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From The Director’s Desk:

Lauren Doyle, MGC, CGC

It's hard to believe an entire year has gone by, and oh what a year it has been! Whether it is the academic calendar or the beautiful North Carolina days that run into each other, the weeks have seemingly evaporated and we are finding ourselves gearing up to celebrate all the excitement, joys and new beginnings the new year brings.

During a season full of reflection, I am feeling tremendous gratitude. I am grateful for the privilege of not only meeting but getting to know many of you this year, through workshops, lectures, meetings, regional and national events. I am thrilled to have been welcomed as a part of so many communities that serve our students, patients and families, and am grateful for the opportunity to witness the incredible work, talents and dedication of our vast alumni network. I feel incredible gratitude for our current students, who are leaning in wholeheartedly to the experiences in front of them, and for the team of caring, creative professionals I have the honor of working with at UNCG every day. We are all honored by the time and energy graciously given by the many genetic counselors, supervisors, physicians, researchers, educators and community members who contribute their talents to enrich our program in a multitude of ways.

I am excited to consider new initiatives and collaborations that will build upon the foundation of the program, and to continue to evolve our strategies to help hone skills and experiences for genetic counselors in all fields in the future.

With gratitude and enthusiasm (and to the best year yet!),
Lauren
Congratulations
Class of 2017!

Class of 2017 Capstone Projects:

Mariah Gleason: 
Assessing Genetic Counselor Knowledge about Psychiatric Disorders and Inclusion of Assessment for such in the General Genetic Counseling Session**

Courtney Heckman: 
Variability Among Clinical Genetics Professionals' Estimates of Complex Disease Risks Based on a Combination of Genetic and Environmental Factors*

Lilli Howard: 
Angelman Syndrome Interdisciplinary Clinics: Parent Perspectives on Clinic Efficacy

Mary Hricik: 
Reanalysis of whole exome sequencing data from patients with retinal dystrophies to identify causal gene variants*

Jaclyn Kotlarek: 
InformaSeq: LabCorp's experience and potential applications for clinical providers

Ruth Lehan: 
Burnout and Workplace Isolation in Laboratory Genetic Counselors*

Maggie Powell: 
An Evaluation of Genetic Counselor's Usage of Tablet Computers and Mobile Medical Applications in Clinic

Liz Mizerik: 
Hereditary diabetes referral and counseling practices in a prenatal setting*

*designates platform presentation at 2017 NSGC Annual Conference

Liz Mizerik with Capstone chair Rachel Mills (Class of 2008) at the UNCG Research and Creativity Expo in April 2017 (right) and she was a finalist for a best poster award! (far right)
As of May 2017, the UNCG Student Enrichment Fund has been renamed the "Nancy P. Callanan Genetic Counseling Enrichment Fund." The fund has historically provided students with financial aid to support their professional development such as travel to the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) meeting, financial assistance for Capstone projects and bringing in outside speakers. The name change reflects the supportive and compassionate nature of Nancy Callanan, the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program’s first program director and creator of this fund. For these reasons, it was important to program alumni to recognize Nancy, who provided them with these opportunities. In my recent interview with Nancy, it was evident that her passion for the field of genetic counseling is just as strong now as it ever once was, and the UNCG community is fortunate to have her as our Program Director Emeritus.

Nancy graduated from the Sarah Lawrence Genetic Counseling Program in 1977 and began her career as a pediatric genetic counselor. Reflecting on this, Nancy states that “in some ways, I feel like I grew up with genetic counseling.” She was never one of those individuals who had a 5 or 10-year career plan; her career just unfolded. “First and foremost, I was a clinical genetic counselor. But as I was in an academic medical center, I also had the opportunity to be involved in clinical research and in teaching, primarily in the clinic but also some in the classroom. I was involved in planning for the program and when the opportunity became available to apply to be the first program director I realized that maybe I had the skillset that would allow me to be good program director. It was a leap of faith, but it worked out.”

Shortly after the development of the UNCG program, Nancy was quick to identify that as a program director, you also inherently add administrator to the job description. The student enrichment fund was created on the basis that there was a lack of money in the budget to directly benefit students in ways that she thought were important. The purpose of the fund has always been about the students.

For the future, Nancy hopes that this fund remains sustainable. “As the years go on and there are an increasing number of graduates, I just hope that people continue to feel good about giving back to the program. I hope that as people progress in their careers that they can give back a little more. Broadly, I hope that all graduates see their place in the big picture of the profession and see importance of mentoring students and people who are new to the field, meeting with and encouraging students who are considering genetic counseling as a career.”

As a result of her significant efforts to providing students with professional development opportunities, earlier this year it was revealed to Nancy by program alumni that the student enrichment fund would be renamed in her honor. Commenting on the unveiling, Nancy states, “I was thrilled! It seemed very thoughtful, very fitting, because I had started the fund and felt so strongly about it. The alumni that pulled together to think about something to do to recognize my contributions to the program (and all alumni) are wonderful people. It felt like they put a lot of careful thought into what would be a fitting recognition and I really appreciated that.” During this time, it was evident that the bond between program alumni and Nancy was one that is reflective of the core values of the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program that remains today.
Unveiling of the Name Change (Continued)

In addition to her significant contributions to the field of genetic counseling throughout her career, Nancy remains active within the profession after her retirement in 2016. “I finished out my term on the Board of Directors for the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling (ACGC) and I continue as a volunteer for that organization. I also plan to remain active in NSGC as a member of the Late Career SIG. I have worked with recent graduates on getting their capstone projects ready to submit for publications. I have also been working with colleagues on updating the *Facilitating the Genetic Counseling* textbook. We hope the new edition will be out later this year.” While it is evident that she is still passionate about genetic counseling, Nancy remains humble and is ready to pass on the torch to the new and incoming genetic counselors per se. As Nancy herself puts it, “It’s important for people like me to get out of the way, and let them blossom and contribute the way I was able to do when I was younger. I always joke with people that I wanted to retire before I became a caricature of myself. I wanted to retire when I felt at the top of my game and relevant, and quietly move onto other things and let other people move in. Yes, I am still contributing and plan to keep doing that, but with optimism I realize that there are so many new leaders that are doing great things for the profession.”

Nancy generously shares guidance for incoming and graduating genetic counseling students as they embark upon their training and careers. She states that there will always be new challenges, new things to learn and new discoveries. She encourages students and new graduates to remember that genetic counselors are compassionate, genuine health care providers. The information and content regarding what we know and what we share with our patients is always critical. But the way we do that in a very genuine and compassionate way, using the skills we have learned, is what makes genetic counseling a unique profession. “So, I guess what I’m saying is don’t forget those counseling skills!” she emphasized.

As for personal updates, Nancy happily states that “Roger and I have celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary with a cruise to the British Isles in September, which was lovely. We have loved having a less stressful lifestyle and now that we have more spare time we are getting engaged in our community in new ways... All is good! I look forward to hearing about your professional and personal updates, and I encourage people not to hesitate to reach out by phone or email.”

