors. We are fortunate in that the senior administration within the UF COM will be involved with this as well. Moreover, given your collective experiences, we would like to recruit some of you into this effort. Consequently, we hope that you are amenable to this, should we reach out to you for assistance.

Several months ago, Ms. Thomas and I approached the UF COM administration about setting up a fund that would directly benefit the MHP. The administration approved our request and the endowed MHP Fund was created and will exist, in perpetuity. Donations to the fund will go ENTIRELY in support of our MHP students.

Expenditures will be in the areas of scholarship, leadership training, research, innovation, and education. We ask that you look for the "MHP FUND" write-up contained in this newsletter and consider donating to the program.

To further facilitate the communication amongst the MHP family, please look for the "MHP Contact Information" section of this newsletter. It includes the contact information for both Ms. Thomas and myself, as well as the MHP website. We consider all of you to be the major stakeholders in the program. As such, we want to hear from you regarding things both big and small. If you have ideas or suggestions about the program, please let us know. If you have a photo from your time in the MHP that you would like to share, please send it to us and we'll post it on the website.

Similarly, given that our students find themselves in all corners of this country, you may hear from us asking for your assistance in welcoming them to your hometown. This does not have to be anything extravagant. Rather, the personal relationship between our students and you is what we seek. For example, this past summer, two of our students were in South Florida and Dr. Manuel Padron (MHP Class of 1987) was kind enough to meet them for lunch while watching the England vs. Croatia World Cup Soccer match together.

The students were very moved and greatly appreciative of this action. Moreover, the personal and professional advice that he shared with them was invaluable especially because they would begin medical school just a few weeks thereafter. If you are in the area, and wish to meet and speak with your young colleagues, let us know and we will do our best to consider and accommodate everyone's schedule.

Ms. Thomas and I believe that the greatest strength of the MHP is its people, and that is why bringing all of you together is vitally important to us. Moreover, while our individual academic accomplishments are no doubt important to our future success, we believe that success is often a byproduct of those that either advocate or facilitate for us. Hence, Ms. Thomas and I are working to identify students that we believe have the ability to significantly change the lives of many people, for the better and together. However, we believe that in order for that to have the greatest effect, we very much need your assistance. Consequently, we hope that you can join us in driving the MHP to greater heights.

In closing, Ms. Thomas and I are honored to lead this program and we very much look forward to what the future holds for it. More importantly, we look forward to working with all of you in order to make that happen. Thank you, and Go Gators!

Sincerely,

Peter P. Sayeski, Ph.D.
Director, Medical Honors Program

Danielle L. Thomas, M.Ed.
Assistant Director, Medical Honors Program

Ten Questions: A Conversation with Dr. Peter Sayeski, MHP Director

BY HUGH NGUYEN



1. What is your academic background/research/educational interests?

I have a BA in Anatomy and Physiology from the University of California at Berkeley. My Ph.D. is in Physiology & Biophysics from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I then conducted a 4-year Post Doctoral Research Fellowship at the Emory University School of Medicine. In 2000, I left Emory to come to UF and I have been here ever since. My research interest is in kinase biology and identification of novel kinase inhibitors.

2. What motivated you to apply for the Directorship of the MHP?

From teaching medical students, I was certainly familiar with the MHP. To me, the position was a unique mix of research, mentoring, and medical education. In the research laboratory, I have trained a number of graduate students, undergraduates, and Post Doctoral Fellows. The MHP gave me the opportunity to apply my skill set, but in a very different way. By this, I mean that research mentoring is a little different since it's a lot longer; generally 3-4 years of training. For the MHP however, the mentoring and professional development would occur over just two semesters and in different ways. Last year for example, two MHP students approached me about the possibility of observing neurosurgery faculty, as both have strong interests in the specialty. I was quickly able to connect them with Dr. Maryam Rahman, and five days later, the two students were able to observe two brain surgeries (thank you, Dr. Rahman!). I in turn asked them to reflect on how that collective experience impacted them and their potential careers in medicine. The opportunity to facilitate those type of things, getting them pointed in the right direction, and getting them into contact with the right individuals is certainly different from mentoring graduate students. Even though it's different from training Ph.D. students in the research method, mentoring people on where they would like to be professionally and facilitating that, is certainly rewarding. In another instance, I gave an update to the COM Curriculum Committee about the MHP. To make my point, I highlighted three students and their professional aspirations. One of the students wants to be the CEO of a major healthcare enterprise. After that meeting, two people in the room reached out to me saying that they wanted to facilitate this by having the student shadow various UF COM Deans and the CEO of UF Health. In this instance, by placing this student in direct contact with the people that she aspires to be, I hope to further develop her professional skill set and shorten her academic learning curve.