Overall, Nancy’s continued dedication to the field of genetic counseling and to the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program is still strong. Her desire to help students in the best way possible, her gratitude for donations to the Nancy P. Callanan Genetic Counseling Enrichment Fund, and the unwavering dedication to her students are a few small examples of the impact that she has had on the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program. The enrichment fund name change is just one way for us to say thank you for all of your efforts, Nancy!

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the Nancy P. Callanan Genetic Counseling Enrichment Fund, you may do so online at [http://gen.wp.uncg.edu/make-gift/](http://gen.wp.uncg.edu/make-gift/). If you donate online, please select the “Other” designation and enter “Nancy P. Callanan Genetic Counseling Enrichment Fund”. You may also mail a check payable to the “Nancy P. Callanan Genetic Counseling Enrichment Fund directly to the program at:

UNCG Genetic Counseling Program  
Attn: Marcia Griffin  
996 Spring Garden Street  
Greensboro, NC 27412
UNCG Genetic Counseling Program graduates and alumni strongly represented at 2017 NSGC Annual Conference in Columbus, OH

Mary Hricik (Class of 2017), now working at LabCorp, presents her Capstone research

Liz Mizerik presented her research at poster presentations as well as at Prenatal and Education Special Interest Group meetings at NSGC

Alexandra Henshaw (Class of 2015, right) and colleague

Samantha Brovold (Class of 2015) from Sequonom presents her work (left)

Ruth Lehan (right) with support of Capstone committee member Leah Williams (Class of 2008)

Mariah Gleason (Class of 2017, middle) with Capstone committee members Ashley Lowe (left) and Program Director Lauren Doyle (right). Mariah presented two posters at the meeting!
More fun in Columbus at NSGC! 
2017 Alumni Reunion

Current students meeting alumni from Classes of 2012 and 2015 (right)


The whole gang!

Dinner with classmates and alumni

Always classmates...
The HHS Pacesetter Award honors outstanding alumni of the school who have attained local, state or regional recognition through their achievements in scholarship, leadership or service, during their career, or through civic involvement. This year we are proud to announce that Kelly East is the recipient for the UNCG School of Health and Human Sciences Pacesetter award!

Kelly received her Bachelor of Science degree in Microbiology from Auburn University in 2007 and a Master of Science degree from UNCG in 2010. Throughout her time at UNCG, it was evident that she had a distinct passion for genetics education and addressing low level genetic literacy. She completed a Capstone Project entitled “Evaluations of Biotech 101: An Educational Outreach Program in Genetics and Biotechnology.” This study evaluated the effectiveness of an educational outreach course developed by HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology for the general public with the goal of empowering the public to make more informed healthcare decisions and participate fully in policy decisions relating to genetic information. Kelly was also a program graduate assistant where she worked with the National Coordinating and Evaluation Center Sickle Cell Newborn Screening Initiative.

Kelly worked at HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in 2008 prior to her matriculation into the Genetic Counseling Program. Shortly after graduation, she re-joined the team at HudsonAlpha as a practicing genetic counselor and is still a member of the team today as the Clinical Applications Lead. Kelly states, “at HudsonAlpha, the genetic counseling team is involved in patient care and clinical research projects as well as developing educational programs for clinical audiences. Genetic counselors are part of the Education Outreach department at HudsonAlpha; we work alongside expert educators that we can continue to learn from. We become better teachers for the patients, research participants, and students that we interact with because we are able to watch and learn from the best”. Her job at HudsonAlpha is very rewarding to her, as it allows for the “opportunity to see the people we interact with have what we call ‘light bulb moments’ - when the things we talk about suddenly make sense and come alive. Whether it is high school students, teachers, healthcare providers, patients, or the general public, it is incredible to see people get excited about genetics and understand how it can impact their life.”

Through her work at HudsonAlpha as well as her personal interests, Kelly demonstrated a passion and interest in the field of education within genetic counseling very early on. She recognized a need in our professional community and ultimately created the National Society of Genetic Counselors (NSGC) Education Special Interest Group (SIG), serving as its first Chair in 2011-2012. “Prior to the start of the Education Special Interest Group there was no organized place for genetic counselors who had primary interests and responsibilities related to education to get to know one another, develop projects together and share resources” she states. The comradery that would come out of the Education SIG was a major factor in her decision to start up the group, stating that “by bringing educationally minded genetic counselors together, we can share ideas and work together on projects that would not be possible to do on our own.”

In true pacesetter fashion, Kelly gives back to the profession serving on the Abstract Working Group and is an Associate Member of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics. She has supported the establishment of a new genomic medicine clinic in Huntsville, Alabama and assumed the role of Genomic Counselor Lead for the Smith Family Clinic for Genomic Medicine in 2015.
Pacesetter Award (continued)

Furthermore, Kelly provides instruction in and exposure to genetics and biotechnology to nursing students in the University of Alabama Nursing School where she has Adjunct Faculty status. Kelly is also involved in supervising and mentoring genetic counseling students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham Genetic Counseling Program.

Despite her many professional roles and commitments, Kelly has given back to the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program in various ways since her graduation. Given her passion for education and professional leadership in genetics education, Kelly has served as Capstone Committee member or chair for multiple graduate students in our program including students in the past three graduating classes; each of these students has been successful in presenting their work on a national platform. Commenting on her mentoring approach, Kelly states that “I generally try to put myself in the student’s shoes and think about what they need at that moment to keep a project moving towards a high quality finished result. I try to remember what it was like to be a student working on a Capstone project, what I was able to do easily, and what aspects of the project that I needed a little extra help and encouragement with.” Her open-mindedness, and willingness to be adaptable as a student mentor provides such an excellent foundation for current UNCG students, and her unwavering contributions within the program is outstanding! Kelly also took initiative in creating a unique, nationally competitive summer internship opportunity for genetic counseling graduate students at HudsonAlpha and serves as the coordinator and supervisor of the internship experience.

Kelly has been a leader in education in the genetic counseling profession. Her passion for the development of competent healthcare providers and an informed public, leadership and expertise are exemplary and extend nationally. Reflecting on her time at UNCG, “Throughout my graduate training we were exposed to lots of different specialties and roles genetic counselors can play - and never discouraged from thinking outside the box. We were also given ample opportunities to present information to our classmates and community groups and gain confidence in our education and public speaking skills. I am ever grateful for the education I received at UNCG as well as the strong relationships that were built with program faculty and my fellow classmates.” Kelly is a true role model and a shining star of the UNCG Genetic Counseling Program! We are so proud and honored to present the HHS Pacesetter Award to Kelly East, and we cannot wait to see the new ways that her passion for education will impact our students, patients and the profession!

UNCG Genetics Club!

I am excited to announce the beginning of the UNCG Genetics Club, which began its first official meetings this fall. This club has its origins in the Genetic Counseling Program, but the hope is that it will continue growing to include undergraduates and graduate students from around campus with varying backgrounds. This club was created by Lilli Howard (Class of 2017) with the purpose of encouraging interest and excitement in the field of genetics while bringing people together to discuss scientific and ethical genetic issues. In addition, we hope that this club will have a role in helping prepare those wishing to pursue continued education in genetics and related sciences. This semester, we came together with UNCG students from many backgrounds and interests to have discussions about CRISPR, direct to consumer testing, and public perceptions about genetics. We are excited for this group to continue growing and foster conversations about current hot topics in genetics, as well as hopefully inviting speakers and enjoying social events.

- Gretchen Rosso, Class of 2018
President, UNCG Genetics Club
Keelia Clemens, PhD, MS, CGC
Nominated By: Kayla Boggs, Class of 2016

“Keelia Clemens is very deserving of recognition for being an excellent supervisor! The night before I began my rotation, one of the other cancer genetic counselors at Duke gave birth. My first day was not supposed to be Keelia’s clinic day, but she came in anyway and saw patients and introduced me to the rotation site. She made me feel welcome right away, which was very important to me, since this was my first experience in a cancer rotation. She encouraged me to jump in, flex new skills, try new resources, and develop my own style. I learned a great deal about choosing the best genetic tests, exploring the psychosocial concerns of patients with new cancer diagnoses, and much more. Because Duke Cancer was short-staffed, we were inundated with patients and I was given many responsibilities. However, I was confident in myself and my abilities because Keelia was confident in me. While sometimes it is hard to forget your student status and start really considering yourself capable of being a professional genetic counselor, Keelia made that easy for me! My great experiences at Duke Cancer with Keelia led to my ultimately becoming a cancer GC. Thank you for everything, Keelia!”

“I love being a part of the genetic counseling training program at UNCG. During my training, my supervisors played such an instrumental role in developing the genetic counselor I am today. Each of them had their own style for genetic counseling and through them I was able to develop my own unique way of conveying information to patients. When I began my job search I was hoping to land in a role at an academic center where I would have the opportunity to train future genetic counselors. My goal is to challenge students to step out of their comfort zone and take charge of their cases from case prep to results disclosure. My hope is that after rotations in our clinic, students will feel more confident in their abilities to function as independent genetic counselors. I also strongly feel my interactions with the trainees continue to make me a better genetic counselor. Through their fresh eyes I discover additional methods for conveying genetic information and new approaches for training future students. I am honored to be featured in the supervisor spotlight and look forward to many more years working with this program.”

- Keelia
“Suzanna was a phenomenal supervisor. She worked tirelessly to make sure that my experiences with her helped to increase my confidence and competence in genetic counseling. When a patient no-showed, she offered me the opportunity for a role play. When I felt less than confident about how a session went, she suggested that I write a detailed chart note for a second chance at the session. She provided the most helpful feedback and discussions about enriching my psychosocial counseling skills and challenged me to continue growing throughout the rotation and my career. Despite her own busy caseload, she always made time for me. The thoughtfulness and skills that make Suzanna a fantastic genetic counselor also make her a fantastic supervisor.”

"Working with genetic counseling interns is truly my favorite part of my job. Collaboration with students causes me to be more reflective about my own practice and stretches me in new directions. Whether keeping up with the latest research, puzzling over how to explain a tricky concept, or working out an approach to a challenging psychosocial concern, the savvy and compassionate UNCG students keep me on my toes. Although supervising builds on fundamental genetic counseling skills, it is also its own art, and I am still learning ways to help students apply their strengths and develop their unique approach. We genetic counselors have a tendency to be perfectionists, but working with real people dealing with difficult medical issues can be very messy. If I have a common goal for my students it is to help them go easier on themselves, recognize the power of core skills they already have like empathy and reflection, and embrace “mistakes” as learning opportunities. That’s my goal in my own practice too, and it is no exaggeration to say that I learn something new from every relationship with a student. I am so grateful to have an opportunity to work with UNCG students, and it is truly gratifying to be recognized as a supervisor. Thank you!”

- Suzanna
Like many genetic counselors, I always had a plan. While my career has in part been the result of this careful planning, I have gotten to the place I am today by learning to be flexible in moving from “Plan A” to “Plan at this point I have lost count”, following my evolving passions, and adjusting to life’s unexpected turns.

I entered into the genetic counseling program at UNCG in 2003 knowing that I eventually wanted to specialize in cancer. While I was open to other experiences during my training, a cancer counseling position was still at the top of my list when I began looking for positions during my second year. I was offered and accepted a position to be the first genetic counselor at a hospital in Louisville, KY. Excited about the opportunity to start a new cancer genetic counseling clinic, I packed up the rental car (a garbage truck had pretty much sliced one side of my car in half during the graduation ceremony!) and headed for Louisville. That first year, I worked hard to expand my fledgling clinic in both reach and staff size. Starting a genetic counseling service from the ground up was no easy task, and I didn’t always know the best way to proceed with this effort. However, I had wonderful resources including several of my classmates who had also taken jobs starting new clinics—we held regular conference calls to compare strategies, ask questions, and offer support as we embarked on these journeys as new graduates.

As my clinic grew in staff size, I successfully advocated for a promotion to Manager of Genetic Counseling Services. We began discussing the possibility of expanding genetic counseling at the hospital to other areas. This gave me a needed push to seriously think about the kind of skills that I would need to successfully expand and manage the clinic that I had started. This led to my decision to return to school for my DrPH (Doctor of Public Health) in Health Management and Policy. I quickly found that I loved being back in school and found the classes that I was taking in public health to be so relevant to programs that we were implementing in the clinic. During my doctorate program work, I tried to involve genetics as often as I could. But as my interest in public health genetics was flourishing, the plans to expand my genetic counseling clinic became less realistic. My career was no longer following the well-laid plan that I had developed, and I was faced with a decision—do I move for a new job or stay and finish my degree?

Ultimately, I decided to complete the last two years of my degree full time, even though I wasn’t quite sure how I would use it once I graduated. While not Plan A (or B or C), this decision resulted in so many opportunities to further my expertise in public health genetics that I could not have predicted when I made the extremely difficult decision to leave my genetic counseling position. I was suddenly able to plan a practicum experience in Michigan with their Genomics and Genetic Disorders Section, which would lead to my participation on projects with the Region 4 Midwest Genetics Collaborative, The Genetic Alliance, and the CDC. It was during this practicum in Michigan that

(See next page)
my mentor mentioned she had seen a position for Assistant Genetic Counseling Program Director at Pitt, and thought that I would be a great fit given their strong connection to public health. I agreed, and even though I thought it was a long shot, I applied. (See next page)

I have now been the Assistant Genetic Counseling Program Director at Pitt for just over two years, and I am thrilled with “Plan at this point I have lost track”. I love working with, teaching, and mentoring students as they complete their genetic counseling training. Witnessing and being a small part of their success is beyond rewarding. I have also been able to advance my work in public health genetics by serving as Co-Director of the MPH Program in Public Health Genetics (one of two in the US), steering committee chair for NYMAC Regional Genetics Network, and co-chair of the NSGC Public Health SIG.

While my career path has not always been a clear or easy one, I have certainly learned a lot along the way. In my first position, I realized the importance of maintaining a good work/life balance. Though it is still sometimes difficult to make time for myself, I know that I will do my best work if I take time to recharge and to cultivate new and existing interests and relationships. This is why I now try to stress the importance of self-care to my students.