3. Since taking over the Directorship of the MHP on July 1, 2017, what have you learned from the program?

The office of Alumni affairs was really great in that they compiled a comprehensive list of the MHP Alumni. What was really interesting to see is the diversity of where the alumni have ended up and how they have arrived at positions of prominence in their respective fields. It's nice to see an affirmation of why the program was created 46 years ago. Seeing who they are and what they are doing validates why the program was established. For instance, one example is a research collaborator of mine, Dr. Christopher Cogle. Chris is a hematologist by training and on the faculty here at UF. He is a clinician, a scientist, and an entrepreneur. At the end of the day, Chris strives to improve the quality of life for people diagnosed with MDS/AML via innovative research, discovery, and clinical practice.

4. Anything surprising/interesting that you learned since taking over the Directorship?

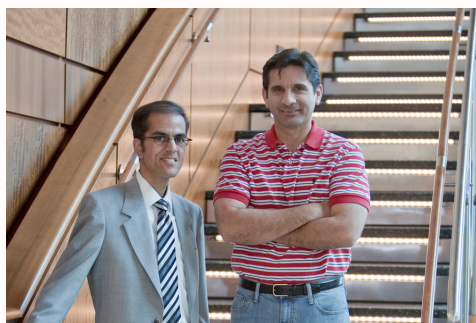
One interesting fact that I learned is that with the May 2018 UF COM graduation, the number of JHMP/MHP Alums went over the 500 mark.

5. What is your vision for the MHP?

I believe the current generation of MHP students will be the future leaders in the medical field. Depending on the student, it may be in academics, private practice, regulatory medicine, health policy, or legislative medicine. It's an exciting time right now, so wherever our students end up, I want them to be the best that they can be. To facilitate this, we have modified the curriculum to have some formal leadership training for our students. This is in the vein of Stephen Covey, Simon Sinek, et al. The intent is to lay a foundation of leadership ideas and concepts, which can be built upon in the future. So in a word, I would say my vision for the program is "leadership."

Ten Questions: A Conversation with Dr. Peter Sayeski, MHP Director (Cont.)

BY HUGH NGUYEN



Dr. Sayeski along former JHMP alumnus, Dr. Christopher Cogle

6. What words do you have for the MHP Alumni?

How we advance in our respective careers is certainly due in part, to our professional accomplishments. That being said, I believe it also has to do with the people who either advocate or provide opportunities for us. The MHP Alums are an amazing asset. I would like to work with them in order to leverage their influence and expertise, so that our students can reach their greatest potential. For example, at three times during the Phase 1 medical school curriculum, our students are required to do clinical preceptorships in the community; Gainesville or otherwise. I would love if the Alums could host our students during these informative clinical opportunities. The Alumni are really the main stakeholders in the program. In this newsletter, we have provided our contact information and we would love to hear from you. We really want to work with you so that you can have a meaningful role in people's lives through the field of medicine.

7. Anything else that you would like to share about the program?

In my short time as Director of the MHP, I have noticed and quickly come to appreciate the comradery that exists amongst the MHP Alums. If you think about it, it's a rather unique and relatively small group of individuals. My hope is to bring this group of people even closer together. Hence, the creation of this newsletter. We very much want to hear from you and about you. If you happen to visit Gainesville, please let us know as we would love to have you meet with our students. If you have MHP-related pictures that you would like to share, we can put them on the MHP website.

8. What are you most proud of in your academic career?

Personal relationships. I was very fortunate in that during my Post Doctoral Research Fellowship at Emory, I was mentored by Dr. Ken Bernstein. I really view Ken as a surrogate father to me. He is a wonderful man. He always advocated for me and placed my interests ahead of his own. He was demanding, but always fair. At times, he believed in me when perhaps I did not believe in myself. He since moved to Cedars-Sinai in Los Angeles and when I'm in LA, I usually spend one night at his home. For the people that I have either trained or taught, I believe the same personal relationships are forming. For example, I see my students whenever they are in Gainesville or if we happen to be at the same scientific conference. I recently had a telephone conversation with one of my former students regarding career advice. I have stayed at their homes, attended their weddings, and seen them have children. One of the weddings was in India and that was an experience that I will never forget. So when I pause and think about the things that I am proud of, it always seems to be about people and the corresponding relationships that have developed.