Sometimes, moving forward in my career and in life in general was about making a decision at a fork in the road, and other times it was about picking up the pieces of shattered plans. One of the best pieces of advice I was given to manage both of these situations was to stop worrying about making the absolute "right" decision and rather think about whether I was making a "good" decision (because, for example, neither finding a new job nor finishing my degree full time were "wrong" decisions). I didn’t always know what those choices would lead to, but I trusted in my capacity to figure it out along the way, and was also fortunate to have a lot of support from the people in my life—my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors—who supported me, cheered me on, and pushed me forward exactly when I needed it.

I am excited for what the future of my career as a genetic counselor holds, but I no longer feel I have to plan for every minute of it!
The Undiagnosed Disease Network (UDN) is a research study founded by the National Institutes of Health in 2014 in an effort to bring together clinical and research experts from across the United States to solve the most challenging medical mysteries using advanced technologies. Pediatric and adult patients with undiagnosed diseases receive weeklong evaluations at one of seven nationwide clinical sites, one of which is located at Duke University Medical Center. The Duke UDN team, headed by Dr. Vandana Shashi, includes three genetic counselors and UNCG alumni; Kelly Schoch (Class of 2005), Rebecca Spillmann (Class of 2007) and Heidi Cope (Class of 2003). Kelly and Rebecca have been with the study since its inception in 2014, with Heidi recently joining this past July.

The Duke UDN genetic counselors work closely with participating patients every step of the process, from comprehensive medical record review and clinical intake to variant interpretation and return of results. “The study takes an enormous effort, on the part of clinicians, researchers and the patients, which is tremendously rewarding when your work culminates in a long-elusive diagnosis,” Kelly explains. In the first two years, the Duke UDN team diagnosed approximately 50% of evaluated patients. In contrast to the clinical setting, the study provides time and resources to dedicate toward each patient. “This study also affords us the opportunity to collaborate with experts in the field to describe and publish previously unrecognized diseases,” states Rebecca. Since 2014, the Duke UDN genetic counselors have contributed to ten manuscripts and numerous abstracts and presentations. “It is exciting to join this research effort and I look forward to many great discoveries,” says Heidi. Interested participants can apply to the UDN online after obtaining a recommendation letter from a referring provider (https://undiagnosed.hms.harvard.edu/apply/).
An open letter to current students and alumni of the UNC-Greensboro Genetic Counseling Program:

Many of us go through life believing there is a plan and a timeline for which things will happen for us. We will finish school, find an amazing job, continue to have passion and stability in that job, maybe find a spouse, have kids, buy a house, and die fulfilled and happy. I was no exception. I was already married when I applied to UNC-Greensboro’s genetic counseling program and in my first year at the program, we bought land in Boulder with a plan for me to finish grad school, find a remote job, and build a house. Then, we’d pay off the land and the house and buy an RV and travel the world with it while working. Everyone - including those at UNC-G thought this plan was just a tad ambitious (and maybe a bit crazy too). But we were focused and we got all of the plan accomplished until the building process. Because then…we got divorced.

I’m telling you all of this because we as genetic counselors tend to be type A and plan for everything we possibly can. We often have high hopes and dreams for the future and we’re ready and willing to push forth and make them happen. None of these are bad qualities at all. However, I’ve found one of the most important qualities to have as a genetic counselor (and as a human) is being adaptable to the things thrown at us - whether that be a patient who was supposed to be a typical AMA case who ends up having a complicated family history of a chromosomal inversion, a young adult who you have to tell is affected with Fragile X and begins asking you whether she should have a hysterectomy, a career focus that you love but leaves you drained at the end of a 40-hour work week, or a divorce. Fortunately, genetic counseling is this amazing field that provides opportunities in so many different aspects of the medical field that there is something for everyone - and at every twist and turn of life; you just have to stay open to it. :) And thus has been my life so far.

My first introduction to genetic counseling as a field, in fact, was by chance. I met an oncologist on a plane going to visit my then-fiancé. He was drawing a pedigree next to me and I asked him if that was something he was doing for his job; I had just taken my genetics final that day to apply to veterinary school. We talked for the length of the plane ride and he gave me his business card. When I got to the next gate, I looked at the card and realized his office was literally right across the street from where I lived. I emailed him expressing interest in a job. He said he might have something soon and a month later I followed up with a short email saying “All I want for Christmas is a job at your office. Merry Christmas!” The next day, I was hired - in a created position made just for me. The next week, I met the genetic counselor who came in monthly for his hereditary cancer patients and that is when I knew I was going to be changing careers - again.

My path after grad school did not go the way I “expected” either. Even though I became interested in genetic counseling in clinic, the jobs that were available for genetic counselors in my area after I finished school were only in industry. I wasn’t opposed to a different direction, but expected to go back into patient interaction at some point in the future. I also realized that often my job happiness was not as dependent on the tasks I was doing as much as the people I was working with. I began my post-grad school career at two major labs interacting with doctors and nurses about (See next page)
Life is A Winding Road (Continued)

tests they ordered I appreciated the work here in that I used counseling skills from the clinical realm in order to impart knowledge and education to healthcare professionals, just at a different level than with patients, and I also spent time researching and summarizing large amounts of data for layperson and professional use. This is something that really drew me to genetic counseling initially as well - the combination of science and counseling. I found myself enjoying all of this more than I expected and liked the combination of structure and variety to my days. I especially liked working remotely, as I could often schedule my days the ways that worked best for my efficiency and health. Since my coworkers and I interacted all day long, I didn’t feel I was removed from the job socially either.

After a number of changes in my life - mostly personal - I looked into other possibilities that incorporated these aspects of my previous jobs with patient interaction too. I became a genetic counselor contractor, meaning I became a free agent to companies who need genetic counseling skills for any and all specialties and fields. It was a big leap for me in terms of taking a risk, but I’ve reaped so many rewards in terms of time flexibility, work/life balance, variety and diversity. In the last year as a contracting genetic counselor, I’ve counseled pediatric, prenatal, pharmacogenetics, and cancer patients by phone as well as made sales cold calls for genetic counseling services, written genetic testing report descriptions, determined whether patients qualified for testing and insurance reimbursement, trained for variant classification, and researched updates in the field. The last year and a half has been a welcome change from going into work and doing the same tasks every day - even if I enjoy doing those tasks. I also have so many different types of people to ask for advice if I’m struggling with a case or project and I gain so many applicable skills from such diverse work. Of course, there are challenges too. Work hours come and go, paychecks aren’t consistent, and I have not one but multiple supervisors with different expectations and roles. I definitely didn’t choose the path to consistency and that might not align with most genetic counselors’ lifestyles or personalities, but I can also structure my time and life in the way that feels natural to me day to day. I have the ability, time, and energy, for instance, to go to a yoga class in the middle of the day, explore more hobbies, spend time with friends whose schedules are not the typical 9-5, volunteer, and get more time outdoors. All of this makes me a happier person - but that’s just me.

I may not, of course, be a contractor for the rest of my life. I hold that as an option too. That’s not to say I’m letting life control me, only to admit that I will likely value different things at different times in my life - and you may too. If I have any advice for you as you choose where you go in your career as a genetic counselor, it wouldn’t be to become a contractor or to work in industry versus in clinic. It would be to consider what you want in your life, what fits with your passions and joys, and not to assume the only path open to you is the already beaten one. Create your own; it’s worth the effort.

Sincerely,
Nikki

If you’d like to contact me with questions or opportunities, my email address is natanya.fleming@gmail.com. I’d love to hear from you!
ALUMNI UPDATES

CLASS OF 2016

Victoria Roth
Quite a few things have happened this year! I passed boards on February 13th of this year. As a present to myself, I picked up my rescue pup on the way home. Her name is Jemma and she is hilarious. I have transitioned into the primary adult genetic counselor role at Baylor Scott & White in Temple, Texas. As one of two GCs at my clinic, I am certainly staying busy (and also seeing pediatrics one day a week). However, they had to do without me recently as I got married on September 30th of this year. Some familiar faces were in attendance! Rebecca was my MOH and Chelsey and Megan ran the timing for the ceremony. Thank goodness sweet Katie made it too!

Rebecca LeShay
I recently moved back to southern CA to take a position as a Health Sciences Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of California at Irvine. I will see patients as well as be actively involved with the UCI genetic counseling training program. I am very excited for this new opportunity and big professional change! I also recently attended fellow classmate Victoria Roth’s wedding along with our classmates Katie Garbarini, Chelsey Burden, and Megan Ensinger (see personal updates).

CLASS OF 2017

Mariah Gleason
I am part of the Levine Cancer Institute Cancer Genetics program at Carolinas HealthCare System. I currently work in a small town in western North Carolina called Valdese. As the western-based genetic counselor, I see 25% of my patients in person and 75% of my patients by telemedicine to other regional sites. It is very rewarding to be part of extending genetic counseling to so many locations throughout NC. I recently presented two posters at NSGC (pictured), developed from my capstone project: Genetic Counselors’ Attitudes about, Practices of, and Preparedness for Communicating Risk for Psychiatric Illness. I was inspired by the recent NSGC conference to become more active in #GCchat on twitter; you can find me @MariahLGleason.
CLASS OF 2015

Liz Francisco:
Professional Update: I am working at the Greenwood Genetic Center as a prenatal and general genetic counselor. Specifically, I have been heading the effort to expand our program to include adult cardiology and neurology referrals and I am the lead genetic counselor for these referrals in our office. Additionally, I have started seeing patients as part of a new MDA clinic for adults in our area.

Personal Update: My husband Adam and I just welcomed our son Calvin Carl Francisco on Monday 9/4/2017. He is joined at home by our pups Knox and Mason. See attached pictures! UNCG onesie was given to him courtesy of classmate Jules Koenig!

Samantha (Caldwell) Brovold
Still loving working at Sequenom and just accepted a contract position with Gene-Matters providing tele-counseling. Matt and I officially tied the knot last year and had our wedding in Savannah. We added a second dog to our family, Ralph, a 7yo basset/beagle mix. Also am part of a recent publication (work from my UNCG summer rotation at NIH): A Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials to Assess Outcomes of Genetic Counseling.

Caitlin Troyer
I continue to work as a pediatric genetic counselor at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. We are a very high volume clinic, personally I see about 600-700 patients a year, which keeps us all very busy! This year Virginia passed licensure for genetic counselors which has been very exciting! We are currently in the process of being credentialed at our medical center as well. My coworker and I are beginning new involvement with a multi-disciplinary Cleft/Craniofacial clinic that is new to our center. I have continued to work with our multidisciplinary Hemophilia treatment center team as well. I have loved being able to keep up with my UNCG classmates at weddings, conferences, and otherwise throughout the year. In my free time I can't get enough of the beautiful mountains nearby and spend many weekends hiking and camping with friends.

Jules (Koenig) Savatt
After graduation, I moved to Pennsylvania and began working at Geisinger. After two years working in a split position in research and with the clinical cancer genetics team, I recently shifted my clinical work to the Autism and Developmental Medicine Institute at Geisinger. I have continued to work on the Clinical Genome Resource (ClinGen) team at Geisinger, and specifically, help coordinate the patient registry, GenomeConnect. GenomeConnect is open to anyone who has had genetic testing and is interested in sharing their genetic and health information to help us better understand genomics. As part of this research, I have several opportunities to present our research at national conferences including a platform presentation at ASHG later this week.
Sarah Hart:
I continue to work at Duke Pediatrics in the Down syndrome and 22q deletion syndrome clinics. I also continue to be involved in Down syndrome research and recently published a review paper on pharmacological interventions for cognition in Down syndrome. I have really enjoyed being able to work with current UNCG students for their capstone projects and on clinical rotations! Family life continues to be busy but fun with Elle, age 6 and Audrey, age 2 ½ (see photo)!

Becca Loman
This year has been another exciting year for me. I continue in my role as assistant program director of the Augustana-Sanford genetic counseling program. Each day I seem to learn something new and even more appreciate all the work that UNCG program staff and clinical supervisors did for me while I was a student. My clinical practice has switched from primarily pediatrics to starting a new clinic within the general OB-GYN department. On a personal note, this was an even more exciting year as my husband, Winston, and I welcomed our daughter, Hadley, on March 31st. She has been the perfect addition to our family and we are loving watching her develop her own personality.

Heather Rocha
I’m still at Geisinger (3.5 years strong!) working primarily with the Oncology Program. I spend about 80% of my time doing clinical work, and 20% of my time working with the MyCode study, of which Adam Buchanan is leading our return of results program with Amy Sturm. See personal updates for a photo from a community event where I hosted a risk assessment and breast cancer awareness booth with a PA and Nurse Navigator from the Breast Program.
Erin Campbell

Hi! I continue to work at UNC in the Prenatal Diagnosis Program. Our division keeps expanding and we recently opened a new clinic space in north Chapel Hill. We now see patients in four locations (Raleigh, two locations in Chapel Hill, and an outreach clinic in Pinehurst). I get to work with another program graduate, Kelly Gilmore. I love working at an academic institution because we see such a variety of cases and I get to teach fellows, medical students, and students from our own program. Right now I try to identify patients who would be eligible for enrollment in the ongoing UNC Prenatal Exome research study. We're still recruiting trios if you have families who may be interested who have/had a pregnancy with congenital anomalies and normal microarray. Another of my favorite parts of UNC is the availability of a Perinatal Palliative Care program. I attend their monthly meetings and was able to take a training course through Resolve through Sharing a few years ago that I highly recommend.

Personally, I've been mentoring a middle (now high-school!) student for the last few years through my church. It's been a lot of fun to get to know her and watch her grow as she gets ready for college. :) Chase and I also rescued a puppy in April. His name is Knox! He loves going on outdoor adventures with us and is a sweet, goofy dog! I've attached a picture of us at Craggy Pinnacle outside of Asheville, NC this summer.

Rebecca Okashah

I continue to work at The Children's Hospital of San Antonio as a pediatric genetic counselor. I participate in the Pediatric and Clinical SIG as the Resource Co-Chair and participate as a member of the Texas Society of Genetic Counselors. I have enjoyed the camaraderie that I received from the UNCG MSGC Program. Martin and I adopted Greta in 2016.