9. Can you tell us one fun fact about yourself?

For the last two years of my undergraduate studies, I lived in a sorority with 60 women. It was considered a job and I was paid accordingly. As needed, I would do minor repairs around the house and help the kitchen staff with meals and clean up. One of the cooks was named Hana. She was like a mother to me. She retired to Mississippi and to this day, we exchange Christmas cards every year. I'm also friends with many of the women that lived there with me. To some extent, with every job I have had since then, and I say this jokingly, is a little bit disappointing compared to that job.

10. When not directing the MHP, what do you do for fun/hobbies?

I enjoy anything outdoors. I am currently doing off-road biking. It's one of those things that can help me clear my head. I do the same with golf, but that's a bigger time commitment for me. When I am not doing that, I like to cook. For the Florida vs. Georgia game, the MHP class will be at my home for a watch and dinner party, so my culinary skills will be put to the test.

Ten Questions: A Conversation with Mrs. Danielle Thomas, MHP Assistant Director

BY MALLIKA BHATTA



1. What is your academic background/educational interests?

I have a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Master's in Education with a concentration in College Student Affairs from the University of South Florida. My interests include helping students maximize their potential, finding their passion, and connecting them with resources to develop into amazing individuals who are well-rounded and holistically healthy. In my former position, I planned service and medical mission trips for pre-health students, which I found to be humbling and enjoyable. Memorable moments include witnessing pre-health students fundraise donations to buy hygiene and medical supplies for global community members, pre-health students learning how to take vital signs to assist medical professionals with the check-in process for medical visits, and pre-health students teaching their peers about health education topics so they could in turn educate community members abroad.

2. What do you like about the MHP?

I like that the Medical Honors Program allows students to first explore their interest in medicine and find their passions, then opt into applying for the accelerated program and early admission to UF College of Medicine. I also like that students in the MHP are intentionally supported during the year, by the program director, assistant director, UF COM faculty and UF COM Admissions staff. The students seem to benefit from the cohort style selection such that they are able to foster close peer relationships in the MHP year that last throughout medical school and beyond. Students enjoy being intellectually stimulated by the UF COM faculty and by the research project they delve into, which culminates in to an honors thesis, which is another aspect I like about the program. I am humbled and appreciative of the position I am in, serving as the assistant director of the MHP and UF COM Admissions. In my role with the MHP, I am thrilled to assist students with preparing for application to the program, answer any questions about the curriculum and application, help to connect students with COM resources, event plan, and learn with and from current students throughout their junior year. For students who are not admitted to the MHP, I appreciate having the opportunity to provide feedback about their application, which I hope empowers them for applying to our medical program. It has been a joy being on the other side of pre-health advising to celebrate the accomplishments of an applicant who I know has worked diligently for their seat in medical school. I am appreciative that Dr. Peter Sayeski and Juliet Hill are my professional mentors.

3. What have you learned from the program?

I am consistently reminded of how talented and resourceful undergraduate students are. I learned that the JHMP/MHP has been preparing medical students for leadership positions and to be clinician scientists, in a conventional and nonconventional manner, for decades, since 1972 to be exact. We continually evaluate the program to ensure it fits personal, academic and professional goals, and meets the mission of the UF COM.

4. Anything surprising/interesting that you learned about the program?

It is interesting that faculty of UF COM take their time to instruct MHP students and enjoy getting to know the students. Another neat thing is that every spring MHP professors invite the students over to their house for dinner. The program truly allows students to feel prepared when they begin medical school, and are aware and connected to UF COM resources and support. For example, we created a course called the Aspect of the Art of Medicine. It is taught every fall semester and in this course we invite Dr. Beverly Vidaurreta, UF COM Psychologist, and Mr. Jim Gorske, UF COM Learning Specialist. Many students have shared that it is a less intimidating experience when it is time to meet with both or either while in medical school.

5. What is your vision for the MHP?

Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership. When assessing where the MHP alums are and what they are doing, the common theme has been- leadership roles, regardless of service in academics, private practice, administration, health policy, etc. Therefore, the current mission is to lay a foundation of leadership skills and concepts, which can be augmented throughout medical school and beyond. All in all the goal is that students become passionate leaders who are responsible global citizens and exemplify cultural competency as they interact with each other as well as patients. We hope that students continue to be well-balanced individuals and demonstrate compassionate care.