Ledare Finley

My current position is with University Genetics at UT Medical Center in Knoxville, TN. I see adult and pediatric patients with the geneticist, Dr. Ilse Anderson, and also have GC only consultations for cancer, cardiology, and a wide variety of genetic referrals. The Tennessee Genetic Counselors Association (TNGCA) has started having a yearly educational conference in 2016 and I participated in the planning process this year – we had a great 2nd annual event at Cheekwood Gardens in Nashville. I enjoyed spending some quality time with my classmate Anna Villa at NSGC and seeing all the UNGC students and grads at the reunion. It’s fun to hear how the UNGC program is growing and changing! On the personal front, I love being back in East Tennessee and have much more opportunity to see my old friends and family. I try to get over to Middle Tennessee as much as possible to visit and help out my dad (who is 91 years old now). I am still very devoted to my yoga practice – I think all GCs probably need yoga! And I had a great trip to NYC back in the spring with classmate Rebecca Littlejohn as we did a whirlwind tour of the sights. Keeping my fingers crossed that UT Football can turn this season around!
CLASS OF 2012

Ryan Noss
I continue to work at the Cleveland Clinic in our Cancer Genetics team. The majority of my patients are newly diagnosed with breast cancer in our multidisciplinary breast cancer clinic. However, I see other cancer referrals as well. I have recently begun developing our telegenetics clinic and we currently offer this service for patients at 2 remote cancer centers. In regards to research studies, I am the study coordinator for a project conducting whole exome sequencing for patients with a pediatric cancer as well as the study coordinator for the BRCA1/2 Narod study. In 2018, I hope to submit manuscripts reviewing the improved work flow and efficiencies by embedding a genetic counselor in a multidisciplinary breast cancer clinic as well as the improved work flow and efficiencies of switching from a satellite in-person clinic to a telegenetics clinic. This year I became a committee member of the Access/Alternative Service Delivery SIG for NSGC. I feel my training at UNCG has given me an excellent foundation in medical genetics, while keeping a very strong presence of psychosocial counseling skills, which I do not always see in graduate of other programs. On a personal level, Kara and I had our first child on April 30th. His name is Owen and we are loving our new roles as parents!

Courtney Kiss
I’ve been working at Kingston General Hospital as a clinical genetic counselor for over 4 ½ years providing prenatal, pediatric and adult genetic counseling services. I’m fortunate to live in a city with plenty of outdoor activities close by- I enjoy kayaking, hiking and volleyball. Travel highlights of the past year include a cross-country ski trip in Quebec, a trip to San Francisco to explore the city, and an adventure weekend at Georgian Bay Islands National park.

Sara Wienke
I have been working with Ambry Genetics since May of 2016 as an Oncology Genetic Specialist as a resource for clients in the Carolinas, Virginia and DC and am loving it. However, I have mostly been focused on my personal life the past year. I married my best friend, Christopher Myers, on June 9, 2017 and October 6 we welcomed the birth of our son, Calvin William Myers.

CLASS OF 2011

Melanie Hardy
I am still working at JScreen Emory University as the Assistant Director of Genetic Counseling Services. Currently, I am working on several projects, including determining the impact of reproductive carrier screening on couples at increased risk, as well as the development of telehealth resources for GC students with BU GC Program and Education SIG. I am also working on several research studies involving VUS reclassification in the HEXA gene. On a personal note, this past year we have some new additions to the family, two German Shepherd/Belgian Malinois dogs (Lili and Hein) who were former contract working dogs in the military (suicide bomb detection) and a new collie (Sunny).
CLASS OF 2011 (cont)

Mallory Schultz Sdano
In November 2016 I started a new job with Humana in the Utilization Management department. I work with a team of genetic counselors and nurses to review pre-authorization requests and weigh in on Humana's Medical Coverage Policies. We have a great team and I am loving working from home in my PJs! My husband Matt and I are still living in Salt Lake City, UT and taking every chance we get to go hiking and camping in the surrounding mountains and desert. In September 2016 we did a “bucket list” trip to Peru, including a couple days at Machu Picchu! Hope everyone is doing well!

CLASS OF 2010

Whitney (Cogswell) Dobek
I am still happily working with the University of South Carolina Genetic Counseling program. I am the instructor for two courses in their curriculum, and I am an advisor for thesis projects in addition to seeing patients in the clinical realm for hereditary cancer. On a personal note, my husband and I welcomed our second daughter, Cora Anne, in March! (see picture of Rory, 4, and Cora, 6m).

Alexis Carere
This past summer, I completed my post-doc in genetic epidemiology and began working as a clinical genetics analysis specialist at London Health Sciences Centre. I am responsible for variant assessment for our lab’s next-generation sequencing panels and whole exome sequencing. I am really enjoying my new job, particularly the fact that it is much closer to home and I have more time to spend with our now one-year-old son George. For the past two years I have been co-chair of the CAGC Annual Education Conference, and as of January 1st 2018, I will be President-Elect of CAGC. I am also (extremely slowly but surely) working on starting a genetic counselling program in London, Ontario. Recently, I introduced George and my husband John to “the South” with a visit to Savannah, Georgia (see photo). We are also looking forward to our first family trip to North Carolina for the New Year’s Eve wedding of a friend I met while at UNCG :)
CLASS OF 2009

Meagan Farmer
I have recently published a Pediatric Cancer Genetics textbook through Elsevier this month (with Sonja Eubanks Higgins and Katie Farmer as contributors!). I am also on the variant review committee for the Alabama Genomic Health Initiative, which is a joint project conducted by UAB and the HudsAlpha Institute for Biotechnology. Through this project, genomic testing, interpretation, and counseling is provided free of charge to residents in each of Alabama’s 67 counties. Furthermore, I became a member of UAB telemedicine advisory board which works to continue to expand telemedicine services throughout the southeast. I am also active in UAB Genetic Counseling and UAB Genetics Residency training programs as instructor, lecturer, committee member and clinical supervisor. Lastly, I am finishing my MBA with concentrations in Healthcare and Information Systems in December of 2017!

Diana Schnipke
As of April 2017 I work as a Medical Information Liaison at Myriad Genetic Laboratories. It's been a big switch from the clinical setting, but I have enjoyed learning much more about genetic testing and lab processes while still having some patient interaction. On a personal note, my husband and I welcomed our first child on August 4, 2017! Baby girl, Taylor Mae Schnipke. She was 5 lbs 9 oz, but at 2 months of age now she has almost doubled her weight! (See personal updates for pictures).

CLASS OF 2008

Rachel Mills
I am still at Duke in the Center for Applied Genomics and Precision Medicine and was promoted to "Associate in Research" at the end of 2017. My work focuses on coordinating research studies involving pharmacogenetic testing and other precision medicine applications. I have also taken on new teaching responsibilities including co-teaching an adult continuing education program on Precision Medicine and co-teaching a research methods class for Duke undergrads. I’ve remained involved with NSGC, particularly as a member of the Precision Medicine SIG and the annual conference planning committee. My husband, Justin and I bought a house in Durham last December. We have enjoyed making our little house a home and being close enough to the Durham Bulls ballpark to see fireworks in the summer.
CLASS OF 2008 (cont)

Leah Williams
I just celebrated my 8th anniversary with GeneDx! The past year has been busy with more recruiting, hiring and training in order to grow our genetic counseling department, and also getting more involved in NSGC. I am still the chair of the Leadership and Management SIG (LMSIG), which is in its first full year of operation. I have also contributed to a couple of issues of Perspectives and am a member of the Testing Workgroup for the PSS that will come through in 2018. I was proud to see and participate in Ruth Lehan’s poster presentation at NSGC this year (photo attached) and look forward to participating in more student projects in the future! On a personal note, Ryan and I are still getting settled in Olney, MD (maybe by the 3rd year I will say we are officially settled!), and the kids are loving the neighborhood and their daycare. I spend my free time running a lot (racing a lot) and crafting as much as I can.

Kate Hanauer
I'm expecting my second baby- a boy- this April! Our first, Trey, is 2 and very excited to be getting a baby brother! On the professional side, I've been promoted to Principal Genetic Counselor with Integrated Genetics this year and continue to work with a busy prenatal practice in Charlotte while expanding my role within the company. Recently, I've been working with the Integrated Genetics marketing team to create videos for our clients and other web context. I also play a role in ensuring quality in the genetic counseling results letters. I've been working with a team of counselors at Integrated Genetics for about 7 years now and have had a wonderful experience!

CLASS OF 2007

Linda Carey
I have been working at GeneDx as a remote report writer for 2 years, specializing in metabolic and mitochondrial genetics. It’s been an interesting transition from clinical life, but I still feel like I am helping patients in the end. I get pumped when I know the clinical history of a patient and can use that information to get variants to pathogenic, providing a diagnosis! In my free time, I enjoy traveling and just recently got back from seeing parts of Normandy, France. I’ve been married for 6 years and have a pup named Sadie, and two cats, Harry and Pixie.

Rebecca Spillman
See “The Undiagnosed Disease Network” on page 14.

CLASS OF 2006

We still love you Class of 2006...just send in your updates next year! : )
**CLASS OF 2004**

**Shelly Galasinski**
Our family made a big move from the Chicago area to Northern California last summer and we are starting to feel like CA is home now. I left clinical cancer genetic counseling in August of 2014 to work on exome analysis in the laboratory. Although I really love all of the challenges diagnostic exome presents, I have very recently returned to working in the cancer field with Color Genomics as a Content Specialist. I primarily work from home, but I spend a day in the office each week where I get to enjoy some of the Silicon Valley culture like having dogs in the office. I am also learning more about therapeutics for rare diseases from my husband whose job prompted the move to CA. The rest of my time is spent with my two sons at lacrosse, soccer, swimming, and other after-school activities.

**Stephanie Laniewski:** Still at University of Rochester Medical Center in Maternal Fetal Medicine. In addition to reproductive genetic counseling, I am now also the Fetal Care Coordinator and manage our patients (as well as incoming referrals/transfers from outside institutions) with multifetal pregnancies and/or complex fetal conditions. To promote continuity of care, our MFM geneticist and I are also beginning to see these babies in the NICU for post-natal follow-up. My baby boy who arrived 9 days after presenting our capstone projects, is now 13 years old and in middle school!

**CLASS OF 2005**

**Jill Polk**
I am entering my twelfth year at Cleveland Clinic specializing in cancer genetics. I have also started working for PWNHealth, a virtual care company enabling access to diagnostic testing, treatment and professional guidance that empowers individuals to improve their health. Since life with 3 kids (ages 9, 7, and 4) was slowing down, the Polk family adopted a puppy, Trixie, this summer (and their beloved super senior, Maize, who lived in Greensboro for grad school years, turned 15.)

**Courtney Rowe-Teeter**
I am in my 4th year working at the Stanford Cancer Genetics Clinic. In 2015 I expanded our clinic to a second location in San Jose, and we thankfully added a second genetic counselor to our San Jose clinic over a year ago. I continue to enjoy supervising Stanford Genetic Counseling Interns. I continue to help with my husband’s sports art business (btarts.com). We participate as vendors in about 10-12 Art & Wine Festivals a year. I also launched my own Rodan+Fields skincare business a few months ago. Feel free to check it out! (croweteeter.myrandf.com) The most important job I have is mother to our beautiful Sophia. Sophia turned 8 this past June and is in the 3rd grade this year.

**Kelly Schoch**
See “The Undiagnosed Diseases Network” article on page 14.
Kelly Gilmore
We're all good here - my son is 12yo now, which is crazy. Time just has a way of doing those things I guess.... I'm still working part time at UNC, some clinical and some on the prenatal exome sequencing project.

Amy Mottola
I continue to work full time at Duke Perinatal of Raleigh where I’ve been for over 14 years. In addition to clinical responsibilities, I’ve become more formally involved in the genetics training of Duke Maternal Fetal Medicine Fellows. Most recently, I co-authored, “What’s New in Prenatal Genetics? A Review of Current Recommendations and Guidelines” in Obstetrical & Gynecological Survey as well as “Prenatal diagnosis of Neu Laxova syndrome” in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. At home, my husband and I stay extremely busy with our four boys: Ryan (11), Brayden (9), Collin (6) and Logan (4). If I’m not at work, you are almost guaranteed to find me at the baseball fields...or the grocery store!!!

Eddie Williams
I changed jobs at the beginning of this year. I resigned as the Genetic Services Manager with LabCorp in January after 13 years with the company. I created a clinical Cancer GC position at the Pearson Cancer Center in Lynchburg, VA. I started in February and I’ve been working to establish a hereditary cancer risk assessment program. Bitter sweet as I really enjoyed my position at Labcorp and all of the GCs (good number of UNCG alum), but I’m happy in Lynchburg as my family and my wife’s family are from this area. We really enjoy being close to our families. The physicians and other health care providers have been extremely receptive and supportive of having a GC at the Cancer Center. Additional responsibilities include being part of the Cancer Committee and attending weekly multidisciplinary case conferences.

Heidi Cope
See “The Undiagnosed Disease Network” on page 14.

Brooke Smith
I continue to work at the Greenwood Genetic Center in Greenville, SC providing genetic counseling to pediatric and adult patients and just passed the 15 year mark with this great organization. My husband and I also celebrated our 15 year wedding anniversary over the summer! Our kids, Jack (6) and Campbell (4), continue to keep us on our toes and make life the most fun!

Randi Culp Stewart
See “Faculty Updates”
Faculty Updates

Sonja Higgins

Hello All! I look forward to reading all of your updates every year and am glad the newsletter continues. The Higgins household is never dull with a 2 and a 3 year old about as well as my teenage step-daughters. The little ones are great fun and keep me very busy. The biggest news for me is that I am going back to work. I have just started working part time from home for a company called Metis Genetics that provides genetic counseling services via tele-medicine. Since I live in a small town on the coast of South Carolina with no major medical centers or universities nearby, this option allows me to get back to genetic counseling in a slightly new way. I hope to be at ACMG in Charlotte, NC next April, so please find me to say hello if you are there.