Ten Questions: A Conversation with Mrs. Danielle Thomas, MHP Assistant Director (Cont.)

BY MALLIKA BHATTA



Ms. Thomas with future Gator Docs

6. What words do you have for the MHP Alumni?

Thank you for taking the time to read the inaugural newsletter. Thank you for paving the way for your successors. Thank you in advance for investing your time in mentoring your young colleagues. We welcome you to remain in touch with us and provide any feedback and ideas (topics to cover in the newsletter, seminars/guest lecturers, etc.). We need you to partner with us as we move forward and elevate the MHP to greater heights.

7. Anything else that you would like to share about the program?

We would love to be able to incorporate a clinical component to the curriculum. If you have any ideas, please to let us know.

8. What are you most proud of in your academic career?

Education has provided me with so many opportunities to meet new people, learn about varying cultures, and create some pretty close relationships. While a pre-health advisor in an honors college, I loved partnering with students. The most enjoyable experiences were getting to know each students' story, their interests and passions. Several relationships have developed into friendships for many that have graduated; they are now either in professional school or working in health professions. I am humbled that they allowed me to be a part of their journey and extremely proud of each of them and their success. During graduate school, I was fortunate to be mentored by Mrs. Celeste Lazzara who taught me about so much about life, mentorship, having a career and family, the art of listening, and advocating for others and yourself. While serving as her graduate assistant, I think she saw potential and believed in me, and at times intentionally pushed me out of my comfort zone in order for me to grow. She attended my wedding, encouraged me throughout pregnancy, and since having my daughter, I made sure to introduce her to Ms. Celeste. For the students I have guided and supported, may our relationship continue to evolve and never end, similar to Ms. Celeste's and my relationship. For those I am able to support and mentor in the future, may we share an enriching relationship that thrives.

9. Can you tell us one fun fact about yourself?

As a student programmer for University Lecture Series in college, I met Maya Angelou, and some other famous people. I named my daughter after the great Maya Angelou. Something a bit more exhilarating, I'm a bit of an adrenaline junkie, I like rollercoasters and when in college I jumped into the ocean from a 32 feet cliff at Rick's Café in Jamaica.



10. When not directing the MHP, what do you do for fun/hobbies?

I love dancing, traveling, both locally and abroad, and spending time with family and friends. When the TV is on, I'm often times watching HGTV's Property Brothers, Fixer Upper, Love It or List It; however during basketball season, you will find me watching the Boston Celtics, and of course Florida Gators sports. I enjoy watching and attending any divisions' basketball and volleyball games, and playing both sports when time permits.

Left: Ms. Thomas with current MS2, MHP Alumni

2018 Match list Institutions

Congrats!

MHP CLASS OF 2018

On the Residency Match

Carolina's Medical Ctr., Charlotte
Emory University
George Washington University
Johns Hopkins University
McGraw Medical Ctr., Northwestern
Riverside Regional Medical Center
St. Joseph Mercy Hospital
University of Florida, Gainesville
University of Michigan
University of Texas Southwestern
Vanderbilt University

Introducing the MHP Class of 2023



First row (Left to Right): Mallika Bhatta, Emma Powers, Cathleen Mestre.

Second row: Niranjana Vijayaraghavan, Phoebe Jin, Hugh Nguyen, Dionne Blake.

Third row: Victor Sanchez, Matthew Johnson, Yusuf Mehkri, Alyssa Nielsen, AJ Winer.

Last row: Mike (Zino) Kuhn, Mohammed Ali, Omar Sharaf

STAYING CONNECTED

CONTACT US

THE MHP WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Graduating over 500+ alums since its creation in 1972, the MHP would love to hear from you about your stories and achievements. If you are interested in giving back read more below about how you can leave your legacy today.

MEDICAL HONORS PROGRAM FUND

An MHP fund has been established via the UF Foundation. 100% of all contributions will go directly to the program and advance the mission of the MHP via investments in program development, scholarship, leadership, research, innovation, and education. With your generous support, we look forward to the continued positive impact that our students have in the betterment of healthcare, both locally and globally. All donations are fully tax deductible. To give, please click here: drgator.ufl.edu/mhpsupportfund



MHP CONTACT INFORMATION

Do you have any questions, comments, suggestions, stories, etc. about the MHP? If so, we would love to hear from you.

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MHP FUND: www.uff.ufl.edu/give/COMMHP/