Dr. Pam Reitnauer

Here is a photo of my daughter Sofia in Copenhagen during our Scandanavian cruise this past summer.
Marcia Griffin

It’s been another great year in the Genetic Counseling Program. The most exciting event of the year was my youngest son got married. He, along with his dad, have been building a little house for him and his new wife. They hit several roadblocks along the way which caused delays in the process. They are now on a roll and things are moving right along. Nice thing about that is they will move out of my camper where they have been living since April.

Please don’t forget about us...when you move, change jobs or change your preferred methods of contact! Send me an email at <mmgriffi@uncg.edu> so we can update you in our alumni directory. Hope everyone has a great holiday season!

Marcia (above) and Angie, the daughter she never had (right)!
Dr. Ramji Bhandari

I am a Developmental Biologist. My research interests fall at the intersection of developmental biology, epigenetics, and environment. The current research in my laboratory focuses on how grandparent’s exposure to environmental chemical stressors causes diseases in grand and great-grandchildren. As we know that fetal programming can permanently shape the body’s structure, function, and metabolism, any perturbations in fetal programming leads to adult onset of diseases. Environmental exposure can alter developmental trajectories. Expected outcomes of the developmental exposure are not only limited to reproductive defects and neurological disorders, but also a variety of diseases such as metabolic disorders and cancers that can show up long after the exposure was ceased.

My laboratory utilizes vertebrate animals as experimental organisms and takes comparative approach to understand mechanisms associated with environmentally induced adult onset diseases and their transgenerational transmission to subsequent generations. Using laboratory-based comparative epigenetic database and bioinformatics tools, we assess history of past exposures and current diseases in humans. The course “Human Embryology and Teratology” complements my research interests and teaching this course strengthens my understanding of development and disease. I am very excited to offer this course and have intelligent and forward looking students in the class.

Together we learn!

Dr. Ramji Bhandari
Instructor, Human Embryology and Teratology

Dr. Terrance McConnell

I retired from teaching in May of 2015. I have not been bored! I taught a version of "Ethics and Genetics" in the Master’s Program in Bioethics at Wake Forest University during the fall of 2015. I continue to serve on the Ethics Committee at the Cone Health System, which I have done since 1991. And I was on the Admissions Committee of the Genetic Counseling Program in 2016 and 2017. I have read lots of applications in seventeen years.

I still exercise daily. What I used to do was accurately called “running.” I think that a more honest description now is “traversing.” I usually do 4 or 5 miles per day. I still have access to an office in the Philosophy Department at UNCG, which I use daily. I have been writing articles for journals and chapters for anthologies; I think that I have published six since retirement. Some of these publications can serve as chapters of a book on gratitude (one on that topic was not enough!), which I hope to complete next year.

I still enjoy reading books and articles related to ethics and genetics, and I also enjoy reading history. I do not miss teaching classes of 75 students, but there is still a place in my heart for seminars and Ethics and Genetics.
Randi Culp Stewart

This has been a truly wonderful year! It has been fun growing our program in new ways with Lauren, Marcia and Pam for the benefit of the students and their training. I especially enjoy seeing our graduates ground themselves so quickly in the profession after graduation and spread their wings. You all quickly assume so many responsibilities including supervision of genetic counseling students and other learners but I cannot think of a more rewarding way to “give back” to the profession and grow yourself professionally. Please reach out to us if we can support you in any way along your career paths or journeys in life. Also, we would love to hear from you if you would like to be more involved in our program, serve on a Capstone committee, or otherwise. We are well aware that our alumni are our best ambassadors and amazing program supporters. Thank you for all of your efforts on our behalf! Thank you for every student you mentor, interested applicant you send our way and every person you educate about genetic counseling services. I genuinely appreciate hearing from each of you, even if it is to help complete a licensure application or be a reference for you. Keep it coming!

Will and I just celebrated our 12th wedding anniversary this month. We continue to love the great outdoors and do our best to raise environmentally conscious little nature enthusiasts. Ryleigh had a recycling-themed birthday party this year...it might actually be working! Ryleigh just turned 8 and Dylan is now 3 years old. They are the joy of my life in every way. I considered sharing a different picture of the kids but these just seemed to sum up their lives pretty well...always in motion, laughing and playing in the dirt at a ball game.

My very best to you and your families this holiday season and always!

Thank you!

A special thank you to UNCG first year genetic counseling student Mercedes Zoeteman for her efforts on this newsletter!
Personal Updates

Ryan (Noss), Kara, and their newest addition Owen! (above)

Mallory (Schultz) and Matt at Machu Picchu! (above)

Liz Francisco and Adam’s son, Calvin Carl Francisco, born 9/4/2017. (above)

Becca Loman and husband Winston’s daughter, Hadley (born March 31st, 2017) (above)

Taylor Mae Schnipke (Diana Schnipke’s new addition), born August 4th, 2017!

UNCG Genetics Club meeting (above)

Class of 2017 graduates Jaclyn Kotlarek and Lillian Howard. Photo taken outside of their clinic space at University of Iowa Health Care. (above)
Erin Campbell, Chase, and their new puppy April at Craggy Pinnacle! (above)

Melanie Hardy’s new additions: Sunny, Lili and Hein! (right)

Ryan, Emmet, Ainsley and Leah Williams (above)

Jaclyn Kotlarek, Courtney Heckman, Liz Mizerik and Lillian Howard at Courtney Heckman’s wedding! (above)

Megan Ensinger, Chelsey Burden, Rebecca LeShay and Katie Garbarini (Class of 2016) at Victoria Roth’s wedding! (above)

The Class of 2015 at Bri Benjamin’s wedding! (left)
Personal Updates

Amy Motolla’s sons: Ryan (11), Brayden (9), Collin (6) and Logan (4).

Brooke Smith, Eddy, Jack (6) and Campbell (4).

Jill Polk and family! (above)

John, Alexis Carere, and George during a trip to Savannah, GA. (above)

Sam (Caldwell) Brovold’s wedding with Class of 2015 classmates (above)

Taylor, Lauren and Caitlin dancing circles around other guests at the reception! (left)

Sarah Hart’s girls, Elle and Audrey! (above)
Personal Updates

Whitney (Cogswell) Dobek’s children Rory (4y) and Cora (6m) (left)

Sara Wienke, husband Christopher Myers (right), and son Calvin William (left), born October 6th.

Rebecca Okashah and Martin’s new addition, Greta! (right)

Sam Brovold and Bri Benjamin at Sam’s wedding! (left)

Sam’s new dog Ralph (right)

Courtney Heckman and husband Bret. (above)
Personal Updates

Jill Polk’s family adopted a puppy, Trixie, this summer….and their beloved super senior, Maize, who lived in Greensboro for grad school years, turned 15! (above)

Dana Faux, Mallory Sdano and Melanie Hardy at Emily Walsh’s wedding! (Class of 2011) (right)

Caitlin Troyer and Lauren Baldwin….still trying to figure out how to have a good time together! : ) (above)

Heather Rocha hosting a risk assessment and breast cancer awareness booth! (above)

First year students Clayton Mann and Stacey Wallen at the DSNGG Buddy Walk (below)

Current first and second year students enjoying time together. (left)

Caitlin Troyer and Lauren Baldwin….still trying to figure out how to have a good time together! : ) (above